

PZ 3

.T272

Mo

COPY 1

FT MEADE
GenColl

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Class. PZ² Copyright No.

Shelf J272 M6

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THIS NUMBER CONTAINS

2.6

MORE THAN KIN.

By **MARION HARLAND,**

AUTHOR OF "ALONE," "HIS GREAT SELF," ETC.

COMPLETE.

NOVEMBER, 1892

LIPPINCOTT'S

MONTHLY MAGAZINE

LIPPINCOTT'S.

CONTENTS

No. 299.

MORE THAN KIN	<i>Marion Harland</i>	549-632
THE SPORTING EDITOR. (Journalist Series)	<i>J. B. McCormick ("Macon")</i>	633
THE HOMELESS THOUGHTS. (Poem)	<i>Dora Read Goodale</i>	641
TO ISABEL. (Poem)		641
IN A GONDOLA. (Illustrated)	<i>Ellen Olney Kirk</i>	642
CRICKET IN THE UNITED STATES. (Athletic Series.) (Illustrated)	<i>George Stuart Patterson</i>	649
CORYDON AT THE TRYST. (Poem)	<i>Frances Nathan</i>	660
A STORY WITHOUT A MORAL	<i>M. Helen Fraser Lovett</i>	661
MIRAGE. (Poem)	<i>Edith M. Thomas</i>	663
FORM IN DRIVING. (Illustrated)	<i>C. Davis English</i>	664
MEN OF THE DAY	<i>M. Crofton</i>	675
AS IT SEEMS		677
WITH THE WITS. (Illustrated by leading artists.)		

PRICE TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

PUBLISHED BY

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO. PHILADELPHIA:

LONDON: WARD, LOCK, BOWDEN & CO.

PARIS: BRENTANO'S, 17 AVENUE DE L'OPERA.

MORE THAN KIN.

BY
MARION HARLAND,
AUTHOR OF "ALONE," "HIS GREAT SELF," ETC.

*M. H. W.
D. C. W.*

35-

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT
OCT 22 1892
CITY OF WASHINGTON
42656X1

PHILADELPHIA:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

P23
T272M0

Copyright, 1892, by J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA, U.S.A.

LIPPINCOTT'S
MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

NOVEMBER, 1892.

MORE THAN KIN.

CHAPTER I.

IT was not altogether what followed it that stamped that afternoon and the drive to the railway-station upon my memory in colors that will never fade.

The forenoon had been showery,—soft, heavy rains that soaked herbage and weakened the stems of foliage. A steady wind came down the northern gorge at mid-day, blowing straight and steadily, but not hard, for some hours. At half-past four, when I drove out of the gate, the air was still, almost balmy. The long stretch of the village street lay before me down to the turn that would take me to the station. The houses lining this, our best thoroughfare, stood back modestly from the wayside, and between them and a possibly prying public a double row of maples made a deep-green shade in summer. Now that the autumnal glow was at the height, they gave to the interspace the dim richness of a cathedral aisle. The highway ran due east and west; the wind, as I have said, had blown out of the north. Right across the track, the intervals of wet black road showing between, the burning leaves had drifted in straight swaths. The half-mile drive was barred with tinted flame. The wet leaves had fallen prone and lain still where they had dropped. In the level sun-rays they glowed and throbbled into a passion of color.

My ponies shied sharply at the first of these apparent barriers. I had coaxed them to step gingerly, with much pointing of ears and graceful sidling, upon the gorgeous rug, when a carriage, coming from the opposite direction, was drawn up to mine, and a lovely face, framed in silver hair, looked out of the window.

“I was on my way to see you, Sydney dear. Don came out early to-day, but he had to see a man at the station, and sent me on as his *avant-coureur*. He will walk over by and by. You will not be gone long, I hope?”

Warm color that was not embarrassment flowed over my face. I felt my eyes brighten.

"I am only going to the station to meet Doctor and Elsie, who went to the city this morning. There will be a vacant seat for Don on the way back."

"Ah!" with a smile of friendly satisfaction. "Then I will sit with your mother while you are away. Have you noticed that the road is barred with the latest thing in October tartans? From the lower end it looks like a series of Turner's sunsets. Don't let me detain you. Good-by."

I tautened the reins until my ponies arched their necks and stepped high. The turnout was my especial property,—a pretty surrey, with polished panels and dark-brown cushions, and a good deal of silver-plating about the harness. The ponies were a singularly perfect match,—iron-gray, with white manes and tails, and so many signs of blood that everybody looked at them as I drove along. There would not be a better-appointed equipage at the station, a better-dressed woman, or a more clever "whip." My blue cloth gown was tailor-made; my gauntlets fitted smoothly; my jaunty toque was fashionable and becoming.

There are times when a woman reckons her personal advantages at full value, and when she is right in doing it. The weakness and folly that compose vanity enter in when she begins to depend and presume upon extrinsic circumstances that may slough away from her very self and leave it intact, if she has but arrayed herself in them, not pressed them into the substance of her soul.

Don Upton had sent me yesterday two big apples that had grown, cheek by cheek, to fulness of ripening. One side of each was red as blood,—fresh, young, healthy blood, "which is the life." The reverse on one bore the initials "S. S." in crimson upon a pale-green field. Upon the other apple, "D. U." was similarly dyed and set. Before they had begun to blush, he had ingeniously bound up a section of each in oiled silk, with the letters cut out in the covering. The sun had done the rest. In a discursive, superficial way, as I drove along, I fell to philosophizing, and likened the initials upon the cuticle of the fruit—this last remaining unaltered in grain, for all its brilliant lettering—to the gratification I had in looking my best to-day. The glow was but skin-deep. The thought that I was to see Don in five minutes, that I belonged to him and he to me, soaked like sunshine and dew to the heart of me; coursed through every thought and sensation as sun-warmed sap had filled and rounded and sweetened the beautiful globes I had laid away in cotton-wool in a cabinet to mellow.

My mother had a story of my infancy that recurred to my mind and made me smile, as I sat upright in driving-school form upon my box-cushion, chin level, and hands firm yet light upon the lines. The ponies had delicate mouths and sensibilities. Who hoped to control them must consider these, consult and respect them.

My old negro "mammy," who had nursed my mother in her infancy, had said one day of my mad dance and shout, when there was

no apparent cause for exuberance of glee, "Let her 'lone, Mis' Charlotte! She jis' so *glad o' she-self*, she donno what ter do."

I was never so glad of myself before as on this October afternoon, as my dear little nags went spinning down the cross-barred street, shivering and scattering the "sunset series;" around the corner; past the quiet church and the graveyard, yellowed by fallen elm-leaves; with a lively "click-clack" of hoofs and hollow thunder of wheels, across the bridge spanning Mapleton Creek, then up a gentle ascent, and, with a flash of silver plates and jingle of chains and buckles, brought up as still as a pair of granite steeds at the station platform. I was youthful and happy, and the young love to "dash," as colts to curvet.

A dozen other vehicles were waiting for the train, for the New Jersey village was almost in sight of New York. The foam of the billowing life of the metropolis dashed gayly over us all summer, and ran up, more feebly, but perceptibly, in the dead of winter. We villagers knew one another, and each new arrival at the railway rendezvous awoke a little stir of nods and smiles, and, from the carriages nearest to the latest comers, friendly or merry words. Without meaning to do it, I had halted close to a somewhat shabby buggy drawn by a meek sorrel mare. Why a sorrel horse can look more abjectly resigned than any other, and a sorrel mare carry abject resignation to meaner lengths than her brother of the same objectionable hue, is one of the countless and unaccountable things too common to be classed with phenomena.

The gown of the woman who sat in the shabby buggy would have been described as sorrel, had her mare worn it. It was a mixed silk and woollen stuff, and fitted her so badly as to be, strictly speaking, no fit. Her black gloves were stretched by fidgety fingers into two sizes too large for her, and were whitish at the finger-tips. That on the right hand was ripped on the ball of the thumb, and while talking she pulled at the two sides of the rip, folding them over one another, and throwing the rest of the thumb out of perspective. Her black straw bonnet was small for her head; her abundant hair was dark and ill dressed; her bright eyes were darker; her nose was long, with thin, arched nostrils; the mouth was small and sour.

Mrs. Tommy Robb was the literary star of Mapleton. Of the first magnitude in her own estimation, she ranged from the third to the sixth in her neighbors' eyes, and, as we gathered from metropolitan talk, was of no magnitude at all in New York. Perception of the latter fact—however she might feign to ignore it—helped to embitter her. Ambition that outruns ability begets hunger that frets soul and heart, as acid bites into steel. Mrs. Robb proclaimed herself an agnostic, and, like a majority of the professors of unfaith, confounded the word with atheist. She was as vain of knowing and believing nothing of her soul and its destiny as of the pessimism the unlearned mistook for ill humor and a natural taste for detraction. Her life had been a continual disappointment. A dashing, vivacious girl, she had come to Mapleton one summer with the wealthy woman whose adopted daughter she was, and captivated Tommy Robb, the eldest scion of a good old family.

Everybody liked Tommy, and nobody recollected that his name was Thomas. His handsome face and good heart made him a favorite partner with the girls, and his sound principles commended him to the confidence of the mothers. One and all of his old friends were in doubt whether to be more sorry or surprised at his marriage with the keen-tongued city-girl. In reviewing the transaction fifteen years later, she must have been most surprised of all. For Tommy, albeit not quite the fool she now esteemed him, was commonplace to a degree that was amazing in a man who went by rail to New York every day, and he had succeeded but moderately well in a business that had promised large things when Caroline Van Nostrand exchanged her dissyllable for his monosyllable.

As is often the case with a man wedded to a woman mentally superior to him, what intellect Tommy had to begin with had dwindled pathetically. Men of the best intentions cannot stand on tiptoe forever, and soon or late discover that it is not in them to take on thought sufficient to add one cubit to their mental stature. The spirit is willing, but mind-muscles are weak. The ill-mated pair had four sons as handsome and as commonplace as their father, and, because of this, each boy was a separate and special provocation to the clever mother.

For clever she was—in a way. As a detective she would have been famous. This career being closed to one in her walk of life, she became a newspaper correspondent. Her field of labor was circumscribed by the tether of Tommy and the boys, intertwined with the social prejudice that condemns a matron and mother to look after her own house before sallying out to pry into the manner in which other people's homes are ordered, but she worked her one acre hard. My stepfather had read aloud at the breakfast-table that morning a letter in a city paper over the signature "C. A. R.," purporting to be a record of the impressions our hill-girt village had made upon a New England tourist. Hardly a family of any note whatsoever had escaped a lash, and, although no names were given, we recognized ourselves and our neighbors. In recollection of the article, I should not have selected hers as the vicinity in which to spend the few minutes of waiting that must precede the appearance of the train. Without suspecting that the vacant space conveniently close to the platform was other than accidental, I had guided the ponies into it.

Mrs. Robb smiled a meaning response to my bow, as I perceived her.

"You are a courageous girl!" said her clear, high soprano. "I have been amusing myself for five minutes by seeing what a wide area the fluttering of wounded pigeons has left about me. And *you* wouldn't have come so close had you looked before you leaped. Don't trouble yourself to refute the charge. I shouldn't believe any polite falsehood you felt yourself called upon to utter. Or—maybe you did not see my article in to-day's *Clarion*?"

She had none of the disinclination to discuss her writings in and out of season that characterizes great authors. I rarely met her without hearing of some "article" in prose or verse with which she had honored humanity.

I replied with polite promptness :

“Oh, yes! You were the Autocrat of our breakfast-table this morning. Doctor read the letter aloud.”

She looked gratified, but against her will. The draught that had not a drop of gall or quassia would have been insipid to her palate.

“What did your mother say of it? I don’t inquire into the opinions of your step-father, for he never has an original one upon matters that do not immediately concern him, and I shouldn’t value it if he had. But your mother has brains, and generally puts them to good use, if she *did* mislay them about ten years ago! You needn’t redden so furiously. I’d say the same to her if she were here. There are few women whom I trouble myself to respect, or with whose views upon any subject I concern myself. As a sex they are characterless, like sheep, or sly, like cats. She didn’t relish the cut I dealt pets of the petticoats who had got above compounding their own prescriptions, but not above trading upon the monetary and mental capital of other people?”

It was never worth while to get angry at her arrant impertinence. She would have been enraged had she divined how much of toleration and civility she owed to her husband and the family connection she despised as provincial and humdrum. The rôle of protector was one in which her fancy had never painted her legal lord.

I was not afraid of Mrs. Robb, as many people were, and the thought struck me that a deserved, if not a salutary, reprisal might be to emulate her frankness.

“She did not seem crushed, or even agitated,” I said. “On the contrary, she laughed, and said, ‘Oh, dear! that *car* is off the track again!’”

I, too, laughed in requiting rudeness in kind, a novel experiment on my part. She granted me a sidelong glance, lowering her lids in a sinister way.

“*So-o!* Another hurt pigeon! I had not credited you with so much affection for your step-parent.”

Leaning back in the shabby buggy, she went on folding the edges of the rip in her thumb over upon one another, the short upper lip, that was always conscious of an evil odor, more expressive than usual.

The encounter was sufficiently disagreeable, but I had not comprehended the sacrifice of true gentleness I had made by my retort until I saw Don Upton making his way toward me between the waiting carriages.

We had loved one another from childhood, and been openly betrothed for a year, and never until that instant had I had the disposition to escape the scrutiny of his honest eyes. I tried to persuade myself that aversion to Mrs. Robb’s proximity and espial prompted the desire to slip away and cool my uneasy blushes before he could note them. At the bottom of my heart I knew that I lied to my conscience. The longing, which was aspiration, to be always at my cleanest best in Don’s presence was another feeling, that went down to the core of my being. Had he been within hearing, nothing could have provoked me to deal blow for blow, in what I called, to my shamed self, “fishwife-

fashion." I had seen him eye Mrs. Robb sometimes in grave compassion when she struck out viciously at friend or foe; gravity tinged with wonder at the coarse discourtesy of it all; pity for the suffering that, he insisted, must have driven a woman of birth and breeding to take up such weapons. He had told me that these exhibitions gave color to the stories of her mean parentage current among the "wounded pigeons." What would he say to my confession of the descent to her level?

He had reached me, flushed with dodging under horses' noses and darting through narrow lanes lined with wheels, and given me the happy smile nobody else, unless it were his mother, had power to call up, and I had time to feel how wretched was my effort to appear composed, when Mrs. Robb accosted him across me:

"Good afternoon, Donald!—Mr. Upton, I would say! You boys grow so fast, and so do your beards, that I am constantly in peril of breeding contempt by familiarity,—running off the rails of conventionality, as this witty young lady and her wittier mother would put it. She has just been telling me of the latest family *bon mot*. But what I was about to ask you is if there is the proverbial grain of truth in the chaff of the story that your mother went to the city the other day to have a consultation of physicians?"

Don looked startled, glancing quickly from the catechist to me; then, apparently reassured by my composure, replied, tranquilly,—

"The grain of wheat is not there, I think, Mrs. Robb. My mother is in her usual excellent health. Were anything so far wrong as your story implies, I should be the first to know it."

"Or so filial vanity thinks. It is the trick of modern mothers to practise pious deceptions upon their offspring up to the last gasp. It is pathetic, heroic, and Christian. Thank Fortune!—if I were a Christian, I should say 'Thank God!' and thereby break the second—or is it the third commandment, Miss Salisbury?—thank Fortune, I am neither heroine nor religious, much less a model mother. It seemed unlikely to me, however, that Mrs. Upton would seek any other professional aid than such as Dr. Wentworth, seconded—or firsted—by Mrs. Dr. Wentworth, can offer. Her faith in them approximates sublimity. Being as little of a model patient as I am of a model parent, I can only wonder—and adore—such perfect trust. My dear Sydney, your face is too expressive. Believe me that I would back away out of hearing, if I could without killing somebody's horses. Were the danger to human beings, I would not hesitate to gratify you. Indeed, I should hail the opportunity of ridding the world of a fool or two. But be patient! I hear the train-whistle at the station below."

In her line the woman was a genius. The combined wits of Mapleton could not have fused into a speech of equal length the same number of disagreeable things. I never talked with her that she did not leave a brier in a vulnerable part. She had stuck me as full of them, now, as if I had fallen headlong into a bed of prickly pears and rolled over and over in attempting to rise. Every sensitive bit of me,—my love for and pride in my mother; my distrust of my step-

father, and jealous dread of his influence over the wife who was so much nobler than he; my concealed impatience with Mrs. Upton's confidence in his professional skill; my horror of public sentimental passages between my lover and myself, or the appearance of such; my devout attachment to my Church and the holy faith of which I believed Her to be the exponent,—the pessimist had at them all. Every shot went home, and every arrow rankled.

Don's tact was perfect and his courtesy invariable. He gave no sign of perceiving my tormentor's animus, or her success. At the sound of the whistle he ran his eye along the reins, straightened one with a touch, and let his hand rest caressingly upon the shining coat of the pony nearest him in passing to their heads. They were train-proof, but he took no risks where my safety was involved.

If he had not stood just there, foot and eye alert, and with the cleared area next the rails directly before him! How many, many times I have shuddered over the words and what was contained in the pregnant *if!*

The train was an express, and a minute behind time; therefore it made brief pause at our station. I looked in vain for my little sister and our step-father among those who hastily emerged from the open doors. Whistle and bell were peremptory, and simultaneously with these signals the wheels began to revolve. The whole train was in motion, when Dr. Wentworth appeared upon the front platform of the next to the last car, hurrying Elsie before him. Just beyond the crossing was an embankment recently heaped with sand and earth, and at that point the tardy passenger grasped the slight figure by the arms and leaned forward to lower her to the ground. Every looker-on saw that he had miscalculated the speed of the train, and, in one gasp of horror, that to drop the child straight down would be to yield her to the awful suction that would draw her under the wheels.

"Throw her outward!" roared several voices, and Don Upton, covering in one great bound the fifteen feet or more separating him from the embankment, grasped Elsie about the knees and slid with her to the level street below. The pause of a quarter-second would have foiled his purpose, and a lusty cheer from the spectators of the daring deed attested the general appreciation of his presence of mind and marvellous agility. As he leaped, a brakeman, seeing the little girl's peril, pulled the signal-rope. The train slowed up to a momentary stop a few yards farther on, and Dr. Wentworth stepped from it to the track with bland dignity, stood aside until the last car had rumbled by, and walked calmly toward us.

Don led Elsie up to one side of my surrey as our step-parent lifted his hat to me from the other. He had come dangerously near making himself ridiculous to his fellow-townspeople, and still nearer killing or maiming his wife's youngest child, but he was neither abashed nor agitated.

"You were very kind to help my little girl down, Don," he said, genial and suave. "I regret that your gallantry cost both of you a needless tumble. She would have landed safely upon her own feet. I

had reckoned upon the motion of the car and the distance she had to fall."

"Jack fell down and cracked his crown,
Jill's sister came tumbling after,"

chanted Mrs. Robb, nodding nonchalantly to her Tommy as he took a seat at her side. "It was a piece of unlucky officiousness on Jack's part, doctor, for the child would certainly have been shortened at the knees but for him, and people seldom survive such accidents. You would have been a richer man for your picturesque experiment."

Even she had the grace to lower her voice that Elsie might not hear the cold-blooded insinuation, the width of the carriage being between the latter and Dr. Wentworth. She was not so close to his ear as to shut it out from mine. My step-father ignored the remark loftily,—a more sensible course than the lightning-flash I sent over his head to her. Poor Tommy caught it. I could not determine whether his consort lost or noticed it.

"Carry, dear!" he murmured, distressfully.

"I only say what everybody that saw it is thinking," she rejoined, gathering up the reins. "When a man is guilty of an asinine thing, it is well to call it by the right name."

"The craziest woman in the United States of North America!" uttered my step-father, stepping into the carriage after Elsie was bestowed upon the back seat. "It is astonishing that she is allowed to go at large—even by a Tommy Robb."

Elsie's light laugh was the only answer. My cheeks throbbed to tingling with mortification; my heart beat tumultuously in reflecting upon the danger my sister had escaped. I held my tongue between my teeth to keep it from saying what I would be made to repent sorely were it spoken. Dr. Wentworth liked to drive my ponies, and especially disliked to have a woman play coachman when he was a passenger. I had not stirred from the driver's place at his interrogative pause before he swung himself up to Elsie's side. So soon as he was settled, I moved to the left of the front seat, and motioned to Don that the right was vacated in his favor. His eyes beamed gratefully up at me, but he took the place without a word.

Elsie patted my shoulder, laying her sweet face against it for a second.

"We came near being carried on to the Junction," she twittered. "A lady was talking so fast to papa that he didn't hear 'Mapleton' called out. I was across the aisle, and touched his arm just in time. What were you afraid of, Don? It wouldn't have hurt me to be dropped gently into the sand. What a funny coast we had down together—you and I!"

Her silvery laugh rang out anew. A happier child never existed. Don's hand touched mine warningly.

"Better be frightened than hurt, Elsie!" he said, gravely. "I am rather timid about leaving and boarding moving trains. I saw a brakeman killed once by stepping from a car in the Jersey City station. He struck his head against a post, and never moved again."

“How dreadful!” said the tender voice, pityingly, and nobody spoke while we whirled down the street. The sunset bars had been broken by other hoofs and wheels, and the remnants were dim in the declining light. I had meant to point them out to Don, and repeat his mother’s graceful simile, but the inclination had fled with the gorgeous effects of autumnal leaves and afternoon sunshine. The hills that were a clear purple as I drove toward them were dulling into a muddy brown, and opaque mists arose from behind them, washing the yellow out of the sky. Don looked up at the heavens, and shook his head.

“It is not like October to give us so many storms. She is usually the most benignant of months. It may be because my mother was born in October that I fancy a likeness between the two. One always reminds me of the other.”

“There is a likeness, and a strong one.” I caught at the fancy. “Strength, sweetness,—a rich, bland, yet bracing quality of thought and feeling,—a large motherliness—— Why,”—looking at him admiringly,—“the comparison is worthy of her, Don! It is poetry!”

“I am glad to be worthy of her in some way. If I am poetical—for once—she is my inspiration.”

Inspiration, fair and sweet, as embodied in the shape that moved up the wide hall to meet us upon our return to my home. Hers had always been a comely presence, but in growing older she had grown beautiful. She was still some years under fifty, and the rapid whitening of her hair enhanced the delicacy of her complexion while, as is often the case, it refined her features. “My choice bit of Dresden,” Don liked to call her. Her head was little higher than his elbow, her slight figure was graceful, her small hands and feet were exquisite in shape. Upon each cheek was a flush of pink, and her eyes were soft and lustrous in resting upon Don and myself.

“I am to steal you for to-night, Sydney dear,” she said, blithely. “Don goes early in the morning. (You know, Dr. Wentworth, that my boy sets out to-morrow noon for California, to be absent some weeks?) Your mother, Sydney, seeing the reasonableness of the theft, sanctions it. As it is growing late and damp, will you get ready as quickly as possible?”

I recalled, afterward, that my mother left her guests in the hall with Dr. Wentworth, and followed me up to my room to assist in packing my *sac de nuit*. Elsie came, too, and in her eager chatter of what she had seen and done in town we had no opportunity to exchange other than commonplace remarks. I had whispered to the child in alighting from the carriage not to mention the little adventure at the station. There was then no reason that I knew of for the pensiveness of the smile with which my mother stayed me at my chamber door to kiss me, or the unusual fervor of her embrace, unless it were that she sympathized with me in Don’s approaching departure and our separation. At the impulse of this supposition, I spoke:

“I mean to be very brave and busy for the next three weeks, mamma darling. And Don will be ever so much richer for this trip. I am glad he should have it.”

“So am I, love. And I know that you will be brave. You never fail me.”

The last sentence did not seem singular. She was always generous with praise of her first-born and least deserving child.

CHAPTER II.

THE Uptons lived nearly a mile away from us, a rod or so back from the long, straight street bisecting the village. The house was the oldest in the neighborhood. A colonial Upton had built and lived in it. That room of the lower floor which the present mistress and her son liked best was the long library, the ceiling of which was crossed by bold oaken rafters. The windows on one side had been cut down to the floor, and the end farthest from the door was half filled by a great open fireplace. Above the breast-high book-shelves were ranged family portraits,—generations of departed Uptons. Right over the mantel hung the likeness of Don's father, who had died while his boy was a baby. This woman, whose white hair made her young face look the younger, had lived out under this roof twenty-seven years of widowhood. In all this time her son had been her chosen and almost constant companion. Columbia College was his Alma Mater, and he had studied his profession in the law-school of that university. His mother's choice of the college was guided, according to Mrs. Robb, entirely by the circumstance that he could attend it and yet spend nights and Sundays at home. When he went abroad for a year after graduation, his mother accompanied him. That he grew up healthy in mind and body, that his manhood was sturdy and his temper sweet, and his whole nature as unspoiled as if he had been obliged to surrender his will a dozen times an hour to a dozen brothers and sisters, was equally creditable to his mother's management and the quality of the material upon which she wrought.

Something of this I said after dinner that evening, when we three sat about the blazing birch and cedar logs. One of Mrs. Upton's pretty fancies was to have the library fire fed with these. They were sawed into equal lengths, and Don used to make a point of piling them in alternate layers, so that the rich red of one wood set off the mellowed white of the other, “to gratify Madame Mère's æsthetic taste,” he would insist.

To-night he was especially punctilious in the arrangement of the sticks, standing off from the chimney to survey the effect through his hollowed hand, his head on one side, his expression so complacently intent that we both of us laughed, and his mother threatened to box his ears. “If you live to be a hundred years old, you will never outgrow your boyishness,” she complained, lovingly; and as he cast himself down in his favorite attitude, half sitting, half lying, upon the fur rug at her feet, his head upon her lap, she pulled his short curls. “But a pretty nice boy, for all his nonsense; don't you think so, Sydney?”

“A phenomenal boy, when one considers his disadvantages,” rejoined I. “The miracle is that he escaped spoiling.”

“He is a comfort and blessing that have taken the loneliness out of his mother’s life,” she said, her fingers wandering in his hair. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, my son.”

He passed her hand over his eyes in drawing it down to his mouth, and I saw the spray of scattered dew. The murmur made inarticulate by the kiss pressed upon the little hand was eloquent in tenderness of tone.

We were entirely happy, just we three, in the bewitching half-light, warm and palpitating with color, that lent a blush to the shadows grouped in far corners. The sigh of the night-wind lulled fancy to sweeter dreaming.

I have never known another parent whose presence, sympathetic and fondly beloved though she might be, was not a restraint upon the talk of affianced lovers.

“I don’t believe you would have said ‘Yes’ to me, Sydney, if I had had any other woman for a mother,” Don declared, meditatively looking into the fire. “In fact, you may not have forgotten that I offered her first, and, later on, myself as an unimportant adjunct, as I might have thrown in a saddle-horse, or the ‘ouse in Tottenham Road,’ *à la* Guppy. I had little doubt as to the result of a suit thus engineered. Who could resist Madame Mère?”

He had fixed the name upon her in his boyhood, and used it habitually in playfully affectionate moods. It suited her, in spite of her moderate stature. She wore, this evening, a gown of creamy white China crêpe, and in the bodice a Gloire de Dijon rose. Don had put it there when she came down to dinner. After pinning it carefully in place, he stooped for the kiss always claimed when he gave her flowers, and when she fastened in his button-hole the bud or blossom he wore into the city every morning. Such offerings and caresses were part of their daily living.

“Nobody!” I affirmed, unblushingly. “You may recollect that I expressed myself distinctly to that effect upon the occasion of which you speak, and I ‘am of the same opinion still.’ Your individual attractions are not contemptible, but much of your light is reflected radiance. Your credit in Cupid’s court is fair, but the endorser’s name makes your paper legal tender.”

He liked to have me saucy.

“Bravo!” he cried, beating his hands softly together.

His mother laid one of hers on mine with a gentle pat that carried with it love, not rebuke. When she spoke, her thoughts seemed to have strayed wide of the subject under jesting discussion. Her dreamful regards were lifted to the portrait over the mantel.

“It is my wish that when my mission on earth is ended, you two will live on here as long as you can make it convenient and pleasant. I came to this old house a bride. My husband’s mother met me in the porch, and from that hour became mine. We lived happily together for ten years. For her dear sake, my children,—in memory of what she was to me, an orphan girl and a stranger to her,—never join in the popular ridicule of the much-traduced class of mothers-in-law.”

“We need not go back a generation for that which should keep our lips from such talk forever,” interposed I.

“‘Tim Linkinwater!’” in deep, wrathful tones from Don, “‘how dare you talk of dying?’ I call such allusions incongruous, irrational, ‘tolerable, and not to be endured.’ And on my last evening at home for so long!” His tone changed. “When this darling girl and I live here together, mother dear,—as please God we will, before long,—your presence will hallow our happy home. The suggestion of anything else sends a chill to my heart.”

“It is the course of nature, my son.”

“Then please and comfort us by being unnatural, Madame Mère!”

He had imprisoned both her hands in one of his, and, passing an arm about her neck, drew her head down until she looked into his eyes. They were full of loving pleading; fond reproach was in his accent.

“My pretty mother! my young mother with the silver crown and starry eyes! We will have no more talk of loss and separation. Life is too rich, the present hour too sweet, to be embittered by such unhealthy fancies. Now Sydney and I are going to make some music for the ‘loveliest lady in the land.’”

He brought a footstool for her, drew a screen behind her chair to keep off straying draughts, and led me to the piano. For an hour I played accompaniments and he sang, selecting, unasked, the songs that the silent listener loved. By turning my head slightly, I could see in a mirror a picture in which the background was made up of ruddy dusks softening, without confusing, the outline of the still white figure. The head rested motionless against the cushions of her chair; the hands lay together upon the large, fleecy folds of her gown; the dark eyes surveyed us with intensity that, but for the absurdity of the imagination, would have seemed sad. Twice I spoke to her, that the cheerful response might dissipate the fancy.

For she was cheerful. Even in speaking of the time when she must leave us to live out our lives in the old homestead as she had lived hers, she was not sorrowful. Her views of life and human nature were optimistic; her enjoyment of the society of her friends was sincere and cordial; she gave of her good things—love, hope, joy, and faith—generously. Her pathway had been clouded at times, but there was no chill in the shadow.

When we went back to her side, she led the talk to pleasant themes, checking me gently in the midst of a philippic upon Mrs. Robb by reciting several instances of that unpleasant matron’s genuine kindness to the sick and poverty-stricken. It was in answer to my repentant outburst and the expression of a wish that I could, like her, see some line or touch of loveliness in everything, that she lifted one corner of the veil concealing her holy of holies, and told me how she added to her morning and evening prayers, like a collect for all seasons, Faber’s lines,—

Sweeten my bitter-thoughted heart
With charity like thine,
That self may be the only place
On earth that does not shine.

Oblivion of self in regard for others was her hourly walk and practice.

She went off to her room at ten o'clock. Passing her door an hour later, I saw light beneath it, and tapped for admittance. She had exchanged her white gown for a wrapper, but made no other preparation for the night's rest. Upon the table beside her were pen, ink, and paper; beyond them the little pile of devotional books that were, to her single soul, sleeping-draught and morning tonic. A study-lamp burned at her elbow.

"You have been working—not resting!" I charged upon her. "If that was all you came up-stairs for, you might as well have stayed with us."

"I had a thing or two upon my mind, and could not sleep until they were off," she responded. "As to staying down-stairs, you must not forget that I was young myself once, and betrothed—to Don's father. The boy grows to look strangely like him. I am glad he is to have his little wife before many months have passed,—glad and thankful. To-morrow, dear, when he has gone, we will have a long talk together,—you and I. I want you to know how hopefully I confide my best treasure to your keeping. Now you must run away to bed. You will have the lullaby you like best,—the rain upon the piazza-roof under your window. I peeped into your room awhile ago and heard the first rataplan of the tin drum."

A jolly little fire crackled within my fireplace, and an arm-chair was wheeled in front of it; my gown and bedside slippers were warming; a lamp with a rose-colored shade tinged the snow of counterpane and pillows. The warmed and glowing atmosphere enfolded me as further expression of love that had held me close and fondly all the evening. When I knelt in the fire-light to return thanks for blessings unnumbered in possession, and the greater blessings promised, the tears fell fast. Happiness had swelled beyond the boundary of smiles.

I awoke several times during the night by appointment made with myself when I laid my head upon my pillow, that I might enjoy anew the delicious sensation of falling asleep to the music of the gentle rain. Each time I said half aloud, in nestling among the mufflings of cambric, wool, and down, that I was blest above all other women alive, and how good God was to fill my life out round and fair, giving me all the desires of my heart when the existences of others, better and more worthy of his gifts, were warped and neutral-tinted.

The morning broke gloriously. The mountains that enclosed our valley put on the beautiful garments fresh from the loom of autumn; the farthest peaks were misty plum-color; between us and the nearest swam an azure haze that blended the kaleidoscopic yellow, purple, crimson, and russet into perfectness of harmony. Beside my plate at breakfast lay a great bunch of chrysanthemums, the long ragged petals like tattered gold-leaf. They dripped with moisture, for Don had just gathered them from the garden. Breakfast was served at eight, that we might linger over it as long as suited us and yet Don be ready in season for the nine-thirty train. Every detail of Mrs. Upton's household was conducted with like regard to orderly comfort, ease that might be enjoyed with a good conscience. The table-talk was

as cheery as had been that of last night. Our traveller was to remember how full of sunshine his home was up to the last. We prophesied success in this, the most important business-trip he had as yet made; we congratulated him that it would take him into the balminess and fruitage of California; we gave him absurd commissions, after the fashion of Beauty's sisters, compromising finally upon a bunch of Santa Barbara roses, and, as the hour of departure drew near, were seized with a sudden caprice to see him off from our station, when all three of us knew that the horses were already harnessed to the carriage to take us, and that we had never had any intention that the farewells said within-doors should be final.

And so the wrench we pretended not to feel was gotten over. Madame Mère had had her boy to herself for ten minutes in her room and said her blessing—still with a smile—over his head, then sent him to me in the library “while she gave some orders.” The orders were finished just in time for us to step into the carriage and drive briskly—not in haste—to the station. We did not alight, but Don stayed at the open door of the vehicle until the train appeared, gave each of us one more hand-grasp, one lingering, loving look into our eyes, and was aboard and off.

“We will drive directly home, if you please, my daughter!” said my companion, in an altered tone. She was livid with suffering of body or mind, but at my exclamation opened her eyes and signed that I was not to be alarmed, striving hard to form the bloodless lips into a reassuring smile. Still mutely, she waved her hand toward home, and homeward we drove. There was no more color in her face when we drew up at her door, but she spoke quite in her natural voice:

“It was only a sudden faintness, love. I have had such before. Give me your arm up to my room, and call no one.”

She instructed me further, after I had helped her to the lounge, to get medicine from a closet and pour it out for her. Then she lay still, her hand pressed over her eyes. When I saw a tear escape and steal down the white cheek, I was absolutely terrified. I had never seen her weep before. I wound my arms about her and begged her, between my weak sobs, to be comforted. I was sure, I said, that Don would be sent back to us, safe and well.

“Poor child!” said the sweet voice, strengthening upon each word—“poor little girl! I am selfish to distress you before there is need of it. Leave me a little while to myself, and I will tell you all about it. My birds have not been fed to-day. When you have attended to them, come back to me.”

I obeyed implicitly and without misgiving as to the purport of the talk she was to hold with me. Her powers of self-control were great, but the parting from her son was a real affliction. She had overstrained nervous forces in the successful attempt to appear brave and bright in his sight. I resolved that I would not leave her that day, perhaps not to-morrow. Don had consigned her to me. I would care for her with fond assiduity learned from him.

Since that morning I have lost all faith in the truth of presentiments. I planned, while filling cup and seed-vessels and emptying the

cage-trays, how we would indite a joint epistle that should reach Don as soon as he got to San Francisco. If written this morning, it would go out with him in the night express, and probably be handed to him within an hour or two after his arrival. I even composed some nonsense-verses to accompany the joint epistle, rather with the view of diverting his mother than amusing him.

When I had cared for the birds, I stepped through the long window of the library upon the piazza, where the honeysuckles still blossomed and hardy roses resisted such frosts as had reached the southernmost borders. The day was deliciously fresh, and the sunshine lay in broad, still sheets upon floor and terrace on this side of the house. Beyond, and following the southern slope, stretched long lines of Don's pet chrysanthemums. He had taken prizes at four horticultural exhibitions for these flowers as grown in the open air and in greenhouses. The gardener was busy among them, tying up some the rain had beaten loose from their supports, and clipping away dead stems and leaves. I chatted with him while gathering a handful of mignonette for Mrs. Upton.

"How long will they be in flower, Thomas?" I inquired, carelessly, and he replied as if he had read my thought:

"It'll go hard with me, Miss Sydney, if I don't keep most of 'em until Mr. Upton comes back. Unless, of course, we have uncommon hard frosts. I'm loath to have him lose the sight of 'em at their best. In the greenhouse, now, we'll have 'em until the middle of December. Will you be going home soon, Miss Sydney?—asking your pardon for the question,—" as I smiled.

"Not for a couple of days, I think, Thomas."

"Because Mr. Upton's orders are that a choice bunch of them should go to your house every day while he's away. He's uncommon thoughtful in such matters, Mr. Upton is."

The same story everywhere. His love was a great deep,—an atmosphere encompassing me as the sun-filled air flowed caressingly about me. I drank it, breathed it, lived upon it.

Mrs. Upton loved mignonette as her son his chrysanthemums. A vase of it stood upon her work-table and desk from the first of May until late October. The delicate purity of the scent exhaled by the russet-and-green tufts is ever associated in my mind with her. Holding the cluster I had culled, I halted upon the porch for a last look down the terraced slope before entering the house. Through the library windows came the singing of linnet, mocking-bird, and canary. The wet mignonette in my hand, the honeysuckle-bells from their sun-bath, the roses in the nearest borders, poured out incense from hearts unchilled by premonition of frosty death. Beneath a spreading maple on the lawn the exact shape and size of the tree were painted in ochre, buff, and crimson. I wondered, idly, that no cunning carpet-designer had ever accepted the pattern offered him with every autumn. The garden was spacious, and beyond it were other lawns and gardens, red and brown roofs peeping between the trees. Half a mile away a white spire was tremulously outlined in the shimmering haze drawn skyward by the sun.

This would be my home before long. Had I not reason to be "glad of myself"?

Thomas's work brought him to the upper end of the alley as I was about to go in. He was English, slow of wit, yet fond of hearing himself talk.

"Mrs. Robb is main fond of chrysanthemums," he drawled. "She was here last week, and agen yesterday morning. She come in by the lower gate on a-purpose to see how they was a-coming on. She wouldn't ask for the mistress, but just walked out of the little gate same as she'd come in, after I'd showed her them in the garden and under glass. A sociable lady is Mrs. Robb—and rale kind-hearted."

I did not contradict him. He had learned charity of thought and speech in a better school than mine. Like mistress, like man.

Mrs. Upton had not left the lounge, but it was her self-contained, unselfish self who smiled gratefully upon my flowers. She plucked the leaves from the lower stems that would be submerged in water, explaining to me that their decay, not that of the stalks, imparted a disagreeable odor to cut flowers.

"I have kept mignonette fresh for a fortnight by observing this precaution," in the even tone of one imparting useful information, "and by clipping the stems every other day. I change the water daily, cleansing the stems carefully."

Happily content as to her state of mind and body, I sat down in the low chair drawn up to her couch and evidently meant for me. But for a dull pulse of pain far down in my heart when I thought of Don's one-and-twenty days of absence, I should have been blissfully satisfied.

I cannot recall the steps by which she led me to what she had brought me hither to hear. That they were cautious was proved by the gradual opening of my comprehension to the truth I had never dreamed of until I had it from her lips. She was the victim of a fearful malady that could be relieved by nothing short of a critical operation, if by that.

The last provisional clause was kept back until I had learned, with what shuddering reluctance I cannot describe, how insidious had been the increase of the abnormal growth that was sapping her life; how slow she had been to suspect, how loath to believe in the real nature of the horror.

"I said to the Father in my prayers that it could not, that it *must* not be! For there were Don, you know,—and you, my almost daughter, and your mother, my more than sister,—and the suffering poor who seemed to me to need the little I can do for them. It was the oft-repeated story of poor Paul and his stake in the flesh over again. Not until I heard down to the stilling depths of my soul, as did the tried apostle, the whisper, 'My grace is sufficient for thee,' did I risk the confirmation or removal of my suspicions by consultation with your mother. We were not altogether sure until yesterday what must be for life or for——"

I put my hand upon her mouth.

"Not that!" I said, stoutly. "I will not have you say the word!"

I believe still that you are mistaken, and mamma too. What could you know yesterday that you had not known before?"

"Your mother had a letter from Dr. Barker."

The name was a shock, for it was that of a specialist of national reputation.

"She and I went, by appointment, to see him on last Tuesday. His written verdict was in the letter I spoke of. She was to confer with Dr. Wentworth last night. If practicable and prudent, I shall have the work done while my boy is away. He must suspect nothing until the event is certain. You may think it weak, and unworthy of an elderly woman,"—smiling while the delicate pink deepened in her cheeks,—“but I want him to think his mother sound in body and mind. I have taken pains to conceal my physical ailments from him from the time that, as a lad of twelve, he could not sleep one night because I had a violent headache. Somebody had said in his hearing that people sometimes died of pain in the head. I have tried to keep well and cheerful and comely for him.”

"But"—urged I, deprecatingly—"will not he be wounded when he learns that you have denied yourself the solace of his sympathy, and him the privilege of helping you bear the trouble?"

"He must never know it, if all goes well. Upon this point I am resolved. The fact and the details would be an inconceivable shock to his tender heart. I have thought it over and over until my brain spins. When reason is at her coolest and clearest, I see that my duty is to shield him from needless suspense and pain. When he told me first of his projected journey, I saw a providence, and a merciful one, in the opportunity to carry out my wish. I would have spared you the knowledge, too, dear child, had it been possible. As it is now, I am selfish enough to be thankful for your society and petting during these slow, anxious days. Will you spend them with me?"

I assured her eagerly that I should have preferred the petition of and for myself, had she not spoken of it, that I would not leave her for one waking hour while she needed me. I told her, too,—solemnity quelling my agitated spirit,—that Don had committed her to me in our last night's talk, with earnestness akin to prevision. I could not comfort and strengthen her as he might, but I was hers, soul and body, until he should return to receive account of my stewardship.

She kissed me with a look that accepted the offering and repaid me for it a thousandfold. Then, with the quiet decision she assumed when need was of resolute action, she reminded me that it was past the hour at which we were wont to begin our daily reading.

We had studied much together for a year past, reading and discussing works selected by one or both of us, or by Don. He had brought home one day Symonds's "Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama," and we were busy with it now. It lay upon her table, the silk marker between the leaves I had shut upon it yesterday forenoon. The sight of the bit of ribbon nearly overcame my enforced composure. It was a finger pointing to a care-free past, a line of demarcation between me and the merry-hearted girl who had laughed so few hours ago over "The Four P's," "Roister Doister," and the first-rate

screaming farce of "Gammer Gurton." It cost me an effort to announce in level accents the title of to-day's chapter,—“The Rise of Tragedy.”

Mrs. Upton's chair was in the roomy bay-window that broke the line of front wall in her sitting-room. As she listened, she knit a silk sock for her son, the last of six pairs I had seen grow under her fingers in our morning studies. She was proficient in all graceful, womanly industries, and seldom idle. All was outwardly as it had been yesterday and the day before, and for a long bright procession of yesterdays,—but ah! for the heart that ached and the spirit that quailed within me!

I read on and on, I fear, monotonously, but without faltering, until recalled to consciousness of what my lips enunciated by my auditor's movement to lay aside her work,—the signal with us of verbal discussion of some point made by the author. Glancing at the lines just overpast, I saw that “‘The Misfortunes of Arthur’ was written by learned men, and acted by the members of a legal society before the queen. The author of the tragedy was Thomas Hughes. The choruses, dumb shows, argument, induction, and some extra speeches—all the setting of the play, in short—are ascribed to other students of the Inn. Among these occurs the name of Francis Bacon. The future Lord Verulam was at that time in his twenty-third year.”

“A scrap of ore out of which one might forge a link in the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy,” said the clear, soft voice. “Was it Carlyle, or Emerson, or somebody else, who said of the plays ascribed to great William,—Bacon, or a miracle?”

I was defending the Warwickshire playwright zealously, if not according to knowledge, when my companion said, without alteration in manner or accent,—

“My love, I think I hear your mother's voice in the lower hall. Will you ask her and Dr. Wentworth to come up?”

CHAPTER III.

I USED to say and believe that life was worth living if only because it gave me opportunity of knowing two such women as Mrs. Upton and my mother. The latter had married at nineteen her father's colleague in the practice of medicine, a man twenty years her senior, and already eminent in his profession. Women-doctors and colleges for training the same were comparatively rare at that date, yet Mrs. Salisbury began almost immediately, under the tutelage of her husband, the study of medical science. He laughingly encouraged for a while what he regarded as youthful caprice in an intelligent girl, but soon recognized as genuine enthusiasm in his calling. He died when I was eleven years of age. For eight years his wife had been virtually his professional partner, although she had never attended a public medical lecture. If there were an important operation to be performed by him, his brethren became accustomed to see him introduce as his assistant the slight, dignified young matron whose modest self-possession and steadfast attention to the matter in hand disabused the most

captious of suspicion of unfeminine forwardness. Her nerve never failed her, and the practised touch that denotes training in surgery, combined with sympathetic tact only to be found in a true woman, was speedily acknowledged by patients and practitioners as a powerful factor in clinical work. Conservatism bowed to conviction of the shrewd sense of the husband and the wife's talents and skill. Those who came to cavil remained to admire, and departed to extol.

As time went on, Mrs. Salisbury became her husband's almost constant companion in his daily rounds, often entering the sick-room at his side; when she did not, hearing a detailed account of the symptoms and the action of remedial agents upon his return to the carriage, and consulted as frankly as though their sexes were the same. He was great enough in himself not to fear the presence near the throne of his personality of one whose genius and ability were indisputable. Once and again he predicted, more in earnest than in jest, that in the event of his decease "the bereaved widow would continue the business at the old stand," albeit American taste might keep the advertisement from his tombstone. Spectators of their singularly harmonious wedded life have told me of his prideful fondness in his pupil, and the affectionate deference paid to her honored master by the brilliant woman. His death at fifty-one was hastened by the shock of heavy financial losses brought on by generous and misplaced faith in others. His style of living had been liberal, his charities lavish, but his income justified these and the hope of affluence as well. His wife, as sole executrix and administratrix, was less dismayed than her friends when, apart from thirty thousand dollars devised to me,—and which the widow religiously set aside as he had directed,—there remained to her, as residuary legatee, what was, by comparison with my small fortune, a mere pittance. Elsie was born seven months after our father's death, and was, therefore, unprovided for.

She had passed her second birthday when her mother, after an examination in a college of physicians and surgeons, took the degree of M.D. and entered upon the practice of medicine in our populous and fast-growing suburban town. It was a daring step, but her personal popularity was great, and the profession of which her husband had been an ornament gave her generous encouragement in unqualified testimony to her fitness to follow in his footsteps. In an incredibly short time, considering the robust nature of provincial prejudice, Dr. Charlotte Salisbury became the fashion. Shortly before his death her husband had bought the cottage in which he was born, and enlarged and modernized it with the intention of retiring from active professional labors at some not distant day. This homestead the intrepid widow contrived to retain, and this was the haven to which she withdrew when the city home was sold. Under this roof Elsie was born, and here we were living in elegant, if modest, comfort, when Dr. Charlotte Salisbury married Raymond Wentworth.

God forgive me that to this hour the hot blood stains my forehead when I speak of my mother's second marriage! I can comprehend now, as I did not in the glow of youthful intolerance, that she had never given the full wealth of her heart to the man who was her

father's friend and contemporary. She awarded him grateful and admiring reverence, with, perhaps, never a misgiving that the deeps of her rich nature had not been sounded. She was a dutiful and loving wife, as she had been dutiful and affectionate as her father's daughter. She mourned in genuine sorrow of soul the breaking of the strong staff and beautiful rod on which she had leaned in safety and honor. His expressed wishes were the law of her conduct; in speaking of him, tone and mien were chastened almost to devoutness.

In the fourth year of her widowhood she fell in love for the first time in her life, and became Dr. Wentworth's adoring wife. He was thirty years of age, and a bachelor. She was thirty-five, and the mother of two children. People usually exclaimed upon first seeing them together, "What a splendid couple!" yet I question if my mother had one really fine feature excepting expressive eyes, gray in color and of fair size and shape. Her head was nobly moulded and regal in poise; her mouth, if rather large, showed in speech and smile perfect teeth within mobile lips; every lineament denoted intellect of a high order and a thoroughly sweet nature. Dr. Wentworth's was the most nearly perfect physique I have ever looked upon; his manner was engaging; his voice full and round, with a slightly melancholy cadence at the end of sentences so well put together as to give the effect of elegant language. One had to know him intimately to comprehend how little pith was in the polished periods, how meagre the talent he burnished and held aloft for the dazzlement of beholders. The astute woman of the world, who had lived for twelve years in the closest of earthly relations with a man of learning and refinement, was so far imposed upon by the few shining gifts of his successor as to credit him with all that he claimed to possess.

One month before the quiet wedding which both preferred to a larger gathering, my mother's only brother died suddenly, wifeless and childless, leaving the whole of a large estate to his sister. It is simple justice to Dr. Wentworth to admit the improbability that he had any expectation of this event when he addressed the prospective legatee, but justice also impels criticism of his manner of receiving the goods the gods had unexpectedly bestowed. Before the marriage he settled every stick and stiver of his bride's fortune upon herself, and forthwith entered upon the career of ostentatious independence that distinguished his after-life. Without going into details that would clog the wheels of my narrative and forestall certain unfoldings of the story, I will state, as the general rule of his conduct and language in this regard, that while he got the full benefit of the double lining of down given to his nest by his wife's accession of wealth, he preserved his self-respect and won the admiration of his world by accepting, under proud protest, luxury and such added dignity of position as riches brought. What money he made by the legitimate practice of his profession was his. All else was Mrs. Wentworth's, and thus specified with punctiliousness born of hurt haughtiness that in the eyes of his wife was becoming to him and creditable to human nature. She delighted in heaping gifts upon him, and fancied herself clever in divining what would be the bent of his wishes had pride and an over-nice sense of

honor suffered him to cherish desires for which his own purse could not pay. Then began a system of timid diplomacy on her part, of studied blindness upon his, prefatory to the tactful, tender, and reluctant acceptance of the gift. Women never learn wisdom by such experiences. The memory of former pleadings with him to let her please him by the gift of diamond studs, gold watch, carriage-and-pair, and the riding-horse absolutely necessary for the preservation of his health, left her with no defence against the absolute refusal, the earnest reminder that he married her, not her money; the pain it cost him to repulse the well-meant generosity for which he could not but love her the better, if that were possible. And so on, up—or down—to yielding to her sometimes tearful importunities, with evident pain to himself, and only because he could deny her nothing. The *sequitur* to each such transaction was, on one side, gentle pensiveness, continued for hours, sometimes days, the noble fortitude of one who endures a great hurt lest his beloved should sustain a less, and, upon the other, eager assiduity to prove appreciation of the favor done her by the sacrifice of personal feeling and manly independence. If all this was farcical, ours was not the only home in which the comedy has been a part of daily life.

A branch of the same root was the husbandly dread and wifely horror lest the envious and evil-disposed should rate her intellect and professional skill more highly than his. From the day that made them one, her consistent design to efface herself whenever the act would exalt him was obvious to me,—then a sharp-eyed critic of fifteen,—and, as it irked me to suspect, not a secret to some others.

Dr. Wentworth's inner office was also my mother's sitting-room. Her work-table, the davenport upon which she wrote notes and letters, her flowers and birds in winter, were there, and engaged her attention to the apparent exclusion of pursuits that had engrossed her during Dr. Salisbury's lifetime. She drove much with her husband, and once in a great while entered the chamber of a patient, but always as a friend. She even gave offence, occasionally, by obvious indifference to cases that seemed serious to sufferers and friends. Now and then she made opportunities of proclaiming how rusty she had grown in the theoretical knowledge and practice of her whilom profession, what a home-lover and home-keeper she had become. I knew this to be acting—and over-acting; that she had never studied harder or observed more closely, never so given every power of her fine intellect to the consideration of symptoms and the action of remedies as during the period of her husband's increasing fame and the steady eclipse of her reputation.

The situation was phenomenal to my youthful apprehension, unless I traced a similitude between it and the gorgeously-apparelled automaton chess-player Don took me to see one winter. The majestic figure and his unerring moves had painful fascination for me. Yet I could not say to Don, when he rallied me upon my grave face and obvious absorption in the imposing cheat, that I saw, instead of the gowned and turbaned Turk upon the dais, Dr. Wentworth's front and back offices, his suavely wise reception of patients, and my mother's face bent over fancy-work or flower-pots.

In others' sight he never descended from the dais, and his motive power was never unveiled. I am confident that the deception was maintained in their most private interviews, that she assumed his superior knowledge and skill, and he graciously allowed the assumption. In wholesome disgust at the deception, I could not but recall the plea by which Katherine Parr saved her head. In reading aloud Strickland's "Queens of England" to Mrs. Upton, I could not quite hold my voice steady at the passage describing the diplomacy of the royal and most Christian consort :

" ' I have always held it preposterous for a woman to instruct her lord ; and if I have ever presumed to differ with your highness on religion, it was partly to obtain information for my own comfort regarding nice points on which I stood in doubt, and sometimes because I perceived that, in talking, you were better able to pass away the pain and weariness of your present infirmity, which encouraged me to this boldness in the hope of profiting withal by your majesty's learned discourse.'

" ' And is it so, sweetheart ?' replied the king. ' Then are we perfect friends.'

Raymond Wentworth's wife could have been perfect friends with him upon no other terms.

" The husband is the head of the wife," I heard him reply once, and pointedly, to Don's argument for the equality of the sexes. " If your principle were put into practice, the household would be a double-headed *lusus naturæ*."

And my dear mother applauded the phrase, her fine eyes shining with pride and love upon her superb lord.

He was never cross to her in public, never demitted the least of the graceful attentions due from the chief to an honored lieutenant ; yet I think he was never altogether rid of the apprehension that she might penetrate the secret of her power and his weakness. Her loyalty must have surprised him in moments of candid self-communing, if such ever visited him.

Husband and wife stood together this morning, just within the entrance of Mrs. Upton's drawing-room, evidently expectant of a summons to the upper floor. Both were tall. There was hardly the difference of half a head between them ; yet, as I perceived from the stairs, he was looking down upon her from the height of one of his loftiest and blandest moods. His well-fitting morning-coat was buttoned below the swell of his broad chest ; his shoulders were squared resolutely ; one gloved hand holding his silk hat was cast behind him ; the other played with a silky chestnut moustache without hiding a politely wearied smile. I knew the mood for one that tried my undisciplined soul more than downright and vulgar abuse would have done. I caught, too, the pleading intonations that sought to dispel it.

Both turned at my footsteps, Dr. Wentworth leisurely, with perfunctory interest in the report I might bring ; my mother eagerly, her heart in face and upon tongue.

" How is she this morning ?" she asked before I could kiss her.

“Very bright and brave!” I answered, breathlessly. “And quite comfortable. She wishes you to come up.”

Dr. Wentworth bowed in stepping back for his wife to pass. Looking around at the stair-foot, she saw that he did not follow, and made an anxious pause.

“Come, Raymond, dear.”

“Not without an invitation, love. If our friend desires my presence, she will send for me.”

I bit my lip. To strike him I must thrust through my mother’s heart.

“The ‘you’ was plural,” I said, with tolerable grace. “Mrs. Upton mentioned you both by name.”

“She is very good. Your mother and Dr. Barker have shown themselves so competent to the management of the case that I am, at best, but a supernumerary.”

“You are physician-in-chief,” returned my mother, emphatically. “without whom we cannot take a step.”

“Opinions may differ upon that, as upon other points, my dear.” But he condescended to follow her up the stairway.

Left below,—for I, at least, had nothing to do with the consultation,—I stamped rather than walked up and down the floor in a paroxysm of angry mortification. To see such a woman the puppet of such a man would stir any lover of justice to indignation. When the puppet was the woman dearest to me, the object of my exulting adoration, and the man was despised in my eyes, the exhibition drove me to frenzy. I anticipated the prolonged penance my mother must pay for abetting her friend’s visit to the city physician, if she had not herself proposed it. Her husband’s vanity was made up of nerve-tips, and, as his manner showed, every nerve was smarting. With the intense self-consciousness of one who knows himself to be as weak as vain, he descried with the naked eye intentional slights which greater souls could not have seen with a microscope, and resented them in inverse proportion to his deserts. While the precious life of one whose goodness to him and to his had been beyond computation hung upon the flutter of a breath, he could stand to consider questions of precedence and ceremony, and stab as he best understood how to pierce the soul already racked with anxiety as to the fate of her beloved friend.

They were a long time up-stairs, I began to tell myself, as my impatient fit subsided. It was silly and selfish in me to waste time and temper upon what could not affect her whose interests were now paramount. Whatever might be my private opinion of Dr. Wentworth’s mental and moral calibre, the sufferer up-stairs believed in him, and must be sustained in that faith until the great trial was over. He was, beyond doubt, a skilful surgeon. His head and, I could not but add, his heart were cool; his hand was steady and deft. Surgery was his specialty, and several critical operations successfully performed by him had given him more than provincial fame. Only a week ago he had been called into consultation with a corps of celebrated metropolitan doctors upon a case of unusual interest, and, according to his theory, had taken a prominent part in that which resulted in a cure noised

abroad as miraculous. Impartial judgment decided that while he should never give the casting vote as to the need of the knife, he was competent to wield it when wiser men had decreed the use of it. I wondered—as from sudden inspiration—if this were not also my mother's secret persuasion. Beneath the show of absolute trust and admiration that galled me to the quick did the professional side of her rate him at his exact value? Was her apparent endorsement of all he did the mask for a brave, sustained effort to straighten his deflections and ward off the consequences of his erring judgment?

As the meaning of what daily went on under my eyes grew and glowed before my contemplation, my heart stood still. From wondering reverence for the grand creature in whose dual life conscience and heart touched hands across what would have seemed to timid natures a mighty chasm, fancy passed into speculation as to what would or might be the end of the pious fraud. How long would the sensitive vanity of the occupant of the throne brook the whisper of the concealed vizier? Since no mortal is ubiquitous, might not some exigency find him alone and unprepared? A single failure in tact would wreck the wife's influence. A word such as Mrs. Robb had dropped to the effect that he was "firsted, not seconded" by his partner, would infuriate him to the rending of the silken leading-strings so cleverly disguised. And then——

My hands and feet were numb with cold; a viewless wall closed upon me and hindered respiration. When I heard the visitors descending the stairs, I shook off, as it were, a horrible nightmare, and ran into the library. Just then I could not look into my mother's eyes, or support her husband's presence. The long window through which I would have fled into the garden was fast, and the bolt was stiff. There was no time to struggle with it. I must have wrought myself into a state akin to dementia, for I had but the one motive in mind of eluding observation until I could comport myself more decorously than was practicable just now.

I stood close against the frame of the door connecting library and drawing-room, folding the velvet *portière* about me. I never thought of the chance that they might linger in the outer apartment to consult as to the case they had examined together. I marvel still that my mother's fine sense of propriety did not dictate a different course.

The first sentence I overheard put the discovery of myself out of the question:

"If you are bent upon murdering your friend, you must choose some other confederate. Your favorite Dr. Barker may be less scrupulous than your husband."

To my surprise, the reply was in the wife's mildest voice:

"I have not cited Dr. Barker's opinion in opposition to yours, Raymond. I merely questioned if your diagnosis were altogether correct. She has remarkable will-power, and is less nervous than one would believe possible in the circumstances. I think if the truth were told her she would instantly propose——"

"That is your theory. I have mine," broke in Dr. Wentworth, heedless of common courtesy. "If I am to perform the operation, it

is, I submit, somewhat important that my views should have some weight. If you are to run the affair, do not shirk responsibility. That would be—*womanish!*”

I guessed at the sneering smile from his tone. As he grew insulting, my mother became calm. I divined, too, for whose sake she hid the writhings of a wounded heart and continued to argue in support of her position.

“It is because I value your reputation, and because this is no common case, that I urge mature consideration of all possibilities. My confidence in your skill is perfect. But I have heard you say that women are, sometimes, better judges than more learned men of one another’s physical idiosyncrasies. The fear I have expressed is not new to me. It is based upon careful study of symptoms that some months ago excited my apprehensions.”

“It is strange that you have never alluded to them until lately. Yet not so strange, after all, perhaps. This is not the first instance by many in which I have been kept in the dark until you saw fit to admit me to your counsels. If I have not seemed conscious of this before, it was not that I have not observed and felt every indication of your growing independence of myself and such poor service as I have been able to render one so gifted and distinguished as Dr. Charlotte Salisbury—*Wentworth!*”

I have heard other men say cruelly unjust things to the women they had sworn to cherish,—men of piety and refinement, whom the world at large accredited, likewise, with humanity. No other exhibition of the power to wound, vested by law and gospel in husband or wife, ever appalled me as this unexpected demonstration from the suave, elegant physician. Had the woman he addressed shrieked, or sobbed, or swooned, I should have thought it natural. It was more sadly significant of the frequency of such scenes that the brief pause succeeding the last speech was not broken by so much as a sigh.

“There is the carriage, dear,” was the next remark, in a full, gentle tone. “I am afraid we have detained you inconveniently long. I know how full your hands are. There is no need that this matter should be decided to-day. Further developments may make plain the path of duty and expediency. Would you like to have me go home now, or shall I stay with Mrs. Upton a little longer?”

He answered sulkily, evidently but half appeased by her deferential query :

“Stay—if you like. Perhaps you may quiet measurably her intense nervous excitement. Give valerian, red lavender, or bromide of potassium, should it continue. It is of the last importance that she should be kept tranquil. I will look in again in about two hours. Let her suppose that I am to call for you in time to take you home to luncheon. She might be agitated did she suspect my second visit to be professional.”

He had grown composed and perfunctory : the kiss without which he never left his wife for an hour was dutifully given : in the hall he raised his voice slightly, that the “*Au revoir, my darling!*” might reach the upper chamber and delude the invalid into belief of his easy mind

with respect to herself. He was not consciously hypocritical, and better men find their tempers sweetened by overflow and gust.

Misled by the silence in the outer room into the idea that it was untenanted, I peered from behind my curtain. Through the front window I saw Dr. Wentworth, erect and stately, march down the walk and step into his carriage, leaning forward, as the horses started, to lift his hat to the wife he had left. She returned the salute with a wave of the hand, turned from her outlook, walked a few steps, paused irresolute and remained standing for a full minute, hands clasped tightly upon one another and head bent. Not daring to stir, I gazed at her whitening face with new agony in my heart,—the anguish of seeing her torn by suffering with which I might not intermeddle. She was hardly a dozen feet from me in body. Death could not have sundered us more completely in spirit. Had the man who wounded her been my father, I could have flown to her and mingled my tears with hers over his injustice and petulance. What I branded, mentally, as the monstrous relation she had assumed to this man cut her off from my sympathy with, or just apprehension of, the nature of that which made her vulnerable, and lent him the art to pierce her through with incommunicable sorrows.

The awful minute during which, all unconscious of my scrutiny, she stood motionless in the middle of the room, paling visage and clinched fingers testifying to the inward battle she must ever wage alone, was ended by her abrupt motion to cast herself upon her knees before a chair. Her face hidden upon her outstretched arms, she lay, rather than crouched there, dumb, still, but shaken by dry sobs more terrible to look upon than excess of weeping. I stole soundlessly to the long window nearest me, wrestled desperately with the bolt, and escaped into the shrubbery.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF an hour elapsed before I dared show my face in Mrs. Upton's room. The scene was peaceful, bright with the sunlight that had crept around to the invalid's feet, and cheerful with the tones of the two friends. My mother had laid aside her hat, and produced from her reticule a purse she was crocheting as a Christmas-gift for her husband. Mignonette scent mingled with the half-bitter odor of a bowl of white chrysanthemums Don had set that morning upon his mother's table. Both ladies turned at the sound of the opening door.

"Here is our truant!" said my hostess.

And my mother as blithely,—

"We were exchanging conjectures as to your hiding-place, my daughter. I thought you might have walked over to see Kitty Wilcox. She called to see you this morning. We are agreed—Mrs. Upton and I—that you should not be kept in suspense any longer. Everything is settled. The operation is simple, and we think will be attended with little danger. It is to be done in a few days, and as quietly as possible. Our dear friend wishes this especially. Not a

creature in the neighborhood is to know it. She can trust her servants, and the nurse to be brought from New York will be received as a visitor."

She had told me everything in half a dozen sentences, with no waste of words and in the matter-of-fact way that might go with the utterance of an unimportant piece of gossip. Her power of quelling nervous disorder was a gift. I thought how useless had been the prescription of a choice of drugs. Her gift had wrought like a charm upon her companion. Mrs. Upton's manner, which had been calm while I read and talked with her, was now almost gay. It was apparent that a weight had left her heart.

In very shame I struggled to emulate the bravery of the pair of strong women. I stooped to kiss the crown of silvery hair above the serene brow of one, and, sitting down upon her footstool, asked certain questions as to symptoms and the regimen indicated by which the system was to be prepared for the excision. The child of two physicians, and the step-child of a surgeon, was not terrified by the details. The thought of the ordeal was already familiar to me. But I must be instructed in the duties delegated to me as the custodian of the dear patient. I had a talent for nursing, and had often exercised it. I inquired boldly if I might not take the place and office of the professional city nurse. I engaged to obey orders to the letter, and that my nerves would not play me false.

Mrs. Upton took me in her arms impulsively as I said it. I felt her tears upon my face as she spoke :

"Darling daughter! Greater love could no child have than this. It may not be. The burden is not one for your young heart and shoulders. But I shall never forget—nor will Don—that you have begged to have it laid upon you."

My mother's decision was the same, and as prompt. She gave me, as compensation for the disappointment, plenty to do. I was to see that the prescribed diet and rules for daily living received proper attention. We were to take several short drives each day, that Mrs. Upton might, without fatigue, get abundance of fresh air. Betweenwhiles she was to spend much time upon the lounge, and I must see to it that her mind did not dwell upon mournful or agitating themes.

"In short,"—the dictator concluded in the firm, sweet voice that was like elixir to heart and spirit,—“you two girls are to have a ‘jolly time’ together, build up your nervous systems and freshen your complexions by keeping early hours,—and enough of them,—eating what you ought to eat, and leaving uneaten the things you ought not to eat, writing to Don every day, of course, and never letting him know now, or in days to come, that his mother was ever really ill in her life. That will be a secret worth keeping from him—and from C. A. R.!”

I recollected myself just in time not to tell her that the newspaper-woman, as she gloried in calling herself, had interviewed Don but yesterday as to the visit to Dr. Barker which both of them imagined was known to nobody outside of the two households. To keep back the remark was the first exercise of my new office of guardian. What

I said, carelessly, instead, to hide the trifling awkwardness of the pause, was not well chosen :

“ I will write at once to Kate Wilcox and excuse myself from her luncheon-party next week.”

“ My love ! when you have ordered a new gown purposely for the occasion !” expostulated my mother.

“ Upon what pretext will you withdraw the acceptance already sent ?” said Mrs. Upton.

I answered them in one disdainful breath :

“ As if I cared for wearing the new gown that once ! Upon *no* pretext at all to her, except that circumstances over which I have no control oblige me to refuse myself the pleasure—and all that, you know. Do you suppose for one moment, dear Mrs. Upton, that I could be so heartless as to leave you for a few hours of so-called pleasure ? or that they could be anything but slow agony to me ?”

“ I know it better than you can tell me. Yet for my sake you will endure them. We cannot afford, at this juncture, to excite suspicion. It is altogether natural that you should spend the first week, or ten days, or even the whole term of Don’s absence, with me. It is not natural—or, what amounts in society to the same thing—conventional, that you should retract a promise given to a friend because you cannot leave a woman who has cogent reasons for wishing to be thought well.”

A shade of nervous worry, new to my sight, crossed the face. The serene depths of her eyes were ruffled ; her hands shook in passing over my hair. She tried to recover her late manner, but ineffectually.

“ I should call it whimsical folly if another woman shrank with dread that she could not shape into words from the *ante-mortem* inquest that will sit upon me if the truth should take wind. I am old enough to put away childish horrors. But the fear is a mild edition of Prometheus’s lacerated liver. I seem to hear and feel the vultures. Pray God my boy may never know of my weak, silly notions and my real pain !”

I sprang to catch her as she drooped to one side of her chair. The bluish pallor that had overspread her face at the station was there now ; her hands plucked at her chest ; her breath intermitted alarmingly. My mother loosened her clothing and lowered the adjustable chair to an easy angle ; then, bidding me support the lax figure, poured out something from a phial, administered it, and, her fingers on the sufferer’s pulse, her lips set hard, her eyes upon Mrs. Upton’s face, watched for the effect of the potion.

“ The paroxysm is passing,” she said, presently and reassuringly.

The patient opened her eyes upon a smile of resolute cheer.

“ You are better now,” said the sympathetic accents. “ The worst is over. It was not a very bad attack.”

A wan gleam responded. The weak hand groped for mine, and, feeling it to be icy cold, Mrs. Upton looked anxious.

“ Don’t let Sydney be frightened. Tell her what it is,” she whispered.

My mother arose abruptly, and, going to a closet, took out another

phial. For some moments she was too intent upon counting the drops of a dark liquid into a glass and measuring teaspoonfuls of water to mix with it, to speak. Not until she had held it to lips that were regaining color did she give sign of having heard the request concerning me.

“Sydney has never had an hysterical fit, but she knows that such are more alarming than dangerous. If she would be of use to you she must bear this in mind.”

The admonition was upon her lips when her husband’s ring was heard. She hastened into the hall and called to him over the balustrade:

“Come up at once, Raymond.”

The tone was professional, and in ring authoritative. Some powerful emotion had mastered wifely reverence, or swept it aside for the instant. The summons was not obeyed in haste. In the stillness of expectancy we heard the visitor lay aside his gloves and hat upon the rack in the hall; then—I could hardly credit it of one whose good-breeding was a proverb—he breathed an opera-air between his teeth in the deliberate ascent of the stairs. A shade less of refinement would have converted it into a whistle. Mrs. Upton’s eyes were closed again, and she did not appear to notice that anything was amiss. My mother avoided my eye; she paled perceptibly, yet met the laggard upon the threshold of the chamber with collected mien and ready word:

“Mrs. Upton has had one of her faint turns. I wish you had been here in time to ward it off!”

Dr. Wentworth, with the cool grace for which he was renowned,—the happy blending of personal interest in the individual, and conscious mastery of the disease that had brought back more than one almost-frightened-to-death patient from the grave’s mouth,—laid his fingers upon Mrs. Upton’s wrist. I have not described as it deserves his manner of performing so simple an act, and I despair of conveying an adequate idea of it. It was an art, and inimitable. I am not at all sure that there was not genius in it. I am altogether sure that his income was doubled by the degree of perfection to which he had brought what is considered by most practitioners too slight a matter to receive serious consideration.

“Be calm and confident!” it seemed to say. “Around your quaking form I draw the awful circle, not of the Church, but of MY PERSONALITY. With my touch upon the helm of your life, you may dismiss your forebodings. I could steer my way between rocks, reefs, and sand-bars with my eyes shut.”

He usually cast them down and lowered the lids, a flash of fine contempt for the adversary that thought to outwit him touching his well-cut mouth and dilating his nostrils. The flash was an indulgent smile by the time he had counted thirty beats. He let Mrs. Upton’s hand down reverently, yet caressingly, upon the arm of her chair,—another touch of genius,—and laughed low and lightly:

“I hope I may always have as good a pulse as yours is at this moment. My dear wife is more learned than I in many—in most—things appertaining to our profession, but her sympathies run away

with her judgment sometimes. Had I not understood this so well, I should have rushed up-stairs just now, expecting to find you *in articulo mortis*, instead of—as you are—likely to outlive all three of us. The seizures which alarm Mrs. Wentworth are symptomatic merely. They represent one of the many phases of hysteria. Their name is legion, and not one of them ever proved fatal.”

“You do not think, then,”—her eyes meeting his without a shade of fear,—“that they may indicate organic disease of the heart?”

He laughed again, in amusement that could not have been simulated :

“I gave you credit for too much common sense to nurse that notion. The heart gets a vast deal of blame that should be laid upon other organs which popular sentiment rates as less dignified,—why, I cannot say. Ninety-nine hundredths of the cases diagnosed as affections of the heart are dyspepsia; fifty per cent. of the remainder may be set down to the credit of lungs or spleen. If you stay with us until you die of heart-disease, Dr. Parr will be but an infant of days by comparison.”

His manner and smile were engaging to fascination. The patient's eyes gleamed gratefully; she lifted herself as a drooping flower revives in dew-laden air.

“And you believe that, after a week or two, these foolish attacks will be as though they had not been, and this over-tired body as nearly good as new as is compatible with the weight of forty-seven years and the memories of past infirmities?”

“I *know* it!”

Handsome and commanding as one born to rule the realm of disease, he beamed benignly upon her. After all, the secret of his professional success was not so occult as I may have made it appear in the telling. It is the way of the average human being to take a man at his own self-valuation, provided he stands up fiercely to his guns, be they Quaker cannon or veritable munitions of war. It is a truism that anything is bound to succeed and bring wealth to the owner, if advertised long and loudly. Dr. Wentworth's every gesture, tone, and pose advertised him. He was panoplied and placarded by nature and by art with certificates of popular power. His wife regarded him now as the single-minded devotee his enshrined saint. He had, within the hour, hurt and humbled her in her own sight and in the presence of others. He made light of the skill she had spent years in acquiring; he set the foot of masculine supremacy—because masculine—upon her queenly neck; he belittled her before her child, and swept aside, as he might a puff of smoke, that upon which she believed might hang a human life, and she remembered it no more in the pride and joy with which she claimed this august being as her very own. In spirit and in letter she called him “lord.” Blind adoration gilded for her the feet which one side of her nature knew to be clay.

I made an opportunity to lure her into my room while physician and patient chatted together. A trunk must be packed and sent to me, since my visit here would be prolonged. I broke right into the middle of our enumeration of the contents of this :

“Mamma, are you and Doctor”—my one name for him—“to have no other assistant than this nurse? Would it not be safer to have Dr. Barker or some one of equal eminence? Is it not customary?”

“Mrs. Upton is unwilling to have more persons present than the state of the case absolutely requires,” she answered, readily. “You have seen how sensitive she is on this point. I could have wished for the presence of a third physician; but there is really no need of it, and we have Dr. Barker’s opinion as to the feasibility of the operation and her fitness to undergo it. Were she a charity patient, I should not hesitate to do the work myself, with no help except such as a tolerable nurse could render. I have done it, and more than once. In at least five cases your father had no assistant except myself, and the patients recovered. No! there is no risk on that head.”

She seemed to say it to herself rather than to me, and I caught at the slight emphasis I thought pressed upon the relative pronoun.

“Where, then, does the peril lie?”

The tremor in my voice recalled to her how much I had at stake in the matter she was trying to weigh with professional dispassionateness.

“My darling!” she said, affectionately, “if I could assure you that in any such case there is no peril, I would gladly relieve your solicitude for one so dear to us all. But you are strong enough to hear the truth. The best that can be said of surgery is that it expels wrong by violence. But where there are no complications, when the subject is healthy and reasonably strong, and the surgeon skilful, as in the present case, the chances for good greatly outnumber those for disaster. Keep up a brave heart, girlie! and hope and pray—as will we all—that the Great Healer will order everything aright, and for our happiness.”

She never preached, and seldom talked the religion she lived. The tender solemnity of the last sentence brought me very near to her.

“I wish you were to do it!” I uttered, impulsively. “I think God would not let the knife swerve in your hand.”

Her glance was keen, almost cold.

“The knife will not go wrong. Your prejudices are unworthy of your reason, Sydney. Some day, perhaps, you will do justice to one whom you have never read aright. You would better write to Madame Voise to send your gown directly here. As to the things to be packed by your maid, I will make a list of them if you will dictate it.”

She sat down at my desk. With a swelling heart I named the articles needed, a mist that stung my eyelids blurring the outlines of the calm face bowed over the paper. Having been born of her body and her soul, nothing I could say or do could alienate her, but I lost ground in her esteem, perhaps in her affection, whenever I intimated an adverse criticism of her husband. No matter how light and indirect might be the stricture, she perceived and repelled it. Praise of herself at his expense was invidious and offensive. I could not say that but for the recollection of her crouching, convulsed figure, beaten down under his unmanly assault, I should never have spoken out the wish whose expression she resented. And in that smarting moment, as ever, I honored her too truly to taunt her with the supremacy of wifely idolatry over maternal affection.

With the vehemence of youth that feels itself to be misapprehended and unjustly condemned, I hated him who had supplanted me. The influence that warped an upright nature and turned mother against daughter could be only evil, and that continually.

Yet

the sweetest soul
That ever looked with human eyes

believed in her friend's husband. Over the luncheon to which she could not persuade her physicians to stay, I hearkened with more than passable patience to praises of his rare and radiant gifts, every word binding upon me more tightly the obligation of apparent acquiescence in her estimation of the paragon.

The day left a bad taste in my mouth which not even a note from Don, scribbled on the westward-bound train, could dispel. I had once overheard my step-father regret mildly to my mother my "unhappy temper." I had never been more nearly of his mind than when I found that night that I could not pray down the boiling bitterness of my thoughts of him. He had "feared" aloud to me, upon another occasion, that I was "disposed to vindictiveness." I could not gainsay that, either. Had news been brought me next morning that the popular physician had been found dead in his bed of the malady whose existence he flouted, I should probably have been shocked; I should certainly have felt for my mother's sorrow. Sitting, sorry and sullen, over my fire, after I had risen from my knees, I said, remorselessly, that I should be relieved to know that he was out of my way forever. Through him my ideal of womanhood and motherhood was dimmed; I found it intolerable that my second mother's clear vision should be dazzled by his specious arts, and upon all these points I was muzzled by natural affection and expediency. Not even Don had fathomed the depth of my dislike for my nominal "family-connection." To his mother, with whom I was frank about everything else, I must play the hypocrite, or imperil her vital interests.

Unless a majority of good Christians lie, it ought not to be hard to pray, "*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" I went to bed without mocking Omniscience by the petition. The last thing I would have asked of Heavenly mercy was such forgiveness as my soul meted out for him whose trespasses were condoned, so far as I could judge, by everybody but myself.

If I did not grow in all fair and saintly graces during that week, it was not for want of a living example of the choicest of these. But for the one acrid drop at the bottom of my heart, every hour would have been filled with tenderest comfort. For my saint comforted me, while I ostensibly ministered unto her,—comforted me for her son's absence, and for the trial the shadow of which stole closer with the going down of each sun. No outward preparation portended this. Her house, always a model of delicate and dainty "keeping," was in such absolute order as betrayed how long had been her outlooking upon dread possibilities. There was nothing to worry or fatigue her. When she had slipped into my daily letter to Don the note written at her escritoire in the sunny window, with my mignonette-sprays still living

and breathing before her, and issued needful instructions for the day to her perfectly-trained servants, she left herself nothing to do more arduous than a stated number of rounds upon Don's socks, our morning's sacred and secular readings, and the drives that were a part of the physician's ordinance.

Her spirits never flagged; her talk was more vivacious and richer than I had ever known it, and she was always the most delightful conversationalist of her circle; her interest in whatever pertained to me, her constant companion, was evinced in a thousand ways. On the evening before Kitty Wilcox's luncheon she chided me playfully for my indifference to what, she averred, occupied much of her thoughts.

"Am I growing more frivolous?" she queried. "Or are you settling down before your time? That the affair is in honor of pretty Kitty's betrothal should excite your sympathies; that it is to be the 'swellest' event of the opening season should awaken your curiosity. Now, I cannot fall asleep conveniently o' nights for speculating as to the probable truth of rumors pointing to liveried footmen by the pair and trio; of fabulous prices paid for chrysanthemums as big as dinner-plates, and peaches as big as cocoanuts, and ices such as the mind of Mapleton never conceived of. Why, I am credibly informed that wines are to be served in glasses blown in Venice a thousand years ago, and that not one favor is more than a week old, each having been manufactured expressly for the guest who will receive it. The chandeliers are to be crystal music-boxes, set to tunes adapted to each course——"

"Beginning with marine airs, out of compliment to the raw oysters, and concluding with 'Araby's Daughter' as coffee is brought in!" interposed I. "None of these things move me, mother mine! I would rather lunch *en tête-à-tête* with you, on cold chicken and bread-and-butter, washed down with a cup of your incomparable tea, than fill my place at this Aladdin-lamp feast. Perhaps I am, as you say, settling down. That implies clearness and calm, doesn't it? Stirring up suggests froth and dregs. I like to be racked off gently, without touching the turbid deposit. And, when we are together,—just we two,—you looking like a blessed white angel, the curtains drawn, the wind singing at the window, lamp and fire at their cheeriest, and I sitting on your foot-cushion,—*thus*,"—suiting action to word,—“my head upon your knee,—*thus*,—I feel the gentle run of the wine of life. There is no joy but calm,—such calm as this.”

She sent me to the library-shelves for Tennyson, and made me read "The Lotus-Eaters" aloud, although both of us knew it almost by heart. And after that, still sitting at her feet, the book laid in the lap of a chair, I dipped into the leaves, as a humming-bird into flower-cups, bringing up tiny tastes of honey, reading, I remember, all of the Brook Song, and a line here and there from "In Memoriam," and talking pityingly of the bootless penances of St. Simeon Stylites, and lingering wonderingly over the six strokes of the master-pencil that showed us the eagle clasping the crag with crooked hands, solitary in the ring of the azure world, watching the wrinkled sea crawling

beneath him. Memory recalls with especial vividness the scene, as I have sketched it, during the interval of musing quiet that succeeded my reading of what is scarcely more than a fragment :

O sad *No More!* O sweet *No More!*
 O strange *No More!*
 By a mossed brook-bank on a stone
 I smelt a wildweed flower alone:
 There was a ringing in my ears,
 And both my eyes gushed out with tears.
 Surely all pleasant things had gone before,
 Low-buried fathom-deep beneath with thee,
 NO MORE!

My companion spoke first :

“It is an echo, faint and weird, of the mood that brought forth ‘Break! break! break!’ Wordsworth found the same chord in his ‘meanest flower that blows.’”

Lying back in her chair, her hands crossed upon her white gown, dreamy eyes looking out upon empty air, she resumed, presently :

“I am trying to analyze the sad sweetness of the response given by human hearts to the sublime simplicity of such lines. Is it genius or feeling that finds the way so surely to the Innermost which only our dearest ones are suffered to enter, and they but seldom?”

I quote her words to show how impersonal was our chat that night, how placid were our spirits, and how natural it was that we should part happily and sleep soundly.

CHAPTER V.

THE yellow light of an October morning, reflected from my chamber-walls, awoke me to the recollection that it was a *fête*-day. Between them, my mother and Mrs. Upton had awakened my but lately indifferent self into a girlish desire to be one of the favored party selected to congratulate the belle of the village upon her engagement to a city lawyer. I was fond of society, and Kitty and I were fond of one another. She had been in several times during the past week to “talk over things.” If the monster fruits and flowers and musical glasses of Mrs. Upton’s merry catalogue were apocryphal, there remained enough charming novelties to astonish our quiet town, and the company to be collected about these promised to be charming. My gown had come home two days ago, and fitted me to perfection. Mrs. Upton and I had chosen it together. The fabric was camel’s-hair cloth, exquisitely fine and soft; in color pearl-gray, and wrought upon skirt, sleeves, and vest with silk of a darker shade into a pattern of daisies and grasses. The flowers were centred with knots of silver thread and the leaves veined with the same. My bonnet of crêpe de Chine matched the ground-color of the gown, and was trimmed with French marguerites and silver grasses. Mrs. Upton had given me a handkerchief edged with point-lace daisies, and I found beside my plate at breakfast a casket, tiny and tempting, with Tiffany’s stamp upon it,

and Don's card by it. Within, upon a velvet bed of palest sea-green, was a brooch of frosted silver. The design was one full-blown marguerite, one half opened, a bud, and a stalk of bearded wheat. The heart of the open flower was of seed-pearls; each kernel of the ripe grain was a pearl, and an opal dew-drop clung to the half-closed bud.

I broke down at sight of the surprise-gift, crying and laughing together in a wild, childish way that called forth Mrs. Upton's playful remonstrance:

"Dear child! have some regard for your eyes and complexion! It will be a poor compliment to Don's choice of a trinket to look your worst when you wear it for the first time."

I checked the tears, but my heart was so large with the consciousness of being beloved and spoiled out of all proportion to my worthiness, that a happy sob trembled up through my talk from time to time; and when my mother, who was to see me dress and to remain with Mrs. Upton until I got back, arrived at eleven o'clock, I was in danger of a hopeless relapse. I enjoyed every moment of that morning. The subdued bustle of preparation pervading the household was such cordial sympathy in my concerns as might attend upon the bridal festivities of a daughter of the home. Rosalie, Mrs. Upton's own maid, laid out each article in which I was to be endued upon my bed; my mother dressed my hair; Rosalie put on my silk stockings and the boots of *Suède* leather of the precise tint of my robe and bonnet. Mrs. Upton, resting among the pillows of my lounge, superintended the process from the first to the last stroke. In her every glance and intonation, as in my mother's touch, was the caressing assurance that love and pride and hope were, for them, bound up in my unworthy self, that what they had done to make my attire elegant and tasteful and becoming was the tangible manifestation of fond desire to forward my happiness by every conceivable means. And Don, in his flight toward the Golden Gate, was picturing the scene to himself, and idealizing the figure that finally stood before the cheval glass, full-toiletted, and blushing with delight to behold the by-so-much-handsomer-than-every-day reflection of her slim self that she questioned the mirror's honesty or the fidelity of her eyesight. Was another girl in the land so generously endowed with the real goods of existence, so royally dowered with love?

My mother averted the threatening shower by a new diversion. David, the butler, brought into the apartment and deposited upon the floor in front of me, as he might a gun-carriage designed for my destruction, Don's tripod and camera. In consigning his gift for me to his mother's care, he had added the injunction that, upon a plate chosen by himself, I was to be photographed in my daisied raiment. The picture was to be developed and mounted, and put into his room to await his return. It was one of the quaint, romantic fancies that helped make him the nonpareil of lovers.

My mother, a deft amateur photographer, posed me, arranged the lights, and "caught" the picture without the loss of a minute, and the whole incident occupied less time than I have taken in the telling. It was, nevertheless, one more element of excitement in the happy agita-

tion of the forenoon, and, the carriage being announced immediately, I caught up my fan and carriage-cloak, and was actually at the door before the thought smote me that I had neither thanked nor said "Good-by" to my benefactors.

"I am clean daft, I believe!" I cried, running back to the sofa, and, neglectful of my fine feathers, sinking upon the carpet in a tumultuous huddle to embrace the occupant. "You have turned my head, every one of you! converted a well-behaved girl into a conceited, inhuman, graceless *wretch*! But I do love you, and if I don't tell you how glad and grateful I am, it is because I haven't command of the whole dictionary!"

She held me to her heart,—a fervent strain I can feel about me now.

"Don's darling!" she whispered. "And mine! My dear, true-hearted daughter! God bless you both!"

Aloud she said, "We or somebody else has taught you how to fib glibly. Run away, now, and be as happy as you deserve to be for your loving-kindness for a creaking old machine like myself."

Rosalie followed me down-stairs to summon the coachman, who, by mistake, had driven to the side-door. She came back to me as I waited upon the piazza, put my cloak about me, and shook out the folds of my skirt with a sort of officious flurry unlike her usual manner, but this I did not remark at the time as peculiar. I had always been a pet with her, and what more natural than that she should mix herself up with my affairs?

"You'll outshine them all, Miss Sydney!" she twittered, with a nervous giggle. "Don't worry about Mrs. Upton, but enjoy yourself as much as any of them. We'll take the best of care of her."

"I know it, Rosalie. Otherwise, I should not leave her," I answered sincerely.

She attended me to the carriage, and saw to it that my draperies were protected from the dust. As I thanked her, I glanced at the upper window,—the wide bay that swept so much sunshine into Mrs. Upton's sitting-room. She stood within it, bathed and glorified by the flood of rays, smiling down at me. My mother's taller head appeared above that encircled by a radiant nimbus where the rays shone through and glittered upon her hair.

I fairly gasped with admiration.

"She is like a saint upon a church-window, only far more beautiful! Tell her I said so, Rosalie, and that it was all I could do to keep from jumping out of the carriage and running up-stairs to say my prayers to her," was my parting message.

Fortunate, thrice-blessed woman that I was that bland, rich autumnal noon, which, I imagined, took me to its heart as had she whose birth-month and type this was.

This was the *motif* of the music played by reason and feeling all the way down the elm-bordered street, across railway and past station, up the modern boulevard to the Wilcox mansion. Even the glimpse I had of Dr. Wentworth sitting in his *coupé* at the station, chatting in his most agreeable manner to a rich New-Yorker who was waiting for

a train, could not dash the glow thrilling through my veins, the melody that filled heart and brain. If I had made the effort then and there, I think that I could have said that difficult clause of the Great Prayer I had found impossible some nights ago. I preferred to put the thought of my step-parent out of my mind with convenient speed, and accept as a good omen the circumstance that he had not seen me.

It is not in self-contempt that I record how easy I found compliance with Rosalie's parting admonition, or that I relished heartily approving looks and kindly comments such as warm-hearted women who like one another will pass upon personal appearance, in defiance of Social Usage manuals. When Kitty whispered that I was "perfectly lovely, and that she wished Don could see me," I thought complacently of the negative perhaps already on the way to New York for development. I had heard Mrs. Upton say that it should go to-day, not to lose time. When Mrs. Robb impaled me across the table with the interviewer's eye, I sat a trifle taller, and bore the operation without blenching. She could find no blemish in the *chef-d'œuvre* of the two mothers, who were, I felt sure, chatting of me over knitting and crocheting, for whom I stored each incident and feature of the gay occasion. The best part of the day would be the rehearsal of the affair over the cosey evening meal I was confident we could coax my mother into sharing. The anticipation blunted the temporary annoyance of Mrs. Robb's proximity. Kitty could not have foreseen that among her one-and-twenty guests she could have picked out no less acceptable *vis-à-vis* for me than the newspaper-woman, who must, when I came to consider the case, sit opposite to somebody.

She was in great force to-day, soaring superior to the shabby gentility of an imitation black-lace gown, and a hat of the same net, with a bunch of red-and-purple flowers set perkily on top of it.

"Scrabbled together by myself," she informed a group of us. "Look at it!" revolving upon one heel like a show-window dummy. "Wouldn't you swear that a French modiste had 'done' me to the tune of thirty dollars for the rubbishy construction? It cost me exactly thirty cents for the frame. The rest of the materials I had by me in the house. I have been writing up 'Millinery as a Fashionable Swindle,' in *The Ladies' Corner Cupboard*, and have so incensed the craft from Nova Scotia to California against me that I don't suppose one of them would set a stitch for me upon any terms."

"More enemies?" said a saucy auditor, in demure distress. "By and by you will be boycotted into starvation and nudity."

"I rather enjoy it!" retorted the newspaper-woman in all sincerity. "Anything is preferable to the dead calm of respectability in which most women are content to exist. I stirred up my sister-in-law and other New York fashionables to pious profanity at a lunch last week by proving that if every woman in the Presbyterian Church, of which they are props and pillars, would deny herself one hat a year for five years to come, and give what it would have cost to the Foreign Missionary Board, the world would be converted in that time. I sent a sketch of my plan, entitled 'One Bonnet Less,' to the *New York Observer*, but it would not publish it. The editor wrote that he considered it 'flippant

and frivolous, and suspected it to be a hoax.' These ultra-religious papers never print the other side of a question. The whole churchly system is lop-sided. It *cants* in a double sense."

She amused most of those present, and she was aware of it, but others like myself grew grave and slipped out of her neighborhood when she began to scoff at sacred things. Her sharp eyes noted our defection, and I paid the penalty for my offence when we were seated at the table. As a social fixture I could not budge, let her say what she would.

She began with the first *entrée*,—creamed lobster served *au gratin* in silver scallop-shells. I was eating mine in gladness and singleness of heart when she opened fire:

"I saw that you resented my onslaught upon the Presbyterians, Miss Salisbury. I forgot when I spoke that your mother affected that persuasion during your own father's lifetime, or I should have withheld my thrust until you were out of earshot. She has so fully identified herself with her present spouse's views and principles upon all subjects that the inadvertence is pardonable. His Episcopacy is, as we all know, pronounced and pervasive. I am told that his unction in responses and his obeisances to the high altar at certain passages in Creed, Gospels, and Gloria are a study in themselves, and have raised the price of the adjoining pews—or do you call them stalls? The High-Church jargon smacks of the stable."

"You can hardly classify them as '*dumb, driven cattle,*'" returned I, carelessly, turning to my right-hand neighbor and beginning to speak of other things.

I did not know Mrs. Tommy Robb if I hoped to shake her off by civil device.

"H'm! that is rather patly said!" never removing the stare of her black eyes, and bearing perceptibly upon the first adverb. "But your wit will never be as caustic as your mother's. I have repeated the *bon mot* of the car off the track, with effect, at least a dozen times since you told me of it."

"Don't make a baker's dozen of the repetitions, I beg, Mrs. Robb!" entreated I, penitently. "I was heartily ashamed of my rudeness by the time the silly thing was said. Forgive and forget it!"

She tossed her head with a dry laugh:

"Bless your unsophisticated soul! Do you imagine that a veteran newspaper-woman, the heroine of a hundred type- and tongue-battles, minds a pea from a child's pop-gun,—and a ricochet shot at that? You are the dutiful echo of your mother, and she is Dr. Wentworth's: so what you gave me was only the shadow of a shade. Your superb step-parent grows superber every day. I saw him at the station to-day, helping a pious-looking woman in black into his carriage. A country-cousin with a big bank-account, I suppose?"

"Probably," I returned. "Such are plentiful in all climates."

"He ordered the coachman to drive to Mrs. Upton's," continued the ubiquitous Terror, in the same clear, high key. "You are staying there, I believe?"

"Not at this moment," I was foolish enough to say.

“Why do you try to bluff an old stager, infant? All Mapleton is cognizant of the fact that you are Mr. Donald Upton’s deputy, and in charge of his invalid mother. All Mapleton, too,—or so much of it as saw your progress through our streets to-day and is gathered about this festive board,—appreciates the compliment paid to your absent *fiancé* by the demi-semi-douleur of your costume. You are, while he is away, a shadow-maiden, a symphony in gray and silver, the silver typifying hope of a speedy return. I never saw anything more chastely symbolical. I shall work it into a paragraph for the *Springfield Sun-flower*, to which I contribute a weekly society-article.”

“Come, come, Carry!” said Mrs. Wilcox from the head of the board. “This is not fair or kind! I told you that we would have no ‘chiel amang us takin’ notes’ to-day.”

“I know that you *said* it. But you meant it as little as the rest of the world. Everybody understands that I represent The Press, and everybody would be disappointed if she did not see the luncheon, or dinner, or reception to which she invites me properly set forth in print within a reasonable time after it takes place. Kate never would forgive me if I left out one course, or overlooked such a *recherché* toilette as that of her bosomest friend. If the truth were told, that is why you and I, Miss Salisbury, are set opposite to one another. To return to our muttons,—it must have been imperative business that called a model son like Mr. Donald three thousand miles away when his mother is, I hear, liable to die at any minute.”

I felt my features pale and stiffen; my hands dropped nervelessly into my lap.

“Shame on you, Carry Robb!” cried Kate, in generous anger. “Why do you manufacture sensational stories? You have terrified the poor child out of her wits. I detest practical jokes, especially when they are utterly witless and without foundation. Don’t mind her, Sydney! She is a pessimist of the blackest dye, and must growl over something.”

“I beg your pardon, I am sure, if I have touched a tender nerve,” resumed the newspaper-woman, her unwinking eyes riddling me through. “I hardly believed the rumor until now. That is one of the cleverest reportorial tricks I know,—to pretend to knowledge of something you are doubtful of. You all must recollect how I got a confession out of that wife-murderer at Jones’s Cross-Cut three years ago, when every other newspaper representative had failed. I sat down in front of him with tears in my eyes, and began talking with him of his old mother, without letting him suspect that I had ever so much as read a newspaper——”

Returning strength enabled me to shut my ears to the rest. Upon reflection, I was more provoked with my weakness than with her disregard of social decency. My emotion had nearly betrayed what I was pledged to conceal. While it was not possible that she should know the exact truth, I had given her almost positive proof that there was something worth her knowing. I rallied my wits to engage in the talk going on on our side of the table when the revolting details of the confession were over. Helen Norris, who sat at my left, helped me by telling a funny story and appealing to me for confirmation; I plucked

up spirit to cap it by another which was received with general applause. My heart softened and warmed toward the acquaintances and intimates of years whose sympathies were manifestly with me. I was altogether at my best self by the time Roman punch was served in chased silver swans, which Mrs. Wilcox let us know, without any parade, were favors to be taken home with us. It was discovered, next, that upon the breast of each bird was a small scroll inscribed with the name of one of the party. They could be used for *bonbonnières*, or to hold flowers. I was looking at the engraved "*Sydney Salisbury*" upon mine, and thinking how I would fill the cup let into the back of the swan with mignonette and set it upon Mrs. Upton's table, when a servant paused behind me and accosted me by name:

"Miss Salisbury, excuse me, ma'am, but there is somebody in the hall who would like to see you."

I was not alarmed; I was scarcely startled; but, with the feeling that a summons sufficiently important to be brought to me in the middle of a ceremonious feast was not to be slighted, I looked at Mrs. Wilcox. She was speaking to some one else, her head slightly turned aside, and I could not instantly win her attention. Mrs. Robb attracted it and the observation of the whole company by a ringing call.

"Mrs. Wilcox! Miss Salisbury wants to be excused. She has been sent for."

"Not sent for," I retorted distinctly, and smiling without effort. "But there is a message for me. Have I your permission to speak with the messenger?"

"Certainly, my love. But do not let anything call you away," I heard in leaving the room by the nearest door.

Mrs. Upton's confidential maid was just without it, my carriage-cloak in hand. She threw it about me.

"You are to come home, Miss Sydney. Mrs. Upton has been taken very ill."

As I sprang into the waiting carriage, I saw, as in the whirling fog of a dream, Mrs. Robb run down the walk to the gate and throw up her hand to a railway-hack that was rumbling along the street.

"What is it, Rosalie?" I got breath and strength to ask as our fleet horses, urged to the top of their speed, sent houses and trees flying behind us.

The hard red of her cheeks was changed to tawny gray, and she had not spoken beyond those first hurried words. She answered without looking at me:

"Some sort of a fainting-fit, I believe, Miss Sydney."

"Ah—h!" Flutter of pulse and spirits was quelled. I knew so much better than she how little real peril lay in the seizure that had scared her. "I have seen her in such, more than once. They are only hysterical. Very distressing, but not dangerous. Nobody dies from hysteria. But I am glad you came for me. My mother sent you, I suppose?"

"No, Miss Sydney: it was Dr. Wentworth," in the same queer, muffled voice, her eyes turned out of the window on her side of the carriage.

That was singular. Dr. Wentworth understood the nature of the attack; and even if it were more serious than common, he and my mother ought to be competent to the management of it.

I should know all in another half-minute. We were turning the last corner. Two physicians' carriages—neither of them Dr. Wentworth's—were at the door. An awful constriction of the heart, such as I had never felt, seized me. Before the horses stood still I dashed open the carriage door and flew into the house. The front door was shut, and I ran around to the long window of the library. It was not fastened. As I threw it wide, the powerful scent of chloroform smote me. In the hall, and on the back-stairs up which I sped as the nearest way to that upper chamber, it was almost suffocating. Two men blocked the narrow passage connecting the back and front halls. Their backs were toward me, their heads close together. They were talking in suppressed tones. What they said chained my flying feet to the floor.

“Wentworth declares that he took upon trust the opinion of his wife, backed by Barker; that he never examined her heart for himself, although his wife had made more than one auscultation and pronounced it all right. To one in Mrs. Upton's condition, chloroform was sure death, as even Dr. Wentworth might have known, if——”

I grasped his arm with both hands, and shook it in the frenzied endeavor to articulate. It was Dr. Gibney, the oldest physician in Mapleton. His companion was Dr. Marvin, a much younger man.

“My dear young lady, compose yourself,” said the latter.

Dr. Gibney detained me, as I tried to rush by him to see for myself what my voice refused to inquire into.

“Let me take you to your room, Sydney, child. It is best that you should not go into that one. Wait, my dear, until——”

I tore myself loose from his hold. The forbidden door was locked on the inside. I beat upon it with my fists, and a woman, a stranger to me, opened it, interposing her person to bar my entrance. I pushed her aside.

The horrible odor of chloroform was strongest here in her bed-chamber. A lounge I had never seen before was in the middle of the floor. Half kneeling, half prostrate beside it, was my mother, her face buried in the counterpane. Upon the other side stood Dr. Wentworth, ghastly white. Between them was a motionless figure. The head drooped toward the right shoulder, bringing the face full into view.

It was Don's mother, and these three people had killed her!

CHAPTER VI.

THE merciful numbness of insensibility was denied me in that supreme hour of agony. It was also decreed that to my brain should be given preternatural steadiness, to every sense acuteness that let not one detail of the calamity pass without note. Not for one second was I permitted to imagine the horrors hemming me in, vagaries of a wandering mind, or parts of a nightmare from which I must awaken

presently, or go mad. I had no hope of insanity. Science from all her stores offered nothing that could blunt memory or purchase immunity from anguished anticipation.

The sight of the marbled face, as white now as the hair above it, the fixed sweetness of a smile that could never be for me again, the veiled eyes, beamless for all time, turned me to breathing stone. The mind was alert under the frozen mask, and the heart coned ceaselessly the lesson of what humanity can endure.

Nor has time made misty the keen outlines or confused the sequence of what followed my impetuous burst into the silent room. My mother shuddered at my one sharp cry, but did not rise or lift her head. Dr. Wentworth came around the foot of the lounge toward me, hands outspread to catch me should I swoon. My gesture stopped him.

"Don't come near me!" I said. "You"—to the strange woman—"are the nurse, I suppose? How was this thing done? Oh,"—as she glanced inquiringly at my step-father,—“I know *who* did it. I must hear just *how* it happened. If you cannot speak here, come to my room.”

"My dear girl——" began Dr. Wentworth.

"Not a word!" I interposed.

With my eye upon him, he could not so much as give his tool a mute signal. I put her out of the chamber before me, drove her straight to my room. Both doctors followed me out of the back hall. Having seen the nurse inside of my door, I faced them.

"What is it?"

Dr. Gibney stepped forward.

"Your father was my friend, my child. For his sake, let me entreat you to take care of yourself. You are in a highly-excited state——"

"Abnormal and irresponsible," murmured Dr. Marvin.

"Let me prepare something for you," pursued Dr. Gibney. "By and by, when you are well and calm——"

"I am perfectly well and perfectly calm," I rejoined. "Should I need sedatives, I will apply to you."

I shut them out. The professional nurse, in whom I recognized the "country cousin in black" Mrs. Robb had seen Dr. Wentworth handing into his carriage, stood upright a little way within the room, rather nervous, and disposed to be offended. I turned the key in the lock and set a chair for her. Her cold, hard eyes did not release me while she took it. She had the air of one who had managed maniacs before to-day.

"Now," I said, "tell me what has been done in this house from the moment you entered it until now."

She demurred, but I would not let her off. Finally, either because she was afraid of me, or because she pitied me, she told a tolerably coherent story.

Dr. Wentworth had engaged her a week ago to be on hand to-day. She was aware what services would be expected of her, and that "the affair" was to be conducted with the utmost secrecy. She had known Dr. Wentworth for years, and been with him in other surgical cases,

like and unlike this. On the way from the station he told her that everything was ready for the operation ; that he and his wife (of whom she had heard as Dr. Charlotte Salisbury) were, by the earnest wish of the subject, to be unassisted except by herself ; that Mrs. Wentworth's daughter was engaged to Mrs. Upton's son, and staying in the house during his absence. She—the young lady—was easily excited and had very little self-control——

“ You asked me to tell you everything, Miss Salisbury,” she interrupted herself to say here.

“ Go on,” I replied.

“ So, Mrs. Upton and the young lady's mother had managed to send her off to a luncheon to keep her out of the way while the operation was going on. The subject had set her heart upon sparing her young friend as far as she could. Mrs. Upton said almost the same thing in my hearing. ‘ How surprised and relieved the dear child will be when she gets back to find that it is all over !’ she said to Mrs. Dr. Wentworth when we were getting her ready.

“ I never saw a calmer patient. She chatted cheerfully up to the last. Mrs. Dr. Wentworth was a great deal more agitated. Dr. Wentworth spoke to her privately, out of the subject's hearing, about her want of self-control.

“ ‘ You'll bring on the very thing you are afraid of,’ says he, ‘ if you don't get yourself better in hand.’

“ I'm sure, as I told the other doctors, if I'd had the least idea that there was any heart-complication I'd have lifted up my voice against the chloroform. As it was, I supposed they two knew what they were about. In fact, 'twas irregular their giving it while I was out of the room, having just stepped across the hall to get a clean handkerchief out of my valise, and not being able to lay my hand at once upon one, my sister having packed my bag.”

“ You were not with her at the last, then ?”

“ Well, I was and I wasn't, as you may say. I'd asked Dr. Wentworth on the way from the station if he meant to give chloroform, and he said there had been some doubt on the subject. The patient was willing to be operated upon without it if 'twas thought advisable, but he didn't see the use of subjecting her to an unnecessary nervous shock. In his opinion, when a subject had to bear such intense pain without the help of anæsthetics, 'twas more likely to prove fatal than the effect of chloroform, to say nothing of making the surgeon's work harder. He had thought sometimes that he'd always refuse to undertake an operation in such circumstances, and he mentioned a case where the subject's screams were heard all over the neighborhood. He hadn't such faith in the stories scary people tell of the evil effects of chloroform in certain cases. If it was properly administered, the danger was nothing. In unskilful hands 'twas different, of course. And I said how I'd stood over many a one by the hour, holding a sponge or napkin to the nose, and taking it away as the doctors motioned me to do, and never a bit of harm done. And what was the matter in giving it in this case ? So he said I had expressed his views exactly, and that Mrs. Upton was sound enough in her general health,

but had been subject to hysterical fainting-fits lately, as was only natural in the circumstances, I am sure.

"So, I can't say that I was surprised when I began to smell chloroform while I was still a-rummaging for the handkerchief. And, thinks I, 'they've decided upon it, and to lose no time,' thinks I, 'and I'd better be getting back in a hurry,' though it did seem to me 'twasn't quite respectful to me as a trained nurse, nor customary with the profession, to administer while I was out of the room. But they'd spoken of the need of promptness, and I will say for myself that I'm not apt to take offence. Some trained ones I could speak of, and whose references ain't near so good as mine, would have shouldered their bag and marched out of the house in the circumstances. But, finding the handkerchiefs, I grabbed one and ran back. When I got to the door I heard a kind of bustle inside, and Mrs. Dr. Wentworth she called out sharp-like, 'My God, Raymond! see what I've done!' or something like that. Before I'd gone out we'd fixed the patient on an operating-lounge, you know, drawn into the middle of the room. 'Twas brought from the attic after I came. As soon as I laid eyes upon her now, I saw that something had gone wrong. The bottle of chloroform had been thrown or dropped on the floor, and was broken. Mrs. Dr. Wentworth had raised the poor lady's head upon her arm and was fanning her, and the doctor was running about the room, throwing up the windows like a distracted man. And the poor thing was dying!

"At first none of us could believe it. We got two other doctors in next to no time. The coachman happened to see their carriages at another house up the street, and rushed right out for them. Everything was done to bring her to, but 'twas no use. She was gone in fifteen minutes after the doctors got here. All of us agree that there was heart-disease, and she was far gone in it, but it's unaccountable that Dr. Wentworth shouldn't have guessed that she had it. From what I can make out, he'd great confidence in his wife's judgment, and she'd auscultated, and couldn't seem to find anything out of the way. I never saw anybody worse cut up than Dr. Wentworth, and I overheard the other doctors going over him hot and heavy in the other room about being so secret about it and 'depending upon a woman's diagnosis.' 'Twas Dr. Marvin said that. Dr. Gibney spoke up for her, and Dr. Wentworth told how Dr. Barker had backed her opinion, and then they changed their tone and said there'd be no trouble about giving a certificate of cause of death, and all that.

"After all, it must have been the will of Providence——"

I raised my hand.

"That will do. You have nothing more to tell me? Did Mrs. Upton speak after taking the chloroform?"

"Not a word that I heard. She must have sunk into a stupor before she had inhaled a dozen whiffs."

The final question pulled hard upon my factitious strength, but I put it unfalteringly:

"Who gave the chloroform?"

"Mrs. Dr. Wentworth."

“Are you positive of that?”

In her zeal for her chief's interests, she seemed to forget that the other party to the transaction was my mother.

“Positive! didn't I see it all with my own eyes, as they told you? The soaked handkerchief dropped out of her lap after I got in. And I told you what she said. Dr. Wentworth wasn't near enough to the patient to have done it. Oh, there's no doubt as to who gave it. But that's neither here nor there. If I hadn't happened to be out of the way at the minute, I should have been ordered to administer, most likely, but the responsibility wouldn't have been mine. I hope, my dear Miss Salisbury, that you won't lay this dispensation to heart. Let me bring you something composing, and undress you and put you to bed, and try not to think of what can't be helped now,—there's a dear.”

“You can go now,” I said, coldly. “I do not need you, and others may.”

She hesitated, looking curiously at me.

“I shall not need you again,” I added. “And there is probably something to do elsewhere. Go to Dr. Wentworth for orders. He is your employer.”

I unlocked the door and held it ajar for her to pass out, which she did with a toss of her head and fling of her whole body. I shot the bolt again, and sat down in the chair she had occupied. Right before me was the lounge upon which Don's mother had lain scarcely three hours ago, watching my toilette. The slumber-robe then cast about her was huddled into a heap upon the foot of the lounge, as she had left it on rising hastily to go into the front room and wave a farewell to me from the bay-window.

She was in the conspiracy to deceive me. No one had joined more cordially in the plot, entered more zestfully into the details of what I saw had been preconcerted from the beginning. She may have acquiesced in my step-father's dictum that I lacked the power of controlling myself and was therefore best out of the way. I did not believe it. Her loving wiles for my delusion were of the same strain with those that were to keep her son in ignorance of her condition. Her thought and design were to avoid inflicting a single pang that could be warded off. Her last thought was of this pious purpose. She had died as she had lived. Not for the fraction of a second did I harbor one emotion of resentment toward one who had exchanged earthly for heavenly angelhood.

And between them they had murdered her!

I had not needed to put the question it cost me an effort to articulate. I knew for myself who was the more culpable of the pair to whom she owed a violent death. Whatever may have been Dr. Wentworth's opinion as to the presence of cardiac disease in his patient, his wife was fully aware of it. This fact was the key to the dialogue I had overheard from the library. Although not the tender-hearted man his clients reported him, he was physically and morally a coward. I had heard him deplore, times without number, the sensitive, sympathetic organization that made him a participant in whatever suffering he saw. He had declared to his wife that he would have nothing to do

with the projected operation unless he were allowed to conduct it in his own way.

“If you are bent upon murdering your friend, you must choose some other confederate. Dr. Barker may not be so scrupulous as your husband,” were words that bore fell significance in the light of the catastrophe consequent upon indulgence of his will. The confederate protested vainly. The imperative summons to the scene of what he diagnosed as an hysterical seizure was argument in visible form. As such he understood and resented it. Her keener senses had detected indications he could not or would not perceive; as the abler physician of the two, she had set before him in formidable array facts he must dispute or respect. Without startling Mrs. Upton by betraying the trend of her fears, she had brought her to express a willingness to submit to the knife unsupported by anæsthetics, if it were deemed necessary that this should be. Professional conscience had fought a good fight; friendship had made a worthy stand; humanity had endured valiantly. Wifeness had prevailed over them all. Cognizant of the risk she ran, as her weaker colleague was not, she had taken it. The infatuation that dominated her being did not stop at passive obedience to the tyrant’s will. With her own hand she had carried his design into effect. She knew his taunt of her intent to murder her friend, by imposing upon her nervous system a heavier strain than it could support, to be as empty as the breath that bore it. Rather than receive another wound in her own breast, she had stultified herself, been false to her womanhood and her professional vows, and made the implied accusation positive and true.

I reasoned it all out, without the omission of a step in the process, proving each position, over and over, resolute will warring against heart and nature. The end was ever the same. The early twilight descended upon me seated opposite the empty lounge, with the slumber-robe heaped together upon the foot, and before my mental vision a verdict stamped in letters of blood.

Don Upton’s mother had met her death at the hands of my mother. No plea of ignorance or haste on the part of the criminal recommended her to mercy.

I measured the horror as I might a belching volcano suddenly upheaved out of a smiling plain. This, my first great grief, was such as had never befallen another woman. Yet the sense of orphanage, and by such means, was subordinated for the time by indignation and pity that seemed infinite. In the course of time I should bethink myself of what the personal bereavement comprehended. Now, imagination was busy with such contrasts as the animated face that had laughed at me from the lounge that noon, and the clay mould left by the spirit upon that other lounge across the hall; the vision of Don as he had kissed his mother “Good-by” at the station, and commended her anew to me, and the wild agony of the eyes that would, ere long, demand account of my stewardship.

Into the awful solitude of hours that robbed me of my youth had come interruptions from without.

First it was the acidulated whine of the hired nurse :

“Miss Salisbury, here is a cup of tea for you. It will do you good.”

“I do not want it.”

“Your mamma is very ill, Miss Salisbury. She’s going from one faint into another. The doctors are uneasy about her, and think it may do her good to see you. Will you come, please, right away?”

“No,” I said, as dryly and dispassionately as before. “You will oblige me by not disturbing me again.”

I had heard another tread with hers in the hall, one that I knew. If my place were at the side of his suffering wife, surely Dr. Wentworth should not absent himself.

A while later he trod boldly down the hall; struck with his august knuckles upon the panels.

“Sydney!” in persuasive accents, “I must speak with you, my child. It is not right for you to seclude yourself in this season of our common sorrow. Will you come to your mother? She needs you, my dear.”

The Sydney Salisbury into which he and his confederate had converted a warm-hearted, trustful girl neither moved nor spoke. If heavier bolts and bars had been at hand, they would have shut him out yet more effectually.

“I hope,” he resumed, after a pregnant pause, and judicially, “that you will not compel us at a time like this to break open the door in order to induce you to listen to reason.”

“You dare not!” I said, without stirring.

The hall was silent again.

He had, of course, telegraphed to Don. Doubtless, too, he had performed the friendly duty in conventionally Christian fashion, sending one despatch to say that his mother was extremely ill, and half an hour later a second announcing the truth. Don would travel night and day to reach home. There would be none to welcome him with tearful embrace. We were his nearest and dearest, now that his mother was gone. He could never touch hand or lip of ours again.

His mother had died by my mother’s hand.

I was back at that again. Reasoning around in a circle, I must find my way to that one point. It was strange that I did not weep, when I knew it all so well. My heart was a hot stone that burned and did not crumble, a heavy coal I must carry about with me for evermore. Since I had sat there the mantel-clock had chimed three, four, five o’clock. Out of the window, which was in line with me, I could see the white steeple, the tapering point melting into the sky. It was a faint pink line against a darkening background in the reflected glow of the west, and my miserable eyes watched listlessly to see it merge into twilight dusks, when my ear caught a sound like a stifled sob outside of the door. A minute later I heard another, and then another. Broken and low as was the weeping, I divined who waited without, and drew back the bolts. My little sister drifted, rather than fell, into my arms. The fading light from the windows revealed a visage so changed and wild that I could not restrain an exclamation of dismay.

“Elsie, darling! You ought not to be here.”

She clung to me convulsively, shivering and sobbing, unable to speak. Raising her as if she were a baby, I laid her upon my bed. With the pressure of her heaving breast against mine, the thought thrilled through me that was to become but too sadly familiar in the days to come. This fairy-like creature, smaller and wiser than her years warranted, was all Fate had left to me, who at the rising of the sun that had just set reckoned myself the happiest and richest of women. Elsie was flesh of my flesh, vein of my vein. They should not rob me of her. I would die first.

I held her closer, as unchildish moans told of violence done to the tender heart and sensitive nerves.

“My baby! who was so thoughtless as to let you come to this house just at this time?”

She seized the hand that stroked her tear-stained face, and covered it with passionate caresses. The racking sobs shook her in every limb.

“Poor Sydney!” she said, between them. “And poor, *poor* Don! Oh, sister! how can God let such things happen?”

I buried my dry, aching eyes in her pillow. The shower of tears and kisses upon my face, neck, and hands was like spring rains upon arid sand. Fire had fallen upon me out of heaven and dried up the fountain of weeping. I sat up and looked drearily into the wet, loving eyes.

“I wish I could cry!” I said. “It might ease this terrible pain at my heart. I shall never cry again, I think.”

The child nestled herself into my bosom, her hands meeting behind my neck.

“If mamma were not so ill, I would go for her. She helps everybody. But she is not to be disturbed. We must love her better than ever, now, Sydney. Next to you and Don she will suffer most. Dear mamma!”

Involuntarily I drew away from the artless pleader. She need never know what had broken my heart and made the thought of meeting my mother and her husband intolerable. I could not echo her fond plaint, but that this was impossible was horrible in itself. “*As one whom his mother comforteth*” must henceforward be a mockery of something once inexpressibly dear and beautiful.

Elsie did not observe, or she misinterpreted, my gesture, for she got hold of one of my hands, and, fitting her cheek into the palm, lay, seemingly content, her great eyes deepening and calming under the sense of loving companionship.

“It has been dreadful all the afternoon,” she said, at last. “I could not get to you or mamma; I could not bear to leave both of you here. I tried not to be in the way, yet it was fearful to be alone. A great many people called. I was in the library when you ran through and up the back stairs, but you did not see me. When I was a little over my fright I would have run after you, but Mrs. Robb stopped me. She wanted to see papa, or mamma, or the nurse, or one of the doctors, directly, she said. So I told Dr. Gibney, and he went down to her. She stayed a long time, and talked to almost everybody, but I kept out of her way. Papa wouldn’t see her, and mamma was

too ill, of course. Mrs. Robb told the nurse that she was 'taking on airs' when she wouldn't let her go into Mrs. Upton's room and said that you would not see any one. Mrs. Robb is a very singular person, Sydney. Dr. Marvin said to Dr. Gibney, after she had gone, that she was the cleverest woman in town, and full of newspaper enterprise. And Dr. Gibney said she was a meddling magpie. She asked the servants all sorts of questions, and I am afraid she thought Rosalie impertinent because she answered her shortly. It was a great relief when she went away."

It was such a solace to the child to unbosom herself to me that I could not check her, although my heart bled, drop by drop, as I listened.

"You are not angry because I came to you, are you?" she queried timidly, at my continued silence.

"No, love! It is a comfort to me to have you here."

She turned her lips to the pillowing palm.

"Papa said I'd better not go near you; that you wanted to be alone. But I got so anxious that I couldn't stay away. I feel safer where you are. If I could only help you ever so little, Sydney! I know nothing can put things back where they were this morning."

Her voice trembled, but she struggled bravely with the returning wave. I was used to caring for her. I must do it now.

"Elsie," I said, kindly yet firmly, "we must never again speak—even to one another—of what has happened here to-day. Talking it over can do nobody any good, and may do harm. Nothing any human being can say or do will lighten the load I must carry for the rest of my life. Love me all the same, little one,—more, if you can! You are the only thing that really belongs to me, and you won't make this awful trouble heavier by forcing me to speak of it."

She obeyed me to the letter, as I was sure she would. While the innocent gravity of face and tone testified to her sympathy with my grief, she forbore, thenceforward, to comment or to question.

Rosalie, without waiting for orders, brought up a supper-tray and lighted the gas. Elsie slipped away while the maid was arranging on a stand what she had prepared for our meal. I surmised correctly that the child had gone to see how our mother was, and, in her absence, asked Rosalie who was in the house.

"Nobody, Miss Sydney, but you, Miss Elsie, the nurse, Miss West, and the servants. Mrs. Wentworth thought it best that the house should be cleared and quiet, and I am sure that would have been my dear mistress's wish. Dr. and Mrs. Wentworth went away about six o'clock. She told me that Miss Elsie could stay all night, if you wished it. Her things will be sent over before bedtime. Mrs. Wentworth was quite calm, but she looked like one struck by death herself, and no wonder."

She folded up the slumber-robe while she talked, and I could not but note that she handled it reverently and laid it away in a drawer as precious. My silence did not restrain the overflow of the full heart.

"I can't bring myself to realize it all, Miss Sydney. And I have been driven crazy all the afternoon by the run of visitors and questions.

Everybody insisted upon seeing Dr. Wentworth, and some were angry at his excusing himself. What else could the poor, dear gentleman do in the circumstances? The hardest heart would have melted to see his face and hear him speak, and how he stayed by Mrs. Wentworth, and did everything for her with his own hands. No woman could have been gentler. It's plain to be seen he's fairly crushed by what's happened. Yet, as I made bold to say to Mrs. Robb, who wouldn't be put off for ever so long, and said some disagreeable things, the like has happened over and over before, and nobody blamed. Why, a lady I knew of died (and the doctor holding her pulse) in a dentist's chair. And everybody who knows Dr. and Mrs. Wentworth understands that either of them would have laid down their own lives sooner than harm a hair of the head of such a friend as Mrs. Upton. 'Twas just one of the terrible things that nothing could have prevented. It's lost me a good place and the best friend I had in the world."

It annoyed me that she wiped her eyes—which were really wet—with her starched apron, and that while rehearsing the particulars of her loss she looked at a blur upon a spoon and polished it away with a napkin. I ought not to notice these trifles, but they obtruded themselves upon me with fretting pertinacity.

Elsie said nothing of the arrangements made for the night when she returned. She was probably at a loss what subjects were safe, for she was silent during the supper each pretended, for the other's sake, to eat. Taken all in all, the evening was the dreariest I ever passed. There was literally nothing for us to do when Rosalie was dismissed for the night. I have understood ever since why it is the accepted fashion with women of a certain stamp to go to bed when "in affliction," and even receive calls of condolence there. Too wretched to speak, yet overrun by trooping fancies that kept my nerves tense, I sat in the arm-chair Elsie wheeled forward for me, eyes so sore and dry by now that the lids would not move over them, gazing at nothing, but thinking! thinking! thinking!—always around in the same circle of lurid fire. Elsie, crouched upon a cushion at my feet, her head on my knee, was so still and for so long that I believed her asleep until at the stroke of nine she raised herself.

"That is my bedtime, Sydney."

"Yes, dear. I was about to speak of it. You would be better off in bed, even if you do not sleep."

"I do not like to leave you alone,"—all the premature womanliness in her eloquent through her wistful regards.

I reminded her that she would not leave the room, and watched her idly while she made ready for slumber. As she brushed out her hair, reddish lights ran over the chestnut waves, and her feet peeped out, small and white, beneath her gown. I told her to slip them into my bedside slippers, hers having been forgotten by the maid who brought her bag. Mine were too large for her, and she lost first one, then the other, in crossing the floor. She smiled the second time this happened.

Ah, well! she was but eleven years old. A child's horror and distressful sympathy are but ephemeral. I wondered how it would

feel for me to smile again spontaneously and gleefully. The inclination would be stranger than the act.

Elsie took a longer time than usual for her prayers. The certainty that she remembered me at length in her guileless petitions irked me. The sense of the uselessness of suing heaven to console one for whom all means of consolation were lost tempted me to rank atheism. She probably had no difficulty in repeating from the heart the petition I would not say seven nights ago. What had I to forgive at her age? I knew not so much as the meaning of "trespasses."

"Your lips are cold, and your hands!" ventured Elsie, in tender solicitude, after kissing me. "Won't you come to bed soon?"

"By and by, darling,—when I feel sleepy."

She lingered beside me, her head on my shoulder. The tips of her fingers glided lightly over the embroidery of my corsage.

"What a lovely, *lovely* gown!" escaped her involuntarily.

Until that instant I had not thought of it since I arose from the lunch-table. I glanced down at it loathingly, and Mrs. Robb's cynical jest returned to me:

"Demi-semi-douleur. A symphony in gray and silver."

I started up, setting the child aside, almost roughly; raised the window, and leaned out, that the cool breath of the night might blow upon my burning head. From a desolated earth I looked up into the vast dumb hollow of the heavens. Somewhere in illimitable space floated the disembodied spirit. Even in heaven she must pity me. But heaven was too far away to be reached by my torn and trailing thoughts.

Somewhere, thousands of miles away, the son to whom the mother had, from his babyhood up, been the first of created things, mused fondly and hopefully of speedy reunion, or, horror-stricken, was hastening homeward to get, if possible, one last look at her dead face.

The chasm dividing me from the bodiless friend was no wider or deeper than the gulf which must ever part me from my living lover.

CHAPTER VII.

THE professional nurse, Miss West, met me next morning with the official hope that I "had had a refreshing night's rest."

Elsie had refrained from asking me how I had passed the dark hours. The child's tact was like cooling lint upon a raw surface. I was up and dressed when she awoke, and she remarked neither upon this nor upon my expressed intention of going down to breakfast with her. But for the grave taciturnity that had superseded her accustomed cheerful chat, she might have seemed forgetful of yesterday's tragedy. I learned long afterward that she had gone down-stairs to the breakfast-room and suggested to the butler that no chair be set at the head of the table, and that the usual arrangement of the tea-equipage be modified so as to make the significant gap less obvious.

Tray and urn were at the side of the board, and Miss West sat behind them, an open newspaper spread over cups and saucers. Her

eyes were dilated and eager; she stayed not to hear the answer to her perfunctory query, had I meditated one.

“It will be a shock, of course, my dear Miss Salisbury, and you in no condition to receive any more shocks; but since you must see it,—— and some evil-tempered person will be sure to rush up to you with it——”

“Let me have it!” I held out my hand.

“You won’t let it prey upon your spirits, will you, now? It’s awful the influence newspapers have, and how it is abused——”

I was beyond her moralizings, having carried off the paper to a window.

The story of yesterday was told three times. First, and briefly, in head-lines of varying and seductive proportions, to whet the appetite. Not an element of the tragic was omitted; nothing that could shock sensibility and set at naught every delicate instinct, violate the innermost privacy of home and heart, and pander to the pruriency of vulgar curiosity, was forgotten by the social scavenger bracketed as “our special correspondent.”

I—any person of clean tastes and self-respect—ought to have despised the garbage garnished into a dainty dish to set before the kings and queens of the breakfast-table. There are those who claim to be proof against the vitriolic *douche*. In the abstract their boast might have been mine, particularly as the identity of “our special correspondent” with our venomous neighbor was fully known to me before I had read a word. In reality every head-line and sub-title raised a blister; the effect of the whole which I was drawn on to read to the last word was the action of caustic acid upon flayed flesh. After the lapse of the years that give perspective to my autobiographical sketch, I cringe and cower in recalling the strange and harrowing sensation of seeing that which I could not have divulged to any creature of mortal mould paraded in bald type; the guarded chambers of imagery unroofed and gutted, and the spoils thereof vended in the market-place.

I cannot write the tale as the newspaper-woman set it forth. But the worst was there, and made doubly superlative by the supple pen.

The cowardly technicalities “it is said” and “we are told” were the shields for such declarations as that the “cardiac affection under which the unfortunate lady had labored was no secret to many of her acquaintances. That the Drs. Wentworth acted as if ignorant of the fatal complication is a criminal mystery which an enlightened and humane public will not condone without other explanation than that which the wedded pair are disposed to supply. Shrewd residents of Mapleton already couple with this latest action of the masculine member of the firm another as rash, which nearly resulted fatally for his youngest step-daughter a few days ago.”

A highly-colored account of the incident at the station followed, in which was introduced the circumstance of my separate fortune and Elsie’s dependence upon her mother.

“In the event of the child’s death, the handsome doctor would

become sole heir of the wife whose devotion to him approximates, if it does not exceed, infatuation that is notorious. She is his senior by perhaps fifteen years, and, although his superior in intellect and education, invariably defers to his judgment. Herein, say the initiated, is the cause of the tragedy that has shocked the community. It is an established fact that Mrs. Dr. Wentworth—or Dr. Salisbury-Wentworth, as she prefers to be styled in reminiscence of the deserved eminence of her first husband—made more than one auscultation in Mrs. Upton's case. It is as certain, unless the fame of her skill be a lie, that she must have been fully aware of what the autopsy that should be demanded by public opinion will show,—*i.e.*, that the hapless lady was not a fit subject for the administration of ether or chloroform. The evidence of the professional nurse in attendance proves that the saturated napkin held to mouth and nostrils by Dr. Salisbury-Wentworth killed the patient as surely and well-nigh as quickly as if it had been a loaded pistol with a finger upon the trigger."

My betrothal to the son of the deceased was made a telling feature of the article; my presence at the "splendid luncheon (of which a detailed account appears in our society columns) given by Mrs. Rossiter Wilcox in honor of her daughter's engagement" was treated dramatically and unsparingly. "It was expedient, no doubt, that a young lady whose excitable temperament is well known to her intimates should be banished from an operating-room; but that she should select the hour of supremest anguish and peril to the mother of her betrothed, and go straight from the house over which the death-shadow was impending to a scene of revelry, her face shaded by no graver emotion than anxiety to keep her *recherché* costume unspotted from cream, wine, and gravy, is, to say the least, a remarkable development of the girl of the period. The news of the terrible casualty was conveyed to the fair and philosophic reveller between the sixth and seventh courses of the feast. With the perfect *aplomb* that characterizes the true American patrician, she requested permission from the hostess to absent herself 'for a little while,' and departed in such good form that the entertainment was not marred by uneasiness on the part of those who remained.

"Her relations to Mr. Donald Upton, who is now absent in California, threaten, in the mysterious circumstances connected with his mother's death, to assume a romantic aspect of more than melodramatic intensity."

Cuts purporting to be portraits of all the parties concerned in the "shocking affair" illustrated the three columns given up by the editorial staff to "an event of importance in society and scientific circles." I may add here that the originals, which had been abstracted from an album in Mrs. Upton's library, were returned in good order some days thereafter, accompanied by Mrs. Thomas Robb's card.

In those three columns of nonpareil type, *The Clarion*, mighty, impersonal, and irresponsible, cited, testified, argued, convicted and sentenced a household that, up to yesterday noon, had maintained a reputation for respectability and benevolence. In the hour of a woe that seemed to lack no element of anguish, the denial to the tormented ones

of the sad, sweet drops of human sympathy that might have wetted their parched tongues was ostentatious and gratuitous. To the outside world, until now ignorant of our existence, we were held up as monsters of ingratitude and cruelty. Whatever of moderate palliation of the enormity of our sin might be admitted to the incorruptible pages in days to come, journalistic policy and precedent would exclude from *The Clarion* refutation of the charges printed upon the evidence of a single flippant, bad-tempered woman.

I folded the paper and put it, in mechanical and unconscious satire, under the family Bible that lay upon a table near by.

"Your coffee is getting cold, my dear," said the nurse, who, as "quite the lady," made herself at home at every family board, and "my-deared" everybody except her inferiors.

What a ghastly, tedious farce was the outward observance of times, seasons, and trite ceremonies, when the foundations of our life and world were destroyed! Yet, with Miss West behind the urn, what other common ground was there?

Something in my face, or the studious reserve I maintained with regard to the newspaper-story, warned her to discretion, and Elsie betrayed no curiosity by glance or word.

We were still at the table when a telegram was brought in. It was directed to me, and from Don:

"Will be with you Wednesday night. Take care of yourself."

Don's tastes and feeling were fine. He would never have written "God bless you!" upon a postal card, or sentimentalized at two cents per word upon a telegraphic form; so that second sentence was fraught with a volume of sorrow, of longing and of love, to my comprehension. It meant that the thought of me and the hope of our meeting were all that stood between him and despair. It purported, furthermore, that his heart was overflowing with tenderest compassion for me, suddenly bereft of my second mother.

"Take care of yourself—*for me*," I read between the lines. "Now that she is gone, to whom else can I turn for consolation? For God's sake, care watchfully for my most precious treasure!

"Take care of yourself—until I can be with you, to cherish and comfort and protect you from all that love can avert of pain or loss.

"Take care of yourself—for she is no longer with you to brood over and guide her daughter."

I locked the despatch up in my jewel-chest; I have it still; I shall keep it always. The daily letter from Don was received by the morning mail, but I left the seal unbroken. I had no right to read what he had written in ignorance of the events of yesterday. The same mail brought a letter for his mother. I eluded Miss West's watchfulness, and made my way, unseen by Elsie or the watchful Rosalie, to the chamber of which nobody spoke, yet which was the fixed centre of every thought. The key was on the outside of the door. I withdrew it from the lock and shut myself in. The room was so dark that it was a moment before I could make out the outline of the odious lounge still standing in the middle of the floor. Bowls of roses and chrysanthemums were upon table and mantel, but the blended perfume did not

overcome, to my diseased fancy, the smell that had been strongest here yesterday. I knelt by the couch and drew aside the linen sheet.

Could death wear so fair a guise? The quick, gentle touch of the black-browed angel had smoothed away the few lines graven by time and care upon the lovely face. There was even something like archness in the smile that almost parted the lips.

In our bedtime Bible-reading a few nights before, she had talked with me of one of the beautiful new truths that were continually drifting to her by a sort of spiritual gravitation, and which she was always eager to share with others. To give was ever to double a joy for her. The words at which she had arrested the reading were these:

"To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you."

She explained that the text in the original held a subtle intimation of a glorious surprise-gift kept by the Father against the home-coming of each of His children.

"A gift so well worth the waiting for that He cannot help giving us a hint of it to keep us in good heart when the day is dark and the way rough," she said, with the same happy smile I now looked upon. "Yet something that cannot be told while we are 'in the body pent.' We could not comprehend it, and be content to live. As an earthly parent might let a line slip into a letter to his absent boy or girl,—'I will not tell you what it is, for I am hoarding it as a joyful surprise for you. Imagine what you please. The reality is sure to transcend in beauty and value the anticipation.' Why, girlie! I lived upon that one 'finding' for days after it came to me. I am afraid I was almost impatient for the hour when the beautiful reserved portion shall be revealed to me."

The secret and the exceeding joy of it were hers now.

For a brief space the peace of the thought, like a placid river, went over my soul. I remembered no more the anguish of total bereavement, in sympathy with the unutterable blessedness of her entrance upon the changeless Now and Forevermore. Gazing upon the mysterious radiance of the smile, the sweet significance of which was but an intimation of the "to be revealed," I felt, presently, warm dimness steal over my aching eyes; then a rush of weeping hid her from me.

It was a fitting close to her earthly ministry that I should leave at her feet the fierce, bitter nature she would have reckoned alien to that of the girl she knew, and arise from my knees when the paroxysm had spent itself, still sorrowful as unto death in spirit, but no longer rebellious and vindictive. I kissed the sealed letters I had brought with me, and hid them beneath the still folds covering her heart.

"You understand why neither of them belongs to me!" I whispered. In the act I felt that I gathered up in my trembling hands what poor remains of my life were left, acknowledging in contrition that, since God had given it, it were sin to despise it, even in ruins. I had reached the door and taken hold of the key, when an impulse, a guardian angel—why not she?—must have awakened, turned me back. I knelt again, and, laying my arm over my darling, repeated without

omission the Master's Prayer-Lesson to His own. I added, reciting still as from the prompter's dictation,—

“For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.”

As it passed my lips I became conscious of a light, unequal tread lingering in the hall, passing the room, halting and returning, pausing at the door, then going on. It was, as I suspected, Elsie. She wore hat and jacket; her face was colorless, her great eyes anxious.

“Ah, Sydney!” catching her breath at my appearance. “I did not like to disturb you. Papa has sent the carriage for us. Mamma is worse again.”

She hesitated before passing to me a note directed to her, not to me. It was written in pencil, and the uneven characters bore but a general resemblance to Dr. Wentworth's clerkly script:

“Your mother is dangerously ill. Cannot one of her daughters come to her?”
R. W.”

“We will both go, and at once,” I said. “We can do no good here now.”

Dr. Gibney was coming out of the front door when we reached home, and turned back to tell us the story of the night and morning. The rally of our mother's forces to arrange, as she believed we would wish, that we should spend the night under Mrs. Upton's roof, sustained her during the homeward drive. She did not speak on the road, but sat erect and apparently composed in her corner of the carriage. When it stopped she alighted and walked steadily into the house. At the foot of the stairs she sank, helpless, speechless, almost lifeless. She was carried to her bed, and had not moved or spoken since.

“It is nervous prostration of the most serious type,” pronounced the old doctor. “What will be the result I dare not predict, but it is my duty to tell you, Sydney, that reason and life are threatened. The shock of yesterday, supervening upon what may have been a prolonged mental strain, is responsible for her condition. One thing more,—dropping his voice and beckoning me into the drawing-room out of hearing of Elsie, and of possible listeners above-stairs,—“it is safe to confide to you, my dear child, my impression that Dr. Wentworth's presence is not salutary at this juncture: I should say decidedly the reverse of soothing. Her eyes assume what I might characterize as a certain troubled wildness at sight of him. Her pulse fluctuates dangerously when he enters the room or approaches her. I have intimated something of this to him, and he did not receive it as I could have desired, I regret to say. In fact, he was palpably disposed to resent the communication, which, I assured him, was professional, not friendly; unequivocally professional, and as indubitably not friendly or personal. Mrs. Wentworth turned her eyes toward me when I spoke of summoning you. I received it, I believe, with reason, as an indication of a natural desire to have you with her. I am equally confident that Miss West's attendance would not be sedative. Are you sufficiently composed to undertake the charge of your mother at this crisis? If so, I will leave my orders with you.”

He sank his voice to a whisper when I had assured him that I would allow nobody else to perform the sacred duty.

“Above all things, and before everything, keep away from her so much as the rustle of a newspaper! One hint of what appeared in to-day’s *Clarion* would be fatal to her. And I may say the same of the creak of a reporter’s shoes,—let it be Mrs. Robb or any other interviewer. The printer’s font and the assassin’s bullet are cast from the same material, and—God forgive me!—I had nearly said that both are sometimes run in the fires of hell! The traditional bird-of-the-air was a blind snail by comparison with the gentry that nose out all we are least willing to have other people know. Now that you breathe naturally and your color has come back, we will go up-stairs. Let Midget come, too!” holding out a kindly hand to Elsie, hovering about the stair-foot. “She is too much like a shadow to disturb anybody.”

My mother’s eyes moved slightly when we stood beside her; and in holding her hand, as I kissed it, I fancied that I felt a tremor in the middle of the palm. Aside from these tokens of life, and the faint, slow respiration we had to stoop to hear, she lay motionless and irresponsible for nine days and ten nights.

After the plain hint of his brother-physician, Dr. Wentworth kept obtrusively out of the way. The scrupulousness of his self-imposed quarantine would have driven me frantic had not my thoughts been absorbed by weightier matters. He even avoided the second story, lest his step should be recognized. A folding-bed was set up for him in the library, but the gas-glare that was not so much as shaded all night proclaimed to passers-by, as to the inmates of the house, how little use he had for sleeping-accommodations. By day he walked the length of the two parlors and the dining-room in the rear, until his beat was perceptible upon the nap of the velvet carpets. He received visitors while he thus strode back and forth, and, having the field of narrative to himself, said what he liked and as he pleased to say it. He was a born *poseur*, and Fate was generous in granting him opportunities for the practice of his specialty.

On the fourth morning after my return he waylaid me on my way from the breakfast-room to the patient’s chamber. I wore felt shoes and a gown that did not rustle, but he drew his brows together at the slight sound I made in passing along the hall.

“If I were in charge of your patient, I should recommend precaution that would insure more than nominal quiet,” he said, plaintively. “I have known a person suffering from nervous prostration to go into spasms at the tread of a fly upon her pillow. I beg your pardon and that of Dr. Gibney and his colleague for the presumption of the suggestion. I should also apologize for detaining you now. How is your mother this morning?”

I made respectful reply, and he hearkened hungrily to each detail, sighing profoundly at the conclusion. With ostentation of reticence he bit back something he had nearly spoken, and turned with difficulty to the cause of the detention.

“It is but right that you should know what is the natural and

inevitable result of the *régime* established in the house of which I have never been the master except by courtesy. I allude to the transfer into other hands of the care of her who, were she conscious, would rise in indignant protest against my exile. And this is but a part of the consequences of Dr. Gibney's autocracy and your blind submission to it, if, indeed, it *be* blind. *Read that!*"

My eye followed the dramatic stroke of his forefinger upon a paragraph in the newspaper he handed me :

"The mystery in the Wentworth-Upton case thickens. Friends are still rigorously excluded from Mrs. Dr. Salisbury-Wentworth's apartment. Her daughters (by a former marriage) are her custodians, and, with the alleged connivance of local practitioners, forbid the entrance of everybody else. The husband, Dr. Raymond Wentworth, is no exception to this law of banishment, and is reported to be greatly afflicted by the extraordinary measure. A rumor was current last evening that Dr. Salisbury-Wentworth was dead. It was afterward contradicted by Dr. Gibney, who, with provincial obstinacy, refuses to give the public any satisfactory account of his patient's condition. His reserve lends color to the story that the principal actor in the calamitous experiment that has deprived the community of its brightest ornament lies at the point of dissolution, in consequence of an unsuccessful attempt at self-destruction. Her apologists suggest that remorse drove her to this extreme step. Cooler heads are nodded over the possibilities of a criminal prosecution——"

I dropped the paper and put my hands over my eyes. The dry ache in my throat made my ears roar and my brain swim.

Dr. Wentworth picked up the journal.

"Read on! There is worse to come!"

I pushed it away.

"That cannot be! Oh, I never dreamed that anybody could be so causelessly—so wantonly cruel! Why does not some one—why do not *you*—insist that these horrible slanders shall be retracted?"

"What could I say?"

His tone was low and hard, so singular that I looked at him inquiringly. One hand crumpled the newspaper into close folds; the other was thrown behind him. His fine eyes were contracted and bright; his pose was picturesque.

"What would you have me say?" altering the phraseology of the query, but not the cutting emphasis.

"That the fault was less hers than yours!" My courage rose into audacity. "That your decision and her action were against her better judgment; that she yielded through fear of wounding and displeasing you. Other physicians have waived their opinions in deference to a colleague. Assume a share of the blame. Think how smitten and helpless she is, how her life hangs upon a hair! She may never be able to plead her own cause against this wicked injustice. You are her husband. She has no other protector. Oh, if *I* were but a man!"

I wrung my hands in impotent distress.

My step-father's visage changed oddly while I talked, from pallor to purple, and then to the color of dead ashes. Pale muscles stood

out tense about the well-cut mouth; the light in his eyes was not pleasant to see; but the strangest thing was a strangled hiss in the thorax at the close of each sentence.

“I have not to learn for the first time your sentiments with regard to the man honored in your mother’s choice of a partner for the life of one of the contracting parties. I believe, however, that you have not, up to this hour, essayed to school me as to my duty as a man and a husband. Were you more familiar with the circumstances of Mrs. Upton’s decease, you might abate your zeal for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. If you wish, I—or Miss West—can put you into possession of the facts of the case. Should you, after hearing these, persist in your demand that I should take the public into confidence, I will accede to it. Whether or not such obedience will prove me a man will depend upon the tastes of my readers.”

He tore the paper twice across, rolled each half into a ball, and tossed them into the waste-basket.

“When you are older and wiser you will comprehend how much easier it is to rush into print than to rush out. It is barely possible, also, that you may scrape a bowing acquaintance with the practical wisdom of letting sleeping dogs lie. Barely possible, I say, because your sex as a body is intent upon pursuing the contrary course. You look amazed at this plainness of speech. I have been tempted to it before, again and again, but a feeling with which you do not credit me—regard for your mother—has restrained me. Without going into particulars, let me close this dialogue by advising you to ask few questions concerning what has occurred within the past week. Should Mr. Donald Upton push his inquiries to the length of a civil or criminal suit, I shall be so unmanly as to defend myself and the male members of the profession. Unless forced to speak openly, I shall act upon the practical hint given you just now, and not stir up an ugly cur.”

He made me a magnificent bow and went over to his promenade in the drawing-room opposite.

He had never liked me. He was now my open enemy.

CHAPTER VIII.

DONALD would be at home (“*with you,*” the despatch had said) on Wednesday night.

Ah me! that any conjunction of evils could make me dread that home-coming as the condemned criminal the fatal chair and the electric current!

He would expect to see me upon his arrival. He had pictured to himself how I would receive him—no one else—in the hall of the desolated house; would stay his breaking heart with loving word and caress.

Mrs. Wilcox—my mother’s friend, as she had been Mrs. Upton’s—consented to meet him at the station and tell him the particulars of the

fearful event on the way home. The telegram had stated baldly that his mother had "died suddenly." The kind neighbor would not intimate to him what the papers he had had no opportunity to see in his hurried journey had bruited to gentle and simple, in the disinterested spirit of journalistic enterprise.

In time, the whole revolting story must be made known to him, and he would be prepared by the horror it inspired for what I could not defer much longer,—the announcement that we must be strangers hereafter. When Miss West, who remained in charge of the house until the funeral, had had her say, and a dozen other tongues had confirmed her statement, he would understand my absence. I wrote a brief note and sent it off in season to Rosalie's care, with instructions to her to give it to Mr. Upton as soon as he was alone. Every word had been conned and weighed a hundred times, yet it read like a hurried scrawl. It began without date or address:

"My mother is ill,—perhaps dying. I cannot leave her for one minute. God pity and help us all!" S. S."

After Elsie went to bed that night, I sat down in the shaded room beside the moveless figure on the bed, and waited.

For what? I persuaded myself it was only to hearken for the distant shriek of the engine which would leave Don at the station. The street and sidewalks in front of the house were muffled with tan-bark; the whole neighborhood was unusually still. I caught the far-off rumble of the train among the hills before the whistle signalled the approach to Mapleton. Then, with an owlish screech, a jingle of the bell, and the "puff! puff!" with which it began to climb the steeper grade beyond our plateau, it was away.

In five minutes the traveller would be at the door in which imagination would always frame the figure that had awaited his coming as child, boy, and man. In fancy I saw him glance quickly in that direction upon alighting from the carriage, so strong would be the habit of five-and-twenty years.

I held my hand over my mouth to suppress a groan. And less than a fortnight ago mother and betrothed had planned the home-festival that was to celebrate this very return! If it be true that

Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things,

the weight of rosemary and rue bowed my young forehead low to the dust that evening.

The vigil was dreesome at best, after the voices in the street and the subdued movement of shutting up the house subsided. It was more like the watch beside a corpse than nursely guard upon the living. Not a clock in the house was suffered to strike; even the ticking of a watch caused the patient's pulse to waver wildly. I could only guess at the time told off by the bell of the white spire I had watched so often from my window in the Upton homestead. Don's train was in at ten o'clock. My note was purposely worded so as to keep him from breaking upon the dead quiet of the anxious household, and he might

refrain from sending a letter lest the ringing of the door-bell should be a disturbance. Had a note arrived, I should not dare to open it in the chamber, or venture to leave my mother long enough to read it.

Yet I listened and waited, and longed and sickened, minute after minute, until a faint, single stroke from the church-spire tore fond, foolish hope from my heart. I had thought myself prepared for separation and silence. I had fainted and fallen in the earliest and briefest stage of the solitary pilgrimage. To know that he was in the same town with me, sitting where we had sat together times without number, yet that he made no effort to see or communicate with me, was bitterer than death. All the night long, in the compulsory inaction of my office, I tortured myself by sketching him as likewise a watcher over a still shape, and that shape a mother's. My spirit flung viewless arms about him; kissed the grief-swollen eyes and pale lips; mingled my tears with his. It was unnatural and violent that he should suffer and I not comfort him. Thus dreaming and thus reasoning, I would resign myself to the sweet agony of the imaginary interview, until a hand on which was blood seemed to start into sight and push us apart.

My mother's maid relieved my watch at three o'clock. I breakfasted at seven, alone, and, after giving orders for the day, was ready to return to my post, when a note was handed me. There was but one word in it.

That was "*Amen!*"

"God pity and help us all!" I had said.

He could make no response but this. It told me all that was needed. Having heard the terrible story, his conclusion was the same as mine. Our union would be an insult to his mother's memory. In the dead of the night preceding her funeral he had set pen to paper as he would have laid a stone above the grave of buried love and hope. Neither of us had sinned against the other, but the rupture was complete and decisive. Our only hope was in the boundless compassion and sustaining grace of the Father who must pity us in our extremity. Even He could not undo the irrevocable. Elsie had said truly that nothing could put things back where they were.

In stoniest calm I sat me down again in the ghostly stillness of that upper chamber. At stated intervals we administered nourishment and stimulants; the doctors crept in on soundless feet and questioned me with eyes, not lips. My answer was as mute. There was no change in her. They asked me nothing of myself, or I could have made the same reply, unless that suspense was over, and certain sorrow, distinct in every black outline, had entire mastery of my spirit.

The monotony of gloom and silence lasted throughout the day in the which my dead, as well as Don's, was buried out of sight. In my outward world the day was like unto the five that had preceded it. Beyond the four walls of the vault that shut me in with the motionless form upon the bed, the only difference to me in all the realm of nature was that one more fresh grave scarred the breast of the earth.

The night-taper had been burning for an hour when Elsie glided in like a shadow. In her hand was a sheet of paper on which she had written in large characters, easily decipherable in the half-light,—

"Don is down-stairs. I will stay with mamma."

In the thrill that tingled through me I half arose. Then I set my lips and shook my head. At her look of consternation I motioned that she must send him away, that I could not and would not see him. Imperatively, even angrily, I signed her to go and deliver my message as I had given it, and without delay. Tears were in her eyes as she obeyed and left me to my misery.

Not until the change of my watch at three o'clock did I write the letter that was to prevent a recurrence of the crucial trial of visit and denial. I was unstrung in mind and body, and poured my soul out in the pages that grew fast under my pen. I told him of my love and my certainty of his, and how precious was the recollection of the unbroken brightness of that mutual affection in the blessed years forever overpast. I told him that his death or mine could not dig a deeper pit or build a higher wall than the event with which neither of us had to do had put between our lives. I prayed that strength might be given us to bear ourselves, when parted, bravely as God-fearing man and woman; that we might be kept from bitterness and despair. I begged him to believe that I should ever be thankful that I had known him, always proud that he had loved me and sought me for his wife.

He called that forenoon, not losing one minute after reading my letter. When I refused to see him, he sat down in the library—Dr. Wentworth being absent for an hour—and wrote a passionate protest. I have it now. I shall keep it while I live. When I die it shall be buried with me. I had utterly misconstrued the "Amen" which was all he had nerve or heart to pen in the prostration induced by his rapid journey and the overwhelming grief of his return. Had my mother murdered his in cold blood, instead of having hastened her death by lack of judgment, the shock of the disaster should have drawn us more nearly together, not parted us. Only his death or mine could do that. Grievous as was his need of my companionship and sympathy in his loneliness and sorrow, he would wait without murmuring until my mind was more free to weigh what he had put forward than while under the stress of present circumstance. He would never give me up, unless I should assure him by word of mouth and in a calm and less distressful day that I had ceased to love him.

I have said that I treasured the letter as a dear and sacred thing. I did not answer it, and he wrote no more, divining, perhaps, that I would not trust myself to open and read further appeals. He adopted another method of keeping himself in my thoughts and of letting me know how continually I was in his. Every evening, between five and six o'clock, there came to me, enveloped in tissue-paper and tied with narrow ribbon of the same color as the flower, a single immense chrysanthemum, unaccompanied by card or message. Sometimes it was a great fluffy ball of golden fringe; again what looked like a ragged cluster of crimped white floss; then an almost perfect sphere of tenderest pink petals or of glowing carnation; now a globe of delicate mauve, shading into snow, or a hemisphere with a base of red-brown, clarified into a heart of orange-flame. Each flower was without a flaw, and none was like the rest. I could not return them to a

nameless donor; to refuse to receive them would excite curious comment; to leave them below-stairs would evoke a smile or covert taunt from Dr. Wentworth. So, when Elsie had brought the first to my room in the rest-hour the maid insisted upon allotting to me, I suffered the child to do the like each evening,—to put the beauty into water, exclaim softly upon its loveliness, and retire on tiptoe, unspoken to and unrebuked.

God only knew how I needed, during the suspenseful dreads of that protracted watch, all the silent comforters heavenly and earthly love could supply.

I could have told how the strain had told upon my physique by the growing ethereality of Elsie's never-robust frame. She did not complain, and the sweet gravity of her face was not a cloud; but I met her eyes, at times, fixed upon me, when she did not expect me to look at her, and interpreted their shadowed depths by the growing forebodings I would not voice. Even Dr. Wentworth's handsome, complacent visage grew haggard with the phenomenal continuance of the mysterious stillness which was not coma. "Nervous prostration," Dr. Gibney had named it. The younger physician talked of a "failure of co-ordination." To my untechnical apprehension her state was the lashing of a tortured sea against icy bars. I was confident that she heard every sound and took in the sense of every movement; that her mind was abnormally active. Sitting where I could see the immobile outline of her features in the dim glow of the night-lamp, I used to wonder what went on behind the mask,—what conflict of love that had risked so much, and of remorse over irremediable wrong. In confronting the King whose shadow hung almost visibly above her bed, did she repent the infatuation that had dragged down death upon her friend and destruction to her daughter's happiness? In the honest hour, was all well lost for what she had striven to gain and hold,—the affections of her superb spouse?

On the tenth night, as I have reason to recall, the thought came to me by degrees,—could my love for Don so far confound my perceptions of right and wrong, or combine so successfully against conscience, as to tempt me to actual sin? Had I been in her place, would the fear of angering him have made me an accomplice in the experiment involving another's chances of life? The answer was ready. Involuntarily I reared my head proudly, a stir of genuine gladness at my heart.

"Don would not have asked it of me! Who follows *his* lead will climb, never fall."

My mother had turned her face never so slightly and was gazing straight at me. Checking the impulse to spring to her side, I held myself still and returned the gaze in smiling composure.

"What is it, mamma dear?" I asked, softly and without eagerness.

The agonized entreaty of the hollow eyes compelled me nearer.

Moving with such caution as one employs in the capture of a frightened bird that may take fright ere the loving hand can close upon it, I moistened the dried lips stirring vainly to shape a word. When it came, hoarse and faint, it was a question, reiterated by the imploring eyes:

“Don?”

“He is at home, mamma, and well.”

Another struggle, and she articulated three words, troubled shadows driving over the depths into which I still tried to smile;

“Will he forgive?”

“Truly and freely!” Did not her life depend upon my tongue?
“When you are well, he will tell you so.”

She looked upward in a fervor of gratitude.

“Thank God!”

In another moment she had turned her face to the pillow; the dark lashes fell prone upon the wan cheeks; her respiration was full and regular.

Afraid to prevent the blessed slumber by word or motion, I sat and watched her until Thekla, the devoted maid, entered and would have relieved me. I would not quit the room, but lay upon a lounge, feverishly wakeful and alert for signs of further change. If what had saved her life were a lie, I was glad that I had told it. But I could answer for Don. I *had* answered for him. Before he could see her I must tell him this. I could think how he would enter her room with the light, swift step whose fall upon the floor and stair of the old home was strengthful music. He would bow his noble young head over her wasted hand and verify my pledge for him, in his mother's name as in his own. Then, he must go! Come health, come death, nothing could shake me from that stand. The bloody line could not be crossed in our lifetime.

The test and the final wrench came frightfully soon. Awakening from a sound slumber of seven hours, my mother asked for Elsie, in a voice weak but natural. When the child approached, pallid and excited, yet exerting the marvellous self-control developed in so many ways of late, the feeble arms were raised to embrace her. She would have us both sit beside her; her regards went from one to the other in mournful intensity of affection. She said little, and yielded gratefully to all we proposed for her nourishment and comfort. Her grand constitution had battled hard; it rallied fast. Yet that day and night went by, and her husband's name was not mentioned by her, by the doctors, or by ourselves. That she expressed no desire to see him was warrant for our omission. Dr. Gibney shook his head at my reply to his catechism on this head.

“Take your cue from her. Insist upon nothing and oppose her in nothing. Nature has her in hand, and we must not intermeddle.”

With the injunction fresh in my mind, I yet blanched and trembled at the request following the first attempt to remove her from the bed to the sofa. She had borne the change surprisingly well, had taken her luncheon with some semblance of relish, and, in calling me to her side, used a tone normal in pitch and volume.

“I must see Don, my daughter.”

“Dear mamma! surely a day or two later would be more prudent.”

“I can wait no longer. While I could not speak the thought was with me constantly. Send for him.”

Elsie's face was all alight; rosy flushes warmed and faded in her cheeks:

"He was here awhile ago, to know how you were, mamma. He cannot have gone far. Shall I go for him?"

I interposed. By a flash of womanly intuition I comprehended that he and Elsie had been in daily communication; that, informed as to the miraculous change in the patient's state, he had come to the house, resolved not to leave it until he had seen me. No one but myself could prepare him for an interview he had not sought, yet which could not be avoided. From nobody else could he hear what I had engaged he should say and how it must be said.

"I will see to that," I said, disregarding Elsie's offer.

I made no haste in the little arrangements nurses consider necessary for the reception of a visitor to the most daintily ordered sick-chamber. A blind must be closed; the slumber-robe readjusted; a chair set near the sofa; a glass of fresh water put within reach of the invalid's hand. Then I walked, still without haste, down the staircase. I was sure of finding Don there. I believed that I was braced and armed for the interview.

One glimpse of the familiar outlines of the figure that hurried toward me, his back to the strong light of the drawing-room windows, overthrew the reserves of factitious fortitude. As the light from the door in which I paused fell upon him, another surprise overtook me.

He was changed as by the lapse of years since our parting, and sorrow had refined his features into a likeness to his mother that was new and startling. A deluge of memories, of longing, of love despairing, yet unutterable, dashed over me.

"Sydney! darling!" said the remembered voice, deepened by emotion.

"Don! Oh, Don!"

I was in his arms, pressed close to the great true heart, and for some minutes our tears said what speech could not. He had been mine for so long and so entirely, our common grief was so poignant, and each stood in such need of the other, that the sternest censor may forgive my culpable weakness. It passed quickly. Before I could stay my tears I released myself and began my remonstrance:

"This is all wrong, Don! And if it were not, we have no time for thoughts of ourselves. Mamma wants to see you. Your name was the first word she spoke when she regained her speech and senses. She will not be put off, weak as she is and great as is the risk of excitement. And I have promised that you will forgive her," hurrying on with what must be uttered. "If I had not, she might—I think she would—have died. If you can find it in your heart to tell her the same, it would be a great kindness. She has been terribly punished, Don."

I could get no further, yet not one sentence of my premeditated appeal had been spoken.

He had both of my hands, and drew them together in his as he replied:

"My poor love! how wildly you talk! Do you know so little of

my mother's son as to imagine that all this pleading is necessary to make me tell your mother a little of the sorrowful pity that is in my heart for her? When she is well, and your nerves have recovered their tone, I must reason out the matter with you. Shall we go up now, dear?"

He put his arm about me, took my handkerchief from my hand, and wiped my eyes as I might Elsie's, gave me one gentle, tender kiss, and, keeping me in the bend of his arm, led me up the staircase, and so into the presence of her whose fault had orphaned him.

A sterner nature than his might have relented at the anguished prayer of the eyes bent upon the door as we entered. The thin hands were raised and clasped in a passion of supplication at his approach. He dropped upon one knee to bring his face near the level of hers, folding the wasted, shaking fingers in his strong clasp.

"Do not try to speak," he said, gently. "I know all, I understand all. There can be no question of forgiveness between you and me. What was done was in the full persuasion that it was best. I have never doubted that. As her dear friend and as Sydney's mother, you can never be less than dear to me. Help me to say, 'The will of the Lord be done!'"

Did ever God make a nobler man than this one whom my own hand must put away from me? Did ever minister to one ready to perish bring a more blessed gospel than that which the full, manly tones recited in the eager ears?

I stood motionless in body. In spirit I had fallen to the ground to kiss the feet of my darling who was also my mother's saviour.

She drew a long, shuddering sigh. Such must Christian have heaved in losing his burden. A faint smile lit the mournful eyes.

"Sydney will thank you. I never can. God will bless you. I am not worthy. I would have saved your mother's life at the expense of my own if I could."

"I believe it!" interposed Don, soothingly. "Do not weary yourself by repeating it. When I next see you, you will be stronger and better able to talk. Good-by."

He raised her hand to his lips,—the hand that had held the accursed handkerchief to his mother's face. Could the purest and loftiest ideal of Christian charity go further with this remorseful soul? I wondered that my mother could accost me with a semblance of tranquillity:

"My daughter, take him down-stairs and call Elsie. She must bring my husband to me. He must hear what Don has said. Then I can rest—and try to live."

In the solemn excitement of the scene it yet occurred to me to wonder if she had denied herself the solace of her husband's society until she was absolved of the sin that had cost her so dear. Was the penance of like strain with that which made a hermit of Prince Guy within sight of his castle-towers, and a black-veiled nun of the repentant La Vallière?

Then—for the love of the young is ever selfish—I forgot all else in apprehension of the interview I could not now avert or postpone.

Having met face to face, Don and I must come to a full understanding as to our future relations. As we turned into the drawing-room, Elsie came flying down the stairs and tapped at the closed door of the library. There was a low colloquy; the child's tones were happy and agitated, the husband's equable and complacent, as of one to whom justice had been rendered after many days. Don and I looked at one another as the firm tread mounted the stairway. Sudden crimson rushed over the young man's face; he clinched his fist.

"Heaven forgive me if I misjudge him! but I have conceived an aversion for that man which may be as unreasonable as it is deadly. I am thankful I was not asked to pardon *him*. Are you sure, Sydney, that the whole fault was not his? I would give my right hand to clear that poor sufferer up-stairs of participation in his blunder. I may not—I do not blame her, but self-reproach is killing her by inches."

In his presence the spring of tears could not be bound.

"Oh, Don!" I sobbed, "would my heart be broken if it were not true? It is this that is killing me. She was never dearer than at this moment when I cannot defend her to you. She loves that man blindly—madly—*wickedly*! Her infatuation has cursed her life and ours. Is it to be wondered at that I rave when I think of it?"

He held me fast when I would have rushed away to hide my transport of grief and despair.

"Hush, dear," he said, solemnly. "Nothing but our own wrongdoing can curse our lives. Unhappy we may and must be. Such wounds as ours do not heal in a week or a year. But love, and time, and divine grace for daily needs do heal, or none of us would outlive a first sorrow. And by and by—my mother would have it to be soon, I know—you will come to me, and let me help carry your load."

I made him see (or so I thought) that this could never be. I went over the ground my thoughts had trampled for the past fortnight until I knew every turn and outlook. I refused to hear counter-statements; I was deaf to argument. A resolute spirit—whether holy or unholy I cannot say (God knows!)—carried me onward until I saw him, baffled and sorrow-stricken, leave the house, and walk slowly, never looking back in the direction of the home I had refused ever to enter again.

I had the rest of the day for triumph in my victory, or mourning over the beaten sods hiding my slain hopes. Dr. Wentworth was in his wife's room, and she required no other attendant.

CHAPTER IX.

MY step-father's behavior during my mother's tedious convalescence was more than exemplary. It neared sublimity in devotion and magnanimity. His patience was illimitable; his devices for enlivening the monotony of the guarded chamber were ingenious and inexhaustible. He contrived dainty and delicious meals; fed her with his own hands; brought flowers and fruits to her side; read aloud by the hour in the rich voice whose intonations were a charm against weariness, and in

every glance and word and action gave evidence of profound gratitude at her return to the right self that awarded him the highest place in her heart and esteem. One might have sneered at the assiduity of this second wooing, had the effect of his policy upon the patient been less obvious. If she had loved him before, she seemed now to adore him, drawing in animation and vigor from his abundant vitality; deferring to his will in matters great and small, with what struck me sometimes as eager servility.

To her children she was affectionate, appreciative of the trifling services we were permitted to offer her, and solicitous lest our long confinement in her room might be responsible for the change she could not but observe in our looks. Yet, even while she remarked upon this, or talked of winter plans for the household, she would break off in the middle of a sentence with a flush of almost painful pleasure at the sound of her husband's step or voice, and, after his appearance, had eyes, ears, and thoughts for him alone. She never appeared quite content unless he were by her, her head upon his bosom, or her hand locked in his.

For what was she trying to atone to him? I vexed myself uselessly with the problem, as with the mystery of his exclusion from her chamber until after she had implored and obtained Don's forgiveness. She never named Don in her husband's presence, or seemed to think of him. Occasionally and casually she asked me if he were well and what he was doing. I replied as if I saw him daily. I had not spoken with him since the day he came to see her.

Knowing me as she did, and the strength of convictions founded upon principles learned from herself, could she imagine that the exchange of words between the son of the murdered woman and herself could affect the damning fact that severed the victim's child from hers? In her anxiety to make up to her wedded lord for possible damage done his reputation by dutiful acquiescence in his decree, to win him to forgetfulness of their joint and disastrous blunder, had she no thought for two lives that acquiescence and that blunder had wrecked?

I had no one with whom to discuss the haunting problems. To no one could I have propounded them except to the man with whom I dared not allow myself to confer. He had not protested against what I had assured him was my ultimatum, nor had he called upon my mother or myself. Not that he furnished food for gossip by shunning the house. In defiance of popular opinion as formulated in "Our Society Column," he took Elsie to walk or drive every fine day.

I made but one stipulation when he wrote a note to me asking permission "to perform this brotherly office to the child, whose languor and growing thinness had excited his uneasiness, as he was sure they must mine." I thanked him in my reply for his solicitude, and gratefully accepted the offer of what would delight Elsie and soon bring back her lost bloom. I begged, however, that no reference should be made to the changed relations between him and myself. She must know everything before long, but I would not grieve her while she was so far from well. To carry out the pious concealment, I used to go to

the drawing-room window to see her off, receiving Don's bow with the kiss she tossed back to me as they drove or walked away.

My heart had no other sustenance than these chance glimpses, beyond my little sister's affection. I stood forlorn and almost forgotten on the outside of the fenced garden of my mother's heart. Since what "our special correspondent" still alluded to once in a while as the "late scandal in our best circles," I held myself haughtily aloof from village intimates. Mrs. Wilcox and Kate had gone to a New York hotel for a couple of months, and in their absence calls of friendliness and ceremony became fewer and fewer. Mrs. Robb had forced her way in twice, and seen no one except Dr. Wentworth. At the third visit, paid after his installation as nurse, she was civilly informed at the door that "all the family were engaged." It was an impolitic measure, but what mattered that? We were a marked household. We had been "talked about;" our private affairs had "got into the papers." The Mapleton *élite* had always had stifled scruples concerning the reception into full and regular fellowship in their order of a woman who could write "M.D." after her name and had actually practised her profession to maintain herself and younger child. It was odd, if "all was right" in her first marriage, that Dr. Salisbury's will should have settled a considerable and specific sum upon his first-born and left the widow and baby unprovided for. Under the shield of Dr. Wentworth's name and character, his wife could have lived down unpleasant rumors had she been content to deport herself as a gentlewoman should. By overruling her husband's better judgment in her thirst for unfeminine pursuits, she had ruined herself and injured him. "C. A. R." led a lively crusade against women-doctors, in which half the papers in the country took part. Thanks to this agitation, the nine-days' wonder was debated for twenty-seven—and more. People looked up at our house in passing, and a sketch of Donald Upton at his mother's grave illustrated one of a series of newspaper letters upon "our suburban cemeteries."

These were the circumstances under which Don chose to advertise his continued connection with us by the only means left to him. He rarely showed himself in our streets unaccompanied by Elsie. She had not returned to school. Without consulting my mother, I assumed the responsibility of keeping her at home. She should not be ostracized or baited by supercilious and inquisitive classmates. I gave up most of the forenoon to teaching her. The afternoons she spent with Don. The evenings after her early bedtime were passed by me in solitude made heavier by those "happier things."

As Elsie regained her former looks, I lost strength, appetite, and interest in existence. So apathetic did I become that nothing hurt me much or long. There was dull satisfaction in the belief that I had lost susceptibility to pain.

From this delusion I was aroused as by an earthquake. One November afternoon, so raw that I had doubted for a time the propriety of allowing Elsie to go walking with her usual escort, and wound my own fur boa about her throat, I lingered at the window through which I had watched the pedestrians until they were lost to sight at a remote turn of their route. Elsie had danced down the walk to the gate to

meet Don, having been on the lookout for him. Her small face and head seemed to move with difficulty in the gray fluffiness from which they arose when she waved her farewell. The sparkle of eyes and smile reminded me of a planet twinkling out of a cloud. A fair and winsome thing was this one possession of mine, and I was never so entirely satisfied as to her safe-keeping and happiness as when she was thus accompanied. A hard pain assailed my heart, a tightness my throat, at the anticipation of her distress when the truth should be unfolded to her. It was singular that she remained so long utterly unsuspecting of a rupture that involved much to her and much more to me whom she ardently loved.

“I beg your pardon,” said my step-father’s voice at my elbow. He smiled slightly and not agreeably at my start; there was exaggerated respect in the inclination of his Antinous head before me,—lorn, and esteemed by few, and by none less than by himself.

“Can you spare me a few minutes?” he inquired, ceremoniously.

I had nothing to do, and nobody knew *this* better than he.

I sat down, and waited for him to begin. Ours were elegant parlors, and they used to be cosily home-like. The arrangement of the furniture was not altered, yet as I glanced listlessly around me they had the look of a body out of which the spirit had fled. Chairs and sofas were stiffer for my knowledge that they had not been sat in for days; the walls were dead because it had been so long since they threw back merry sounds.

It might have been an accidental choice of positions that brought Dr. Wentworth’s back to the light while I faced the windows looking down the street. The row of elms massed along the vista were like clumps of dun mist, so fine and thick was the lace-work of naked twigs. The highway was black with wet, and fitful passions of wind carried hurrying flocks of dead leaves before them. The clouds were not heavy, but they were a continuous curtain, and drawn closely down behind the hills. The scene was lightless; the room felt chilly when Dr. Wentworth began to speak:

“You may anticipate the tenor of my communication; so I need not waste time in prefatory remarks. As matters stand, you must see that it would not be expedient or pleasant that we should continue to live in Mapleton. Did not your mother’s health require a change of residence, the attitude of the community with regard to her demands it, and imperatively. We—she and I—have therefore decided to sail for Europe early in January, even before then, should she be strong enough for the voyage. Elsie would naturally accompany us. You, being of age and mistress of a sufficient fortune, must use your own pleasure as to going or staying. Should you prefer to go, there will be no difficulty in letting this house furnished. If, as your mother inclines to believe, you should object to becoming one of the party, she suggests that Mr. Donald Upton’s wish would probably be to hasten your marriage. I offer no advice, or even opinion, on the subject.”

He had not thrown away a word. The dilemma, so nonchalantly stated, so horrible to me, was before me. Mapleton of late had been dreary and inclement to our shorn fold, but it was *home*, and Don was

in it. I might never speak to him again, or touch his hand, but we breathed the same air; there were blessed whiles in which our paths crossed one another, when the sight of him was vouchsafed to my weary eyes, and Elsie's prattle of him kept my heart from starvation. And the alternative,—brutally set forth if my tormentor suspected the truth, brought forth in indifference as brutal if he were ignorant,—how was I to exclude it from the discussion? how break off here and now all talk of hastening what was never to be?

My lips were stiff and cold; my voice died in my throat in the first effort to articulate.

“I beg your pardon,” said my step-father again, in dry civility.

“How long will you probably remain abroad?”

He shrugged his shapely shoulders.

“That will depend upon health and inclination. We shall not revisit Mapleton for several years, and may decide to spend those years on the other side. Your mother remarked this afternoon that if you were already married and settled here, and desired particularly to have your sister with you, she might be prevailed upon to leave her in your charge. Unless placed in a foreign boarding-school, a child of that age gets little good from going abroad. That is a matter that can be settled later. It is contingent, of course, upon your action and Mr. Upton's.”

For an instant fancy slipped the leash of reason, and leaped forward joyously toward the picture conjured up by his last utterances. A house and home of my own,—Don's house and mine,—with Elsie to have and to hold, and the ocean between us and the man who had robbed me of everything else of worth! The clouds opened above my head and let heaven's boundless glory through.

Gloom and chill had wrapped me close before I attempted reply.

“You have taken me so entirely by surprise that I must have time for deliberation,” rising to end what I could not have endured for another instant. “I will think the matter over, and give you my answer to-morrow.”

He, too, had arisen.

“As you wish,” coldly. “I must, however, stipulate that you do not force discussion of an agitating topic upon your mother. She is unequal to it.”

“I had not thought of it,” I said, in even more freezing brevity.

“That is well. I am relieved that you show her thus much consideration.”

He looked out of the window, evidently with a single eye to the chances of storm, breathing an air of Schubert between lips pursed for whistling, and betook himself leisurely to his wife's sitting-room. She was sufficiently recovered to leave her bed-chamber during the day.

It did not occur to me then, nor for long afterward, that he had used her name unjustifiably in the communication which he implied she had empowered him to make. To this hour I am ignorant how much falsehood was woven into the web of fact, but sober reflection suggests doubts that would then have been balm to my wounded spirit.

I was afraid of myself; afraid of the desperation of loneliness that

enveloped and suffocated me; afraid of the wild impulses surging upon one another, icy waves, bitter as brine, stinging like hail. Hardly knowing what I did, or why, except that the air of the house bought with my father's money, the house in which Elsie had been born, and from which this man, my mother's husband, had the right to thrust me into the street, was intolerable, I snatched from the hall-rack a shawl, and got myself from the shelter of the roof that covered him and the mother who had forsaken her first-born. Like one pursued, I paced up one garden-alley and down another, unmindful that the fall of night brought with it fine, cold rain, until I saw Elsie's shadow moving restlessly about my room, appearing upon and passing from the drawn curtains of the illuminated windows.

"I have been looking everywhere for you!" she cried, when I had dragged myself up to her. "I thought you were lost. Fie! fie! what a naughty girl to stay out of doors until she is wet to the skin and all the curl out of her pretty hair! Oh, I had the loveliest walk! Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it."

She pulled off my wet swathings, rubbed my damp cheeks with her warm hands, and, pushing me into a chair, perched herself upon my knee. Her eyes shone; dimples danced about her mouth. How much good Don had done her! God bless him! oh, God bless him! for the most loyal friend, the most gallant champion, oppressed innocence ever found.

I caught my darling to my heart, and kissed her over and over. I had to tell her, sometime. It could no longer be kept, now that we were going away forever. For this was the resolution I had taken in my restless tramp in the dripping shrubbery. My mother did not care what became of either of us, so long as her husband accompanied her, but, for all that, we ought to go with her. There was nothing else to do. Separation would stir up further scandal compromising her, and we had no other protector,—Elsie and I. My heart bled slow drops as I summoned strength to say what would bring back the old, unchildlike worry to the dear face, the piteous anxiety to her eyes. Yet, if I let pass this opportunity, Dr. Wentworth might consider it obligatory upon him to break to her the news of our banishment, and her artless questioning would precipitate the rest of the revelation.

I began in assumed carelessness, winding and burnishing upon my finger a stray tress of her hair, which was the color of a chestnut fully grown and ripened in the sunshine.

"I have heard something this afternoon, dear,—something that surprised and shocked me,"—quickeningspeech as the remembered shadow stole into place. "Doctor says mamma must go abroad. She may not come back for a long time."

She laid her arms about my neck and her face upon my shoulder.

"Will it cure her, Sydney?" in a low, awed tone.

"Oh, yes, I think so, little one. She is out of danger now, and the change will probably restore her entirely."

Elsie was silent. I feared she was weeping, and when she spoke the cheerful tone took me by surprise:

"I can't leave you, you know, sister. You can't do without me

since our great trouble came. And you ought not to leave Don. He never needed you half so badly before. You are all he has. So I've been thinking that you had better marry him and we three will go on living here. Or, would you go to Don's house?"

A needle pierced my soul with each naïve sentence. I could not temporize longer.

"Elsie! listen to me. Maybe I ought to have told you before, but I dreaded to undeceive you. Don and I will never be married. Don't ask me why. And don't make it harder for me than it is now. And don't let this make you unhappy if you can help it."

She did not cry out, or tremble; only sat bolt upright, eyes shining out of a clear face from which every drop of blood had retreated. For perhaps two minutes she was perfectly still; then the great, luminous eyes came around to rest upon mine. Her mind was made up. Her accents were resolute. When "the midget" looked and spoke in that fashion, fire and water could not stay her.

"I *must* ask you, Sydney! Don loves you so that it would be wicked not to marry him. Why, sister! he has nobody but you that belongs to him, now that his mother is dead."

Her mouth worked, but she would not give in until her protest was ended. "I've noticed that you didn't see much of him lately, but I supposed you wrote to one another every day, and 'twasn't strange that it should make papa feel bad to meet him just now. I thought he stayed away on that account, and that when mamma came downstairs Don would be here again, just as usual."

She was feeling her way, inch by inch. The perception of this and her glance over her shoulder at the door gave me the idea that she longed to say something confidential, yet which she fancied I might not approve. She must not learn to be afraid of me. We were, hereafter, to be all in all to one another.

"What is it, love?" I queried. "Speak out all that is in your wise little head."

She shook it soberly, and put a hand to each temple.

"It isn't wise, but there is so much in it that it aches sometimes, especially since you told me never to speak again of what I can't help thinking of all the time."

"After this, say what you please," said I, mournfully. "Nothing can hurt me. And if it did, this dear head must not be left to ache if I can help it. It isn't good for my baby to think of things she can't talk out to me."

The soberness was not lightened, but she was encouraged. Her voice was little more than a whisper; she glanced again at the door.

"I have known all the time what made mamma ill, and why it excited her to have papa in the room until she could see Don and explain all about it and ask him to forgive papa. For it was a fearful thing, Sydney, that *it* should have been given when she was sure it ought not to be."

I had nearly silenced her peremptorily at that. The torture was like the fall of hot lead upon ear and heart. I held back the passionate impulse, and let her go on. I would keep my word to her.

She must not learn to fear my impetuous moods and quick tongue. After all, she was only what I had called her,—my baby, thinking and speaking with childish inconsequence.

“You see, I was right there when it happened. A telegram had come for mamma, and I took it to Mrs. Upton’s, and Rosalie called mamma out of Mrs. Upton’s bedroom to get it. I picked up the telegram afterward from the floor where she had thrown it. It was from Dr. Barker, and this was what it said: ‘*Letter received. Don’t run the risk.*’ I tore it up into little pieces. Mamma was unconscious, and I thought nobody else had a right to it. When she read it she pressed her lips together tight. You know how she looks when she is very determined. Then she sat down at Mrs. Upton’s desk and began to fill up a telegraph-blank. It didn’t seem to suit her, and she tore it up and began another. She looked very pale and serious, and I was wondering what had happened to worry her, when all of a sudden I smelled chloroform. You know there is no mistaking the smell. Mamma must have noticed it, too, for she jumped up and dashed right past me through the hall to Mrs. Upton’s bedroom. I ran after her,—I was so frightened,—and I suppose she forgot all about me. Mrs. Upton was lying on the lounge, and papa was holding a handkerchief to her face. He had a bottle in his other hand. Mamma flew right at him, and snatched the bottle, and threw it across the room. Then she fell on her knees by the lounge and began to fan Mrs. Upton, and said, as I never heard her speak before, ‘My God, Raymond! what have you done?’ Then Miss West came running in from the other room, and I felt I ought not to stay. And the next thing I heard—you know the rest, Sydney!”

My head was so light and the room spun so rapidly about me that I could summon no words. The frozen quietude deceived the narrator. It was not for nothing that the wise head had been thinking all these weeks. The low, steady tone resumed the tale, when I did not reply:

“I would have told you everything that day, you recollect, but you said, ‘We must never speak to one another again of what has happened.’ And I thought that you must understand how mamma felt. She loved Mrs. Upton so dearly, and she just worships papa. And, although what was done was an accident, he must have known that she was opposed to it, or he wouldn’t have given the chloroform when she was not in the room. I think the reason it made her worse to see him when she was so ill was that it brought everything back to her. And, afterward, when she was better, she was very sorry for him, and sorry she had seemed angry. She is trying to make up to him for it, now, all the time, and to comfort him. He must suffer dreadfully when he thinks of what he did.”

“Suffer!” ejaculation burst forth with impassioned energy that alarmed her. “Suffer! when he has let everybody think that *she* did it,—not he! Oh, the hypocrite! the double-dyed, heartless, cruel hypocrite! And all this time I, like a fool——”

I tore at my throat, where something choked the words and strangled me to blindness.

“Sydney!” the great gray eyes wide with horrified amazement,

“did you think—could you, or anybody, believe that *our* mother had killed Don’s mother? Oh, my poor dear! what you have had to bear, and nobody to help you or tell you anything better!”

She wrapped my head in her arms, patting and stroking it, sobbing and cooing as over something grievously hurt. Suddenly she let me go, and jumped up, face and figure alive with excitement.

“And *that* was why you said you never could marry Don? Did you tell him?”

The change to sternness would have amused me at another time. It actually cowed me instead. The mistake that had been so disastrous seemed now culpably inexcusable.

“Don’t blame me, Elsie!” I pleaded, humbly. “Miss West told me how it had happened, and everything helped me to believe her. I have been very, very unhappy!”

She compressed her lips, marched across the floor and put out her hand to the bell-knob, arrested the motion, and turned to me.

“May I have your phaeton, Sydney? and may John drive me? I must see Don to-night, or I couldn’t sleep a wink. He mustn’t be left to believe this one minute longer.”

“Do what you please, dear.”

I was crying outright now, with the soft abundance of a spring shower. Rocks and ice were gone; there were the awakening of life and the stirring of growth under the warmed waters. She did not ring, and my tears melted her sternness. She came over to me, and again took my head into her embrace.

“I didn’t mean to be unkind, Sydney. I was just thinking of Don, and how he didn’t get comfort when he needed it most, and how he loves you, and all that. Don’t you suppose I understand why he is so good to me? Just because I am your sister. He is very lonely, Sydney.”

I had no answer.

“If you had seen him in his home, as I have,—alone and sad,—missing his mother everywhere, and with your picture—the one taken in your gray-and-silver luncheon-gown—on his table, side by side with hers, and sighing as he looks at them, you’d feel just as I do, only more, don’t you know, Sydney!” with a tremendous muster of courage. “Won’t you let me order the close carriage—it’s raining, you see—and go with me, this minute, to see him?”

CHAPTER X.

THE rain fell in straight sheets as we alighted at the door I had not expected to enter again. The pour upon the roof drowned the noise of our arrival to the solitary occupant of the library. With the delicacy that never failed, Elsie said she would go up-stairs with Rosalie and dry her shoes, the soles of which were damp, she was sure. I tapped at the library door, and it swung a little on the hinges, the bolt not having caught in the socket. My knock was unheard or unheeded.

Through the crack made by the moving door I saw the figure sitting before the fire. A lamp was on the table beside him, and he seemed to be reading a paper or book held in the right hand. His head was supported by the left. I stepped within the room, my footfall muffled by the rugs, and stole, still unheard, up behind him. Over his shoulder I saw that he was studying a panel-photograph of myself,—the one Elsie had described,—the picture that was to have welcomed him in his own room upon his return from his three weeks' absence.

The photograph was singularly distinct and fine. The laughing-eyed girl looked saucily up in the sad eyes above it; the alert pose of the figure, the minutest detail of her costume, even to the marguerites of the brooch, had come out well; the velvet frame he had selected for it was powdered with silver daisies.

After all our years of loving and trusting and hoping, this dumb semblance of what I had been was the one solace left to him in his desolated home.

As he raised it to his lips with a murmur of inarticulate fondness, I flung myself upon the floor before him, the carefully-prepared address I had thought over as we drove through the rainy night forgotten with everything else, save that which uttered itself in the wild cry,—

“Oh, Don! it was *not* mamma who did it! Will you take me back?”

* * * * *

“How did you get here?” asked Don, by and by.

We were quite composed, and had begun to chat in the old way, he in the big chair that had been his father's, and I——

Well, it was Mrs. Upton herself who put it into our heads, by telling us how her husband and she used to sit thus on the evenings when they had no visitors, from the day of their marriage to their separation by death.

“John drove us over,” I said. “And that reminds me that he must be well soaked by now. How careless in me!”

“How *divine* in you!” ringing the bell. “David,” to the butler who answered it, “Miss Salisbury's coachman is exercising his horses in front of the house. Tell him to put them into the stable, and do you take him into the kitchen.”

“That is not worth while,” interposed I. “We must be going at once.”

A gesture checked me. He went on to the man in the same tone of pleasant authority:

“You will see that this is done, David?”

“Yes, sir. But if you please, Mr. Upton, the horses have been under cover and John by the kitchen fire this hour or more. Rosalie thought those would be your wishes, sir.”

“Rosalie was right. David, these young ladies will dine with me this evening. See if there is anything in the house good enough for them. What is it?” as the respectful servitor, the pink and impersonation of propriety, gave sign of further communication.

“Yes, sir. I was only about to say, sir, that dinner will be served whenever you give the order, sir, and preparations have been made

for visitors. Rosalie was sure you would be wishful to have them stay."

"Rosalie was right, again. Before dinner is served, send Thomas with my compliments to Mrs. Wentworth, and say that the young ladies are safe and will be at home later. Or—stay! I will write a note."

"Yes, sir. If you please, Mr. Upton, I think Miss Elsie sent a note to Mrs. Wentworth half an hour ago by Thomas. Miss Elsie and Rosalie took the liberty of sending Thomas without consulting you, seeing you were engaged."

The half-smile upon the young master's face expanded into a half-laugh at the final word; his eyes flashed in my direction.

"Right in all but one respect, David. Miss Elsie Salisbury could not take a liberty in a house that is soon to be her home. I am to be married in a fortnight. Did Rosalie know what my wishes in *that* regard would be?"

David bowed low to me, then to his master, and a third bow took in both of us.

"We've all understood that, this great while, Mr. Upton, sir, and all of our wishes haven't been anyways different in that respect. And if I may be so bold, sir, considering I'm fifteen year and more in the family, I should say the sooner the better, sir; and hearty good wishes from us all."

He backed out, and Elsie's gentle rap followed soon upon his disappearance. Don's eyes glistened as she sprang into the arms he extended. He kissed her again and again with moved fondness very beautiful and touching.

"Would you like to have the half of my kingdom, little sister? Ask for it, and it is yours. You can have anything that is mine, except Sydney. I am so much richer than she by this transaction that I am anxious to equalize things,—to strike a balance in some way."

I had told him that I came to him a refugee whom nobody else wanted. It was like him to vaunt his own gains, to lift me forthwith into the queen's place in his home. Happy as we all were, and light-hearted beyond what we could have reckoned as a possibility three hours before, a solemn hush fell upon us when Don led me up to his mother's place at table and put me into her chair. In doing this he stooped and kissed me, before Elsie, David, and Rosalie,—this last had lingered in the door to see me installed,—a grave, sweet kiss, under which I did not blush. I took it as he meant it, as from *her*.

Anything prettier than Elsie's modest ecstasy of delight throughout the meal and the rest of the evening could not be imagined, unless it were Don's serene enjoyment of our companionship after the dreary stretch of solitary meals and evenings that divided him from the idyllic home-life his mother made for him.

Dinner over, Elsie vanished upon another errand to Rosalie, and at his earnest prayer I prolonged our visit until he had consumed a post-prandial cigar in the library.

"Is that what they call a long nine?" I asked, at length, demurely, "or a modern edition of the brand quenched and locked up in a chest

by a princess who, the wicked fairy said, would live until it was burned up? I have been watching for the tiniest puff of smoke for at least fifteen minutes, and seen none. I *must* go, now, Don. Elsie ought to have been asleep an hour ago."

He laughed in tossing the dead and cold fragment of the cigar into the grate.

"Caught! Ah, well! the need of such artifices will soon be over. I yield more readily in this instance because I must see Dr. Wentworth to-night and spare you the trouble of giving him an answer to-morrow. Heaven send me patience and the grace of forgiveness!"

His countenance darkened so ominously that I laid my hand upon his arm and implored him to bear in mind what we had agreed upon in the talk that preceded dinner. It was the story I had read every day for ten years,—the impracticability of meting out the recompense of the wrong-doer without flinging the heavier stone upon a guiltless soul to whom the sinner was dear. This man had violated a sacred trust and sacrificed his wife's peace of mind and reputation to the demon of his self-love. To clear his skirts of blame, he had suffered public reprobation to rest upon her, if he had not actually directed it toward her. Of this depth of infamy she did not dream. Devoted wife as she was, she would not, I tried to believe, have let me immolate my happiness for a groundless suspicion. I affirmed this boldly to Don. "Neither of them so much as suspected our altered relations," I assured him. "Mamma is too fond a mother—as a woman, she is too just—not to have revealed the truth to me, rather than see me miserable."

He gathered me to him, raised my chin, and gazed into my flushed face.

"I am not prepared to assert the contrary in this case," he said, slowly. "I am still less ready to say what a woman will *not* do who loves her husband with the intense, anxious adoration your mother displays for hers. It is abnormal,—an excrescence, rather than natural growth. It cripples me wofully, as you say. Were I to tell him all I know,—not revealing, of course, Elsie's agency in setting things right,—he would visit his spleen and chagrin and humiliation upon his wife in some ingenious way. This sort of vicarious revenge is a favorite with men of his stripe."

"Don!" I interrupted, "was there *ever* another like him?"

"Few have his opportunities, dear, fortunately. Hush! stand back, and keep quiet."

To my bewilderment, he broke off abruptly, with three hasty strides crossed the floor, and passed the *portière* separating library and drawing-room, letting it close behind him. Then I heard Mrs. Robb's incisive tones in the outer apartment:

"Ah, Donald! David would have kept me out, like a sick dog, upon your veranda, this beastly night, had I not pushed by him. What is going on, that he has orders not to admit callers? Such things don't go down with newspaper-people, you know. And you don't look overjoyed to see me, now I am in."

I surmised from the change in her voice that she sat down as she spoke, and when Don replied, that he remained standing.

“What has purchased for me the honor of your visit, Mrs. Robb?” The accent was curtly civil, totally dissimilar to his accustomed tone. Her laugh was a sniff.

“*That* isn't over-polite, either! See here, Don Upton! you don't mean that you are not man enough and haven't *savoir-faire* enough to rise superior to the provincial trick of resenting newspaper methods of dealing with private history? Why, man! how would big or little papers live if we didn't cater to the taste of our readers? Whatever will sell must go into print. And write it down that the paper that is boycotted by subscribers is *not* the goody-goody sheet that won't have domestic scandals written up for its columns.”

“We have hardly time to enter upon the discussion of the subject,” rejoined Don, with no abatement of formality. “If, as I imagine, you think that I can serve you in some way, kindly indicate it.”

“That is *cold* business with a vengeance!” Yet I fancied that she respected him none the less for the dignified rebuff. “As you suppose, I don't traverse the streets in November storms to converse with nice young men upon unimportant topics. I heard this evening that Dr. and Mrs. Wentworth are fairly hunted out of Mapleton by public sentiment, and go abroad almost immediately. I made Tom drive me to their house directly, but, as usual, was met by the message, ‘Engaged, and unable to see anybody.’ So I had no alternative but to hunt you out and get at the truth. You needn't look non-committal. Something on that subject goes into *The Clarion* to-morrow morning. I shall send my Jim down to the city with my ‘story’ in half an hour. If you don't deny that the whole Wentworth family are off to Europe next month because Mapleton is too hot to hold them, I shall send what I have heard. You are young and hot-headed, so I'll give you another crumb of counsel. *Never quarrel with a newspaper-man or woman.* You'll pay for it six times over if you do. *Now!* what am I to say?”

Mental vision showed her to me as plainly as if the velvet *portière* had been sheerest muslin,—blotting-pad and blue pencil in hand, her head turned sideways in impudent confidence of gaining her end.

“Your husband is my friend, Mrs. Robb,” returned Don, in admirable temper. “You are in my house. These are considerations that stay proceedings I should undoubtedly institute were my interviewer of my own sex and near my age. As neither Dr. nor Mrs. Wentworth has ever intimated to me by word of mouth, or otherwise, the intention of going abroad next month, next year, or ever, I cannot give a categorical answer to your question. One thing, however, I can and do cheerfully affirm of my individual will and knowledge: the entire family will not take flight from Mapleton, since I am to marry Miss Salisbury and bring her to my own house week after next. I court publicity for this fact, now that the time is definitely settled. Is that your carriage out there in the rain? Did I understand you to say that Tom is in it? He must be wet through. May I not bring him in?”

“By no means!” cried the newspaper-woman, briskly. “I must hurry home. He doesn't mind a wetting in a good cause, or ought

not——” scribbling for dear life. “The marriage will be private, of course? Any details you care to furnish?”

“There are none in so quiet an affair,” rejoined Don, with commendable gravity. “I really must insist upon calling poor old Tom. Hear the rain! A glass of whiskey-and-water—*hot*, now—would keep him from taking cold.”

Mrs. Robb never brought Tommy to the front if she could avoid it. He had little to say, gauged by ideas, but he made that little long. I heard Mrs. Robb once define the unpardonable sin to be “boring one’s neighbor.” Presumably her mental attitude toward her husband was vindictive, for a more amiably tiresome man never took in deprecatingly the breath of life.

Seeing the host start toward the door, she pursued him, overtaking him in the hall.

“Thank you for a juicy item!” mingled with the patter of the flood as the front door was opened,—and Don was back in the library, shaking himself free of clinging drops from the umbrella he had held over her to the gate.

He affected not to see my troubled face.

“Unhappy Tommy!” he ran on, holding up one foot, then the other, to the grate. “After all, the best turn I could do him would be to let him catch his death outside. What must existence be to a man who is tied to such a woman? She has the exhaustive pertinacity of a leech, the rattle and sting of a snake.”

“Yet none dare set foot upon her head,” returned I, drearily. “Don! think twice before allying yourself with a family whose evil name you cannot defend. The trail of the serpent is over us. The worst of it is that even so brave a champion as you could not defy her to tell a story so frightfully near the truth. Somebody says that reportorial mud rubs off if allowed to dry. That is, I fancy, when it is *only* mud, and made from clean soil. A mixture such as this woman compounds sticks and stains. Will you never be ashamed of us?”

“Of Raymond Wentworth? Yes! But he is not *us*, thank heaven! The rest of the question will be answered two weeks from to-day. Would it were to-morrow!”

After drawing that final line I glanced up from my paper. I have written this story at odd hours in my corner of the library, which is the nookiest in the room. Much of it has been penned while Don taught Elsie chess. The two are upon the other side of the hearth, with the chess-table between them. The tall girl of fifteen is stigmatized by her instructor as an “ungrateful adept” in the fascinating game. The silent hour occupied by an unusually hard-fought battle was ended just now by a gush of happy laughter, telling of another victory. The large gray eyes have still the tender look of the child as she looks over to me with the instant apprehension that she may have disturbed me. Her slightest act is always judged by her conscience according to the effect it has upon others. She is fragile no longer, and her smile is of sunniest content.

Don is a goodly man to-night in the black velvet smoking-jacket I gave him at Christmas ten days ago. The resemblance to his mother, never traceable until after her death, is more marked now than then, I think because she is so much the theme of thoughts and speech with us. Her portrait hangs behind him; a vase of mignonette is beneath it. I compare the two faces until—his attention attracted, perhaps, by the cessation of the pen-scratch over the paper—he raises eyes very like hers in their loving light, as they meet mine.

“Can I do anything for you, love?” he asks.

“Nothing that you are not doing for me all the time!”

He gives me a longer, more earnest look, and asks no further questions. Raising a finger to his lips, he throws me a silent kiss, and in the same gesture bids me cease from praising him.

Did I speak my mind I might retort, and strongly, that were I to keep silence, the very stones of his ancestral abode would cry out for justice to the noblest of a line of honorable, God-fearing, home-loving gentlemen.

My mother is on the sea, and we congratulate ourselves that the weather is bland for January. She brings her husband's remains with her for burial in Mapleton. We have begged her to live with us, but she prefers to take up her abode in her old home. Elsie will divide her time between the two households, and our boy and baby-girl will, we hope, do much toward cheering her second and sadder widowhood.

Don and I wonder together, sometimes, if she ever knew of the stigma cast upon her by the circumstantial evidence which her husband, the only person, as he supposed, who could controvert it, took no pains to cast aside. We hope that the truth was never revealed to her. We are certain that she would have borne the onus dumbly, so long as the welfare of her children would not be prejudiced by her submission to this one more injustice dealt by the hand she let sway her life. Neither of the wedded pair ever resumed the practice of medicine, and, from flying rumors borne to us over the sea, we learn that the general impression in the foreign circles of which he was an ornament was that Dr. Wentworth yielded his own preferences for an active life in America to his wife's taste for elegant ease abroad. His sentimental homesickness is reported to have been infinitely interesting to travellers and American residents in the storied lands the partner of his exile loved too well to leave.

“His indulgence of her every taste and whim was the loveliest thing imaginable,” said a travelled friend in the visit of condolence paid me after the news of his death was received, “and inimitable by the average husband.”

I let the eulogium pass unchallenged; forbearance for which Don commended me on hearing of the interview.

“*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*,” quoth he, thoughtfully.

I answered in Shakespearian (or Baconian) English,—

“The evil that men do lives after them.”

In partial proof of which I offer this simple tale. It is not in rebuttal of my principle that there is, humanly speaking, an imperishable element in evil, that I cite the circumstance of the honorable

mention made of "our late distinguished and popular citizen" by the Mapleton papers. We have two, now, one a daily with society items that would do credit to a metropolitan journal. "Big" city sheets gave three or four lines apiece to what *The Clarion* styled "a beneficent and blameless life." Several stated that he had remained abroad on account of Mrs. Wentworth's health.

Four years and three-quarters is two generations in newspaperdom.

"C. A. R." is not here to exhume and exhibit the "subject." Tommy Robb, in spite of a vigorous constitution, entered into much-needed rest two years ago, and his widow at once removed to the metropolis, with intent—as Don put it—"to go into scavenging as a profession." Her four boys are clerks in as many offices and shops, and do a generous part toward her maintenance. Don has learned from various sources of her weariful ploddings from one newspaper office to another with wares more or less sensational. Sometimes they are accepted; oftener they are rejected. At long intervals we receive a paper in which an article scored with the editorial blue pencil is signed "C. A. R." She sows beside all waters (at so much per furrow and hill), and a column of a religious weekly was read aloud to-night before the game of chess and Chapter X. were begun. In terms impartially scriptural and slangy, the writer inveighs against tale-bearing, back-biting, scandal-mongering, and lying. The diatribe bears the caption "THE POISON OF ASPES."

THE END.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00023176646

