

Ida Glenwood



**Lily Pearl
and the
Mistress of
Rosedale**

LILY PEARL
AND
THE MISTRESS OF ROSEDALE

BY
IDA GLENWOOD,
"The Blind Bard of Michigan."

EDITED BY
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PREFACE.

It matters but little to the average reader whether a book be wholly historical or purely imaginary if it be of sufficient interest to hold the attention in a pleasurable excitement to its close.

There are those however, who will be glad to know that the following work was wrought out of historical facts gleaned from a large parcel of letters written by a son while a soldier in the army of the rebellion, to his widowed mother, then in Springfield, Mass.

Graphic were his descriptions of scenes and incidents coming to his personal knowledge during that memorable march from "Atlanta to the sea."

These I have woven into a web of fiction mingling their lights and shadows, blending them as best I could amid denser shades, hoping that peradventure their coming to you, gentle reader, may prove as great a pleasure in the perusing as the author has enjoyed in the weaving.

IDA GLENWOOD.

Fenton, Mich.

CHAPTER I.

MIDNIGHT AT "CLIFF HOUSE."

It was a dismal night out upon the ocean where the huge billows tossed high their foaming crests, or dashed with maddening fury upon the rocky shore as if unwilling longer to submit to the powers that shut them in; while ever and anon the deep-mouthed thunder answered back through the darkness "thus far shalt thou go, and no farther."

Then ran the echoes along the shore and up the ragged cliff on whose summit one feeble ray of light struggled through the narrow crevice of a curtained window out into the midnight gloom. The howling winds made sad music through the long corridors and curious wrought lattice work that partially enclosed it; slamming the heavy iron gate that had broken loose from its fastenings and kept swaying to and fro upon its rusty hinges, wakening by its unusual noise the huge watch dog in his kennel, who growled menacingly at being disturbed at such a late hour. The rain beat furiously against the windows and ran in rapid cascades down the steep declivity into the sea, falling on the sandy shore that extended along the beach at the foot of the cliff.

It was October, and the cottage on the summit was usually deserted before this time, for the invalid^[18] who had resided there during five successive seasons could not well endure the autumn breezes when the frost-king had chilled them.

To-night, however, a tall, richly-dressed lady sat alone in the spacious parlor, her black gown lying in heavy folds on the white matting that covered the floor, her head drooping wearily upon her hand as her elbow rested on the table where the wasting candle flickered low in the socket; but she heeded it not. Now and then she would raise her head with a sudden start and look intently at the door opposite and then sink back again into the same posture as before.

There was sadness upon her face, such as awakens the deepest sympathy of a human heart; but in the keen, glistening eye there was a deeper, sterner look that would send a sister's tenderest love back to its secret chamber, chilled and trembling!

There are hours made so big with actions and resolves that *years* full of circumstances and results are made to hang their heavy weights upon them. Such an one was now passing, bearing away on its dark wings the fearful impress made by a silent finger, yet in characters that in after years will reflect back upon the soul, filling it with horror and dismay! A loud peal of thunder echoed through the apartment and then rolled away in the distance, leaving behind the mingled voices of the winds and waves, with the fast falling rain on the roof above.

The door suddenly opened and a servant girl stealthily entered with a newly lighted candle, placed it on the table exchanging it for the one almost spent, and then as stealthily retired.^[19]

The lady did not seem to notice the intruder, as she did not enter the door where her expectant eyes had so often turned with a wild, weird look, and she remained as motionless as before.

Two o'clock. The little silvery bell on the mantel proclaimed the hour, and the tall bent figure at the table gave a sudden start, as though a new pang had penetrated her sensitive brain.

A few moments after, the door toward which her eyes had so often wandered slowly opened and a little girl scarcely ten years of age, timidly entered and approached the lady.

"Mother would like to come in," she said, with a faltering voice, while her pale blue eyes were fixed on the matting at her feet.

"Tell her to come," was the laconic reply, and the child hurried away with a much quicker step than that with which she had entered.

Immediately a small, nervous little woman appeared, with a cold, rigid, sallow face, small gray eyes and sandy hair, bearing in her arms a bundle of soft white flannel, which she pressed mechanically to her well-rounded bust, and without any salutation seated herself upon a wicker chair, and with the utmost *sang froid* commenced unrolling the white flannel she had laid upon her lap.

"It's a wee darling," she said, after a lengthy pause, during which time she had exposed a little red face and a pair of diminutive fists all ready to begin the fierce battles of life, and towards which the lady did not deign to look.

"But it's a pretty thing," she continued. "Look at it, ma'am; it's as fat and plump as a baby three weeks old, and sleeps as quietly as though it had^[20] not been born in such a terrible storm. The pretty dear!"

"How is she?" coolly interrupted the stately lady. "Your patient above stairs, I mean; is she comfortable?"

"Of course she is—they always are, ma'am." And she chuckled a low, unmusical laugh which accorded well with the mingled murmurings of the expiring storm without.

"Tell me more of her," demanded the lady imperiously. "Will she recover soon?"

"I think so ma'am; but she will need a long rest. She is sleeping now as gentle as a kitten. But she was pert enough, I can tell you, when she knew she had a little girl. She actually laughed and said she was '*so glad*,' and was going to call it Lily Pearl. 'That will be *our* pet names joined; he called me Lily and I called him Pearl. Lily-Pearl, *that* shall be her name.' And I thought I would name her as she wished, it will do no harm. It will be a queer thing to fix into Blunt; but we shall get used to it."

The lady frowned, but there might have been seen a moisture in her large dark eyes, as though the heart had sent up a little maternal love from its hidden depths, yet her stern cold words checked them, and they did not reveal it.

"You remember our contract?" she interrogated.

"O yes, ma'am; I am to have two hundred dollars upon the spot, and a hundred and fifty every year until the child is five years old; and then we are to have a new bargain, and if I keep the girl I shall expect you to do something handsome, for you know she will be of no earthly use to *me* before that time, nor after for that matter, if she is no^[21] better than my Maria." Here the woman paused, for the infant on her lap threw up its tiny fists and uttered a feeble cry.

"Poor thing. It's cold, and will want something to eat pretty soon," she continued as she folded the soft flannel again around it.

"I see you have not forgotten the *reward*; your duties, I hope, are equally clear to your memory."

"O yes, ma'am."

"Well then, I do not want *her* to see the child again! It will be so much easier for her to forget that she ever had one. It is no doubt a lawful child as she asserts, as far as her age can make it so—but as I told you she is only fifteen and a few years will cover up this night forever! As soon as it is light, take it to your home and care for it as you will; that is, be a mother to it and *I* will take care of the rest. But remember one thing! I demand you to forget that she *ever* mentioned the silly name of 'Lily Pearl!' Call her anything else you please; let me see,—Phebe, yes—that will do! *Phebe Blunt!* Now leave her with me for a few moments and return to the chamber, she may need you by this time. But stay a moment;" and the lady reached out her hands to receive the little bundle.

"Can you not keep her dozy—*sleepy*, I mean for a short time until she gains a little strength? She will need it you know in order to bear the news, she will be obliged to hear! Are you sufficiently skilled in your profession to do this without injury?"

"To be sure I am ma'am! It's what she needs, and if we don't there will be no pacifying her about her baby." [22]

"You can tell her;" replied the lady, "If she is troublesome, that she is not able to see it at present; she must wait awhile! Now go!"

The woman obeyed and with a cat-like tread left the room a very significant smile lighting her hard features; and the little babe who had just entered upon a life of storms and tempests lay still and motionless upon the rich dress of the beautiful lady who should have wound her jeweled arms about the tiny form and vowed to protect the helpless one in whose veins her own blood was coursing; from the terrors of the threatening blasts. But pride and an unnatural ambition had taken the place of the love that had once ruled her heart and better nature, and the good God had give her knelt in humble subjugation at their feet.

She uncovered the little features before her and gazed long and fixedly upon them, while her thoughts ran back over the short path which had wound so pleasantly along through the last fifteen years since her own beautiful Lillian lay upon her lap, the idol of him who had fallen by the flowery way over which her memory was wandering; and for a time it stopped by a grassy mound at which she often knelt in the twilight hour under the shadows of the fir tree, and a tear fell upon the innocent upturned face; and a low wail penetrated her ear. For a moment she pressed the tiny form to her heaving bosom and her heart whispered, "She shall not want—I will care for her—my Lillian's babe!" She took the little hand in hers and pressed it to her lips, and then with an impulse unpremeditated she unfastened its dress and exposed the pretty pink shoulders to view. She started, and a faint cry broke from her lips which awoke [23] the slumbering echoes in the room. Upon either shoulder a little purple spot was plainly visible, the same over which her maternal pride had lamented sixteen years before! There they were—the very same! With a tremor of deep regret she hastily covered them again and wrapped the soft warm blankets about it tenderly as she laid it down once more upon her lap. A few moments later

the timid Maria entered to take the babe to the kitchen, and with an assumed hauteur the lady yielded up her charge and it was carried from the room. The fury of the storm had passed, though there were clouds still lurking in the sky and the dismal Atlantic kept up its fitful roar; but the winds had ceased and the rain drops fell leisurely from the eaves down upon the gravel walks, and the old house-dog slept quietly in his kennel by the gate. But greater than the storm without had been, was the tumult of emotion that was still raging in the bosom of her who now walked with unsteady step up and down the spacious parlor with folded hands and care-worn expression on her handsome face, which many long years with all their changes and bereavements could not have placed there. "It must be!" she exclaimed at last, and slowly leaving the room she ascended to a distant chamber where her daughter,—her beautiful Lillian, lay pale and restless on her bed in an unnatural sleep.

The mother drew aside the thick folds of the curtains which shut her in and gazed fixedly upon her waxen features. How wan they looked! The rose tints were all faded from her cheeks and lips; and face seemed as cold and white as though just chiseled from the unfeeling marble by the cunning[24] hand of art. By and by the white lips moved and a few audible words escaped them.

"She is dreaming" the mother thought, and bent her stately head to listen. "It is ours—my Pearl—our sweet Lily—*ours*, I am dying—dying—Pearl—Lily!" The curtains fell again around the uneasy sleeper and with a wildly throbbing heart the wretched mother sank down upon a chair and buried her face in her hands, while the angel of maternal pity came and rolled away the stone from the sealed fountain of her tears, and she wept!

Three days with their gloomy nights dragged laggardly and wearily by, and the tall lady in black bent tenderly over the pale languid form on the bed, bathing the white brow and striving to arouse her from the long stupor by endearing words and soft caresses.

"Mother," she said at last; "bring my babe to me will you? I want to see her sweet face before I die! Love her Mother, and call her your own precious Lillian,—give her *my* room and tell her when old enough to understand that there the life began which withered and died when its beautiful blossom budded into life! Will you Mother?"

"You are not going to die my daughter! You are very weak now, it is true, but you will soon be stronger. Wait until then, for it would be disastrous for you to see her now. The excitement might overcome you. Wait dear—your mother knows best. Close your eyes and rest. Just as soon as it is proper you shall see your babe." And she kissed the pale brow with hot quivering lips, and turned away to gain new strength from the vile spirit within for the conflict through which it was to lead her.[25]

A week more and the cry of the mother's heart for its first born would not be hushed.

"My daughter," whispered the weeping mother, "believe me, my poor, *poor* child! *This* is the bitterest hour of my life, for the words your entreaties compel me to utter will fall sadly on your heart my poor Lillian! But it must be done! Bear them my daughter with all the fortitude of which you are capable!" The lips that were already polluted with the falsehoods they were about to utter pressed the white ashy ones of her child as the demon of remorse was introduced into the chamber of her soul which was to poison ever after the fountain of her existence, and people her midnight vigils with spectral fears.

"It is all for the best! Think so my darling and do not grieve that God has transplanted your beautiful Lily to a more genial clime before its purity was soiled by the contaminations of this tainted life. It is safe now; and by and by it shall be given back to you, and with this assurance do not murmur!" Her words fell unheeded upon ears that were sealed from all earthly sounds; but *they were heard!* The dark, *dark* falsehood was registered in letters of fire where no mortal hand could ever blot them out. How true that "upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, and this shall be the portion of their cup."

"I have killed her! I have killed her!" almost shrieked the miserable mother, and with a trembling hand she frantically rang the bell. Little Maria immediately appeared, and with as much composure as she could command the lady asked if Mother was still in the house.[26]

"No ma'am, she's just gone," was the reply.

"Then *run* for her! Hasten, O hasten!" pleaded the miserable woman, and the child obeyed. Rapidly did she chafe the cold hands of the insensible Lillian, but no "comforter" came to the sin-stained heart to drive away its despair. Many moments passed and she was alone with the motionless form of her for whom she would sixteen years before have laid down her life. What agonizing thoughts burned themselves into her brain as she watched the feebly returning breath and saw with a bound of joy the soft tint steal again into the closed lips. At last the eyes were slowly opened and fixed themselves on the blanched face bending over her. Then came a whisper so feeble that the stately head bent low to listen. "I am better now. Kiss me Mother. Let me lay my head on your bosom, and sing to me as you used to do! Hark! how the ocean roars! Listen—it is calling—calling—my Lily, my noble Pearl. O my husband, when may he come to me? We are not children! Am I not a mother? Is he not the father of my child?"

"Do *not*, Lillian, you are very ill! Have you forgotten what your father told you? He is where your babe has gone you know; but his last words were: 'My daughter; trust your mother always, and be guided by her superior wisdom.' I am older than you and know what is best for one in your present position; and if you will wait and be quiet all things will come out right at last."

"Yes, Mother. Let us go home where the odor of the orange-blossoms will bring me back to life, and Old Auntie can tell me all about it! *Her* little ones were all taken, and I never knew how her[27] poor heart ached. I think I dreamed Mother, for I saw my pretty Lily carried away from me and I could not reach it although I stretched out my arms to possess her! O Mother! Mother! *Is my child dead?*" and the large eyes looked with a steady gaze into the blanched face of her only parent, who was chafing with a caressing motion the little white hand that was lying so lifelessly in her own. In vain did the pallid lips strive to answer but no word came to them.

"*Is my child dead?*" she asked again without removing her eyes.

"*Dead*, my daughter," at last fell from her icy lips, and another sin-stain was stamped on her already polluted soul that an ocean of tears could never wash away.

"*Dead*" she murmured, and the beautiful eyes again closed while the wretched mother sat by and trembled.

In the darkness that enveloped her how gladly would the soul have looked up for one little ray of light and comfort, but the pall of sin, the thick darkness of an abiding 'remorse' had settled down over every glimmering hope and not a gladsome beam of light could penetrate its dense folds.

Poor soul! More terrible than the storm that had swept over the sea, when the words of the dark falsehood were registered where no mortal hand could blot them out, were the commotions of the tempest tossed soul as the mother watched on and the moments went wearily by!

"Dead!" again whispered the pale lips. "My Lily, my Pearl! Gone—all, all are gone! Take me home Mother—the ocean roars—the dark waves are rolling over your poor Lillian;—let us^[28] go home," and the beautiful head turned wearily upon its pillow and the wretched watcher moaned in her anguish; for she was *alone*!

CHAPTER II.

THE LITTLE MARINER ALONE UPON THE OCEAN.

Six years! How short each succeeding round appears when one has almost reached the mountain's top-most peak of life's upward course and knows that soon his feet must be going rapidly down upon the other side, where his journey ends! But almost interminable their length to the weary little foot-sore traveler who wanders alone at its base ever looking upward to the green spots on the hillside with restless longings. Poor little Phebe! The first words that fell upon her unappreciative ear were mingled with the requiem notes over departed summer, and it had come for the sixth time since that eventful night with its soft breezes and sweet melodies—with its beautiful flowers and singing birds, and filled the heart of the lonely child full of the glorious sunshine. Now she could sit upon the beach and watch the white sails that floated away over the waters where the golden beams kept dancing and skipping about upon the waves, and listen to the deep, low murmurings of the sea that seemed to sing to her mysterious songs, until the angry passions within would grow calm and fairy forms would lead her away to that far-off land where in dreams she often wandered. Poor little Phebe! She *was* an unfortunate child "always in the way, never good for^[30] anything, doing nothing she ought but always the very thing she should *not*." Never in favor, at least with her foster-mother, who almost daily declared "that the paltry hundred and fifty dollars didn't begin to pay for the trouble and expense of the disagreeable child," and yet it would have been no very easy task to compute the cost of the scanty meal which twice each day fell to the little outcast child to whom the thriving, ambitious Mrs. Blunt gave a shelter. Sure it was that a goodly sum was stored away in the old oak chest which would never have been there had the "troublesome child" not found her way into the fisherman's cottage.

True, there was nothing that was winning about the diminutive figure with the sunburnt face. An unusual growth of thick dark-brown hair was kept conveniently "cropped," in defiance of science or taste, close to her well-rounded head, and a pair of large hazel eyes seemed to be always penetrating the secret depths of hearts where no welcome greeted them. Her dress too did not set off her little dumpy figure to the best advantage, although it was often of the finest material, being generally the cast-off garments of the "misses" of the Cliff House, which were duly sent every season by a servant who was commanded to "inquire after the little girl" and always returned with a favorable report. These the child wore regardless of size or fitness, and as she wandered alone upon the beach with her sad face and thoughtful eyes turned upward gazing into the deep blue sky or away in the dreamy distance one might have been pardoned for calling the queer little figure gnome, or witch, as the fancy struck him.^[31]

"Where under the sun has that little imp gone to now!" exclaimed Mrs. Blunt entering the room one day where her daughter Maria, a pale, sickly girl of sixteen, was sitting, as she deposited her basket of vegetables upon the bare floor in no very amiable mood.

"I do declare! She's the most provoking creature I ever saw! I told her to have all the knives scoured before I came in from the garden and positively there has only *two* of them been touched and *they* are lying out there in the sun growing blacker than ever and she is nowhere to be seen! I don't know *what* to do with her! It don't do a bit of good to whip her—not a bit—and I don't know as anything but *killing* would effect her at all!" She smiled feebly as this last observation fell from her lips, while the daughter laughed outright.

"No it don't!" said the girl, quickly seeing that the fury of the storm had for the time passed and the mother was about to lift the basket and pass into the kitchen; "it don't do a bit of good to whip her! It only makes her mad and more willful! Suppose we try coaxing for a time just to see how it will work. I think there is good in her but cross words will never bring it out!"

"There is one thing about it! If we don't hear from that woman before a great while she may go and find some one to coax her besides *me*; I don't like her well enough to begin!"

"I presume she has not come back from Europe yet," said the daughter musingly; then she spoke more audibly. "I wouldn't send her off yet, Mother; remember we have almost enough for Father to buy a fishing smack of his own, then we^[32] shall be quite rich," and the blue eyes of the pale face lighted up with the anticipation.

"*Humph!* Well she has got to do better than she has if she wants to stay here!" and with this satisfactory conclusion she disappeared with her basket through the narrow door into the kitchen. Maria quietly laid aside her knitting and went out where upon a wooden bench standing on one side of the humble cottage lay the neglected knives which she in a very short time polished and put away in the narrow wicker basket on the dresser, then taking her neatly starched sun bonnet from its nail in the entry and placing it on her head passed out through the garden down a narrow footpath across the common to the sea shore. She was in quest of the truant Phebe, and well did she know where to find her. Walking along a few rods by the sandy beach she came suddenly to the foot of a steep ascent whose side facing the sea was almost entirely composed of precipitous rocks unevenly thrown together, while here and there a stunted pine or a yellow clump of moss struggled for existence. Here too, half way down the rugged descent Phebe lay concealed in her cozy retreat, sheltered from the summer sun by the rocks above her, with an uninterrupted view of the boundless ocean spread out to her delighted gaze. In a few moments Maria was sitting by her side. She did not seem at all surprised at the presence of her visitor, but raising herself remarked quietly: "Maria how *can* those birds stand on the water out there? *I* can't do it. I wish *I* could lie down on that wave that keeps rocking—rocking and singing—why can't I Maria? Hark! Do they^[33] talk to you—the waves? Did they ever say 'come here? come here?' They do to *me*."

"You *are* a queer child!" replied Maria impatiently, forgetting for the time the grand purpose of her visit. "But why don't you try to be a good girl and do as Mother wants to have you? This morning she told you to scour the knives which you know is your work every day, and *why* didn't you stay and do it and not make her so cross with you?"

"Cause—" interrupted the child; "I don't like to scour knives and I ain't a-going to!"

"You don't like to be *whipped* either," answered Maria; "but you know Mother will do it if you don't mind her!"

"I don't much care," said the child, shrugging her shoulders, as she settled herself down with calm composure.

"I don't care *much*. I'll be big some day, and then she won't *dare*! O Maria, see that wave dash up on the rock, and break all to pieces. Somehow—"

"Never mind the waves; I want to talk to you. Do you love me, Phebe?"

"Love you? What is *that*? I don't love nothing," and then starting up and rubbing both her dirty hands across her brown forehead, an act she always performed when some new thought flashed up from within, she exclaimed: "O, Maria! last night, when Father and Mother thought I was asleep in my trundle-bed, I heard her say that somebody had paid lots of money for me or something; and then she laughed and said I didn't look much like a 'lily,' and guessed that if my mother could see me now, she'd be glad 'cause my name wasn't^[34] 'Lily-Pearl.' O Maria! *What* did she mean? '*Lily-Pearl!*' I keep saying it all the time. That's my name; and O it's such a pretty one. Lily-Pearl! Pearls come up out of the ocean. The teacher said so the other day, and I guess *that's* what makes *me* love the sea so much. *Who* is my mother, Maria? And what makes you call me Phebe Blunt, when it's Lily-Pearl? I don't like it, and I won't have such an ugly name. Tell me, who *is* my mother?" Maria was a long time silent, while a deeper pallor overspread her face. But the large, wondering eyes of her interrogator were fixed intently upon it. How *could* she answer? It was a secret that never was to be mentioned; yet well did she know that Phebe would never rest with this sly peep into the exciting mystery, and it would be as well to satisfy her now as any time, and so she said mildly:

"I don't know, Phebe, who your mother is; but she was beautiful, and without doubt rich, and, I think, would have been very glad to have kept you, had it not been for her proud, wicked mother, who did not think it best, and so you came to live with us. Now, wasn't Mother kind to take care of you when a little baby, and shouldn't *you* try to be good, and do as she tells you, to pay her for her trouble?"

Phebe was silent for a moment, while her thoughtful eyes were penetrating the deep blue far away. "No," she said at last. "She might have thrown me back into the sea, where the pearls grow. But I *knew she wasn't my* mother," she continued musingly, as she pointed her finger in the direction of the cottage.

"What made you think so?" asked Maria.^[35]

"Because, if she was, she would kiss me like Lutie Grant's mother does. She always says, 'good morning, daughter,' and kisses her when she goes to school. I wonder what good it does, though," she continued, musingly. "I was never kissed in my life."

"That is *one* way to love," answered Maria with a smile. "Now will you be a good little girl if I kiss you and love you?"

"Maybe so," was the laconic reply.

Maria put her arms around the child's neck and drew her towards her, imprinting upon her lips a hearty kiss.

"Pshaw! *That's* nothing!" she replied, disdainfully. "Is that love, Maria?"

"No; it was a kiss. If you loved me, you wouldn't say *pshaw!* but kiss me as I did you. Now come, let us go to the house. Remember, I have told you a secret about your mother and this will make us friends. You must not tell any one, or even speak about the beautiful lady for Mother would be very angry because I talked about it; and don't forget that you promised to be just as good as you can be, which I am sure will be all right, and by and by we shall all love you. Come!"

"I shan't go! She will want me to wash potatoes, or something, and I *won't* do it."

"But you promised that you would be a good girl if I would love you, and this is not keeping your promise."

"O *you* don't love me; you only want me to go home and scour knives, and I don't like to scour knives, and I *won't*, either."^[36]

"But Mother will whip you when you do come home, and I don't like to see you whipped; why won't you come now?"

Phebe looked at her companion with surprise. She had never heard her talk so gently and feelingly before. For a moment she was almost tempted to yield. Maria saw her advantage and once more urged the willful child to accompany her. Phebe's eyes turned again towards the sea.

"O Maria, Maria! see that big wave chase the other clear up on the sand!"

And the little dumpy form swayed to and fro while her large eyes glistened. Maria turned hopelessly away. Her experiment had failed. "The child is past redemption," she thought, as she walked moodily home. Phebe sat a long time gazing out from her rocky "eyrie" by the sea, thinking over and over again the little story to which she had just listened, and wondering how the beautiful lady looked; and if she really was her mother, and if, instead of being brought by an angel, as Lutie Grant said her little sister was, she had been picked up from off the ocean by somebody she had never seen, and so they called her "Lily-Pearl!" By and by a sudden impulse took possession of her.

"I *must* go and see where that sail boat was going that had just rounded the point yonder!" It had disappeared from sight, but *where* had it gone? With rapid steps she ascended the rocks, and ran up the hill with her utmost speed and then descended into a broad, thick woodland, where for a time she forgot her haste, listening to the music of the birds and gathering wild flowers that were growing all about her. Still she wandered on. It^[37] was past noonday when she emerged from the woods and espied just before her, on a slight elevation, a beautiful house—the house where she was born! There was nothing here, however, to reveal the interesting fact to the little wanderer, and so she traveled on, stopping only for a moment to peep through the heavy iron gate at two pretty children who were playing in the yard, skipping and jumping along the gravel walk; and then, as if fearful of being discovered, started off as fast as possible, leaping down the edge of the cliff until she reached the sandy beach far below. Here she stopped. The pretty sail boat that had allured her hither was nowhere to be seen, and weary and heated, she threw herself upon the

ground and watched the rising tide as it came dashing upon the beach. It had risen rapidly, when suddenly she became aware that a dark object was floating near her on the water. It was a small row boat often used by the inmates of Cliff House, but which the tide had washed from its moorings, and was now with its bow still clinging to the sandy beach, swaying impatiently at her feet, restless as her own adventurous spirit. With a scream of delight she sprang into the frail bark, and soon found herself floating steadily and rapidly away from the shore. Now, for the first time, she was out upon the waves where she had so longed to be, amid the sparkling gems which the sunbeams were scattering all around her, while the huge billows just beyond beckoned her to follow. A small oar lay by her feet, and with this she caressed the ripples and drew, now and then from the unknown depths, the dark-green seaweed that floated by.[38]

Thus she was borne away, unmindful of the danger into which her wild spirit was leading her, and heeding not the sun descending into the dark, gloomy clouds that hung about his ocean bed, for she was happy now; alone upon the boundless sea, her life had become the fairy dream in which she had so often revelled while closeted in her rocky retreat, from which she was floating forever.

She was no more a child, but a wave—a billow—one of those which had sung to her so often while she sat and watched them, and her low, sweet voice joined in the anthem of the sea as if it said—

"Rock me, Mother, gently rock me, Sing the songs I love so well."

CHAPTER III.

THE WAIF AFTER THE STORM.

Phebe listened to the rolling music with an ecstasy never before experienced in her wildest dreams, and as the winds moaned on the distant shore and the sea-birds shrieked their sad accompaniment to the chorus of her song, she fell asleep hungry and weary.

Little slumberer, who shall guide thy frail bark, unseen by mortal eye, over the trackless waves? Who shall check the rising storm and temper the fury of the winds to the poor lone lamb? An eye is upon thee and thou canst not perish! A sure hand is at the helm, and the frail bark shall ride gloriously over the angry deep, and a sweet voice near thee shall whisper "peace, be still!"

It was quite dark when the rolling thunder awoke the sleeper, and with a scream of horror she sprang to her feet to find her alluring dreams, her fancied bliss, all dispelled as the realities of danger burst upon her. She called loudly, but the sea gave only a dismal echo to her ears; she shouted but the deep-toned thunders alone sent back a reply. Where now was the brightness that had so dazzled her? The sunbeams had gathered up all their sparkling gems and with them had disappeared! The music of the waves had died away, the little song which a few hours before had[40] bubbled up in her joyous heart was hushed, and all was darkness and gloom. Ah, little mariner, life is full of just such changes! Sunshine and tempest—noonday and darkness; all intermingling their lights and shades! Thy first great lesson is a sad one, but it will never leave thee. Better so than that it should be only half learned.

Phebe lay in the bottom of the boat famished with hunger, wet with the drenching rain, pale and sick, when the captain of a gallant yacht which had "laid to" during the storm, espied from its deck a little speck far away to leeward, apparently lying still upon the waters.

"I say, Thornton," he remarked to a shipmate near him; "isn't that a boat off yonder? Here—take the glass! I can hardly make it out. But it's something, whether there's any life about it or not."

"Yes, it's a boat clear enough," replied his companion eyeing it intently; "but I imagine it's one that has been washed from some ship during the storm for there is nothing alive about it as I can see."

"I think you are right so we'll leave it to its fate."

In a few moments the beautiful craft had disappeared and the little boat with its helpless occupant was left unheeded except by Him who permits not a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice. Ah—thy fate was near thee, little one but the unseen hand has removed it and it is well! Through the waves the yacht ploughed its way, for the breakers were rushing back from the shore and all on board save one returned to their berths for the rest that had been deprived them by the^[41] howling winds and the tossing of the staunch hull which the day before had seemed so sure and safe in its strength, but which the billows bore high on their foaming crests, then dashed as a helpless thing into the dark furrows the storm-king had ploughed out from the angry deep as he marched onward! O the horrors of a night spent amid a "storm at sea!"

Seated in one of the state rooms was a tall, queenly woman, robed in a rich *deshabille* of gray silk, with her elbow resting on the window sill, her hand supporting the head that bent wearily upon it, while her dark eyes gazed through the heavy plate glass out upon the black waters that kept dashing and surging against the victorious yacht proudly crushing the intruding waves that presumed to cross its pathway.

"Mother," said a winning voice near, "why will you not lie down awhile before breakfast? The danger is all over, and listen! Hear how calmly the seamen walk the deck! I presume everyone has concluded to make up for the fearful lying awake and will not be astir for two hours at least. Come Mother!"

"No—I can rest here! We shall be out another night, and it may be *two*," was the desponding reply.

"You used to sing 'life on the ocean wave' Mother, and I remember your saying once that you had no sympathy with Headley who declared that 'to sing that song by a good warm fire and being in it were two very different experiences,' for *you* rather enjoyed the one you passed through during your first voyage."^[42]

"Yes, child, I remember! I was not as old then as now;" and she might have added "and not as *guilty* then as now;" but they passed on.

It was nearly noon before a coasting vessel came in sight, and spying the little boat that was floating amid the waves the kind-hearted captain ordered three sturdy tars to go and capture it.

"Not so great a job as we've had sometimes," remarked one playfully.

"Pull away boys, see—there is something in the bottom! Steady,—” and as they came alongside the speaker sprang into the boat.

"Och—but she's dead!" exclaimed Mike, as he raised the insensible child in his arms. "She is! Look at her, shipmates," he continued bringing her forward as he would a coil of rope.

"There isn't a bit of color in her face under the dirt; poor wee thing!" and he passed her over to a man with a very brown, weather-beaten face, who laid her tenderly on some blankets and began chafing her hands.

"She is *alive*, boys," he said a few minutes after; "here Mike—pass me that little bottle I saw you put in your pocket this morning, it looked to me like very good brandy," he continued with a laugh, at the same time reaching out for it.

"Sorra a bit of *brandy*!"

"Never mind, pass it over, whatever it is. For once I'll not expose you for the good it may do now." The small bottle was passed and the kind man placed it to the lips of the insensible girl.

"Drink it, child," he said in tones as low and soft as a woman's; "it will make you well."

She did not hear him; yet she did swallow the few drops that were turned into her mouth, and the good man's predictions proved correct, for in a few moments she opened her eyes, but turned her head, hid her face in the blankets on which she was lying.

"She is afraid of our hard old faces," remarked the sailor who was bending over her; "but we will soon be where there will be more agreeable ones. Give way, boys, they are waiting for us," and rising, he left the "wee" stranger to herself.

"I should think she would have got used to ugly faces if she has been where there's a glass," remarked the third of the party, rather cruelly, but laughing and good-natured. They reached the schooner, and the wearied child was handed on board, amid many exclamations and intermingling remarks of sympathy and astonishment.

There were two women down in the small cabin; one the wife of Mike, who, in accordance with the kindness natural to her people, took the little outcast mariner under her especial care, and, with feminine instincts, provided for her wants.

The next few days the diminutive figure of Phebe Blunt sat upon the dark, dingy chest beneath the small narrow window in the cabin, looking out upon the blue, blue sea her beating heart so much loved, as it gathered up the jewels of emerald, and gold, and crystal pearls which the sunbeams scattered upon the wavelets' snowy crests, and with them her fancy built a palace of its own, to which in after years memory would often return and bear away some precious stones to adorn her sober real life.

"Ye're a strange child," said Cathreen, one day, after watching her for a long time, as she sat coiled up on the heavy chest, her large eyes peering from^[44] the window at the dark waters over which they were sailing. "What makes ye look so much at the sea? I'd rather see the land any time; and I wouldn't care a farthing if I never put my eyes on a bit of water again as long as I live." The child turned her beaming face towards the speaker with an expression of wonder and incredulity playing over it.

"How *can* it?" she asked at last, as her little brown hands brushed back the mass of dark hair from her broad forehead.

"Can what?" and the two women laughed heartily.

"Walk on the water. I couldn't, and I don't believe *He* could," and the bewildered gaze was turned again out of the narrow window.

"*Who*, child? Are you beside yourself?"

"*He!* Lutie Grant's mother said He walked on the great sea, but *I* don't believe it. How could He? *I* can't."

"Ye don't know what ye're talking about."

"Yes she does," interrupted the other. "It's Christ, the Bible tells about."

"And he used to love little girls, and took 'em up and kissed 'em; she said so; but, pshaw! that's nothing! Maria kissed *me* once, but 'twasn't much. I'd like to walk on the water, though," and again the eyes sought the far-off, and dropping her head upon her arms sat motionless as before.

"She's a puzzle," remarked Cathreen as she went about her work.

"I'd just like to know who she is and where she came from," remarked her companion, musingly. "I can almost believe that she *did* come up out of the sea, as she says, and that her name *is* 'Lily-Pearl'," and she laughed.[45]

There was a third one who had been listening to the conversation from the narrow stairway that led to the deck, and entering at this moment, said, gently:

"I think I know some one who would enjoy working out this 'puzzle'," and he laid his hand tenderly on the bushy head of the little girl.

"Would you like to go home with me and live?" he asked. "You will find one there who can tell you all about *Him* who walked on the sea and loved little children, and I imagine he would love *you*, too, for there is more in this little heart and brain than is generally given to one so young and ignorant," he continued, as he turned to the wondering women who were listening.

"Ye're not going to take her home with ye *sure*, Mr. Evans? Mike said that *he* guessed we'd take her; she's no trouble and likes the water."

Phebe shrugged her shoulders and looked toward her friend who said, pleasantly:

"I think I will take her home with me; and perhaps we will hear from her mother or somebody who will want her, some day," and patting the rounded cheek, left the cabin and ascended to the deck while Phebe went on with her musings, and the two women commented on her future and the "strange conduct of the mate." Yet, all unseen a hand was tenderly leading the little stray lamb back to its fold through "pastures green" and "by the still waters," where the thorns and the briars were scattered along its banks, and where the poor feet would many times get torn, and the heart grow faint; but her way is onward, for the Father leadeth her. Somebody has said that "God will make the blind bird's nest," and Faber once declared that[46] "there is hardly *ever* a complete silence in our souls. God is whispering to us well nigh continually. Whenever the sounds of the

world die out, then we hear these whisperings of God." Was He not doing this to our little mariner? "They talk to me," she would say, and in her innocence it was the waves that talked—it was the billows that called, but the Father's tender voice was whispering, and his loving care was continually over her.

"The wind is coming up again pretty brisk, Mate, and I guess we shall have another rough night," said the captain, as he met the other on his rounds just as the darkness began to settle down about the vessel.

"If it will keep in the northeast, all right; we will reach the harbor by to-morrow," and he walked thoughtfully on.

This prediction was true. In less than a half hour the gale was tossing the billows high about the ship, and the sky was dark and lead-colored. Phebe would not leave the little window, although the white foam dashed against the small panes and the gloom without was impenetrable.

"Come away, child," commanded one of the women, sharply, "what makes you keep sitting there, when you can't see the nose on your face?"

"I don't want to see it," was the quick reply; "I want to see them roll and tumble over each other. *He* couldn't walk on it now?" she queried, turning to the mate who had entered.

"But *He* could do something more wonderful than that," he said, coming to her and laying his hand on her head.[47]

The wondering eyes that were looking into the face of the speaker grew larger and brighter and she said—

"I don't believe it!"

"The Bible says so, Phebe, and Willie believes it. Hark—how the wind blows and the waves roar! but *He* could say to them all, 'Peace, be *still!*' and they would mind him."

"Stop blowing?"

"Yes, and the sea stop rolling."

She looked at the smiling face for a moment and then with a shrug of the shoulders turned her eyes again out of the window. The ship was plunging madly in the darkness, and the occupants in the little cabin were obliged to hold tightly on to the railing around it to prevent being dashed together, but Phebe kept her seat on the old weather-beaten chest, clinging to the window for power to hold her position, yet her face did not lose its quiet expression for a moment.

"Well, little girl, I see you are not afraid," remarked the mate, pleasantly, as he turned to go above. "I didn't know but the storm would make you think of your ride all alone, and would want some of my help again."

"It don't rain and thunder now," she remarked quietly. "It was awful; the waves talked, and something said, 'Poor little Phebe! the pearls are looking at you, and will take you down in their beautiful home, where you belong, if the storm don't stop'—but it did, and I went to sleep. Where are the pearls? It's cold down there, and what made them throw me on the waves?" Thus Phebe

mused while the winds died away and the waves were calmed, and as the ship settled down into[48] quiet on the dark sea, she turned to the frightened inmates of the cabin with the expression: "Guess He *did*," and getting off her seat crept softly to her bed.

In the elegant yacht seen in the morning, another pair of dark eyes was gazing through the window of the stateroom into the rapidly gathering storm. Evidently it had changed its course, and instead of making its way southward along the coast, it was now laboring to gain the open sea. The eyes were wild in their burning excitement, as the blackness became more intense and the billows roared as they dashed against the brave craft. There was no gathering of the "precious gems" into the soul of the stately lady, for her memory was full of a sad record, from which she could not shut her thoughts. She turned almost fiercely towards the calm figure reclining on the sofa opposite, exclaiming: "Lillian, you anger me. What are you lying there for, when such a terrible storm is out upon the sea? Do you not know that we are not going towards Mobile at all, but are sailing as rapidly as the winds can drive us out into—nobody knows where?"

"Eternity, perhaps," was the quiet response.

"Are you trying to torture me, child?"

"This should not do it, Mother, for your pallid, pinched face tells me that I have given you no new thought. We are in danger, as you know, and many have come where we are never to a shore again."

Mrs. Belmont was silent. Her wild gaze turned once more out of the window, and the daughter mused on.

At last. "If Pearl only knew, I could lie down under a friendly billow peacefully—yes, gladly."[49]

"Will you persist, Lillian?"

"He is my husband and the father of my child."

A moment's silence.

"How terrible! That peal was directly over us!"

The stately head dropped upon the white arm extended across the heavy bar of iron to which she was clinging, while the shouts and heavy hurried feet made a dismal accompaniment to the confusion all about her.

Lillian spoke.

"Mother, with death in the air and on the sea, tell me, *where* is my child?"

"In heaven, I hope," and for once she spoke truly.

"If not there, do you know where she is?"

"She is there. I will not endure your suspicions, Lillian! Never ask me concerning your child again."

The stately lady attempted to rise, but fell back insensible upon the chair. When consciousness was restored the fury of the storm was passed, and Mrs. Belmont, weak and dispirited, moaned upon her bed until the sea-sick passengers landed safely at their destination.

CHAPTER IV.

RECEPTION NIGHT AT THE NEW HOME.

Not many miles from Boston there stands a small, white cottage a few rods back from the main road, with a cool, shady lane leading to the lawn by which it is surrounded. Around this stands many wide-spreading maples, which cast their shadows over roses and honeysuckles when the sun is hottest, while the summer breezes linger among the branches to fan the noonday loungers, who, weary with their morning's toil in the field, seek rest beneath their shades. In the rear a garden stretches its way down to a little brook, which winds itself hither and thither through the tall meadow grass, singing softly to the gay lilies which hang their heads over its banks. The brook passes on through the narrow strip of pines that had carpeted the path on its margin with soft matting until it reaches a fair and picturesque lake, lying snugly nestled in the bright green basin the surrounding hills have made for it. Trees stand upon the water's edge and dip their long, pendant branches playfully into the blue beneath them, and white waxen lilies with their pure petals deck the bosom of the sleeping beauty, and rise and fall mechanically as the breezes pass over the surface.[51]

It was to this home, surrounded by green fields and nature's beauties that George Evans, the kind-hearted sailor, brought the unpromising prize whom he found floating upon the waters.

It was a beautiful, calm summer evening when the two stepped from the cars at the small village of Kirkham and began their pleasant walk of some two miles to their journey's end. The road lay over a varied country of hills and dales, on which the setting sun was throwing an additional charm of golden hues, lighting up the tree tops and gilding the quiet lake and brooklet with tints of changing glories, crowning the distant mountain with a chaplet of beauty, as the retiring king sank lower and lower in his chamber of purple and crimson behind a western cloud. The sailor was walking slowly with bowed head, holding the little brown hand of his *protegee* tightly in his own, unheeding the departing splendors of the dying day, for his thoughts were busy and his face denoted a "mind ill at ease."

"Look—look!" exclaimed his little companion, pulling away her small hand from the weather-beaten one that was so gently leading her.

"*That* is 'most as pretty as the sea: But it don't talk to me," she continued, after a moment's pause. He *did* look as she requested, but not where her finger pointed, for his attention suddenly became riveted upon the little upturned face beside him.

"If they could only see her *now*," he thought; "what eyes! But it will be all gone when we get there, and nothing but the old look of impishness will remain." A smile passed over his bronzed features as he continued to gaze at her who was hurrying on before to gather some flowers that[52] grew by the road-side, and well might he be pardoned for any remark he might be tempted to make, for a more unlovely little image could not well be imagined. Her dress, which had originally been of very fine material, had lost the most of its beauty before coming to her,

and what little might have been left disappeared during the night she lay asleep in the bottom of the dirty fishing boat with the rain beating upon her. To be sure it had been washed and mended by the kind-hearted Cathreen on board the "Bay State," but even this process had failed to add new charms to it, for there were many more colors (added by the several patches) than were at first intended to be there. This outer article of apparel, with an apology for one other garment, was the sole covering of the little dumpy figure; and her hair, which was very thick and much longer than it was generally permitted to grow, hung in confusion about her sunburnt face.

They had now ascended a slight eminence which overlooked the valley, and before them was distinctly visible the blue lake with its green border, and a long line of struggling sunbeams lingering upon its bosom, while to the right, in the midst of the evening shadows, stood the neat white cottage with its numerous adornings; still nearer and plainly discernable in the broad light was a smooth white marble slab cold and chilling as the form which had for many years rested beneath it. This stone so motionless and still told the passer-by that "Henry Wood," the former owner and proprietor of the pleasant home and those extensive fields had long ago ceased from his labors, and the soil which his hands had so productively^[53] tilled was now another's, yet they were not his who was now so thoughtfully looking over them. When *he*, twelve years ago, stood in the place of the buried husband, by the side of the widowed wife, the reservation had been made. The farm with all its accompaniments should belong to his future companion and *her* heirs, of whom her only daughter stood first in the rank of all succeeding claimants.

One child had been born to them, a poor crippled boy of ten years, towards whom the father's heart always turned with all its fullness of paternal love.

"Come here, Phebe," said the sailor kindly to the busy little girl, who had her hands full of gay flowers and leaves, as he seated himself on a stone by the roadside. "Come here and see that house yonder! Don't you think you would like to live there? See that lake, it isn't quite as large as the one I found you on, but there is a boat much prettier, very much, than the one you took your lonely ride in. Tell me, don't you think you would like such a home as that?" he continued, seeing she was gazing thoughtfully on the scene.

"I'd like to go *there*," she answered at last, pointing to the green hills that surrounded the lake.

"But who would feed and take care of you? Besides, why would you not like to live in that pretty house? There are flowers all around it, and smooth paths through the garden down to the meadow brook, and beside it you can walk to the lake where the bright little row-boat is fastened to the oak tree. Willie thinks it is very nice! We always go there together when I am at home, and while^[54] we are sailing I tell him all about my voyage, what I saw and heard, and what I hope he will see and hear some day."

"Won't they make me scour knives and wash potatoes?" asked the child, eagerly. "I don't like to do it, and I *won't*!" she exclaimed emphatically. "Mother used to whip me because I wouldn't do it; but I would run away down to the shore and talk to the waves. Do the waves talk over there?" she said, pointing to the lake, around which the nightly shadows were densely gathering.

"If they do, they will tell you it is *very* naughty not to do what those who are so kind ask you to do. Mothers have to do many things that are not pleasant, and every mother's girl ought to try to please her. Don't you think so?" Phebe shrugged her shoulders, and drawing her hand across her forehead, replied quickly—

"Well, I don't like to scour knives, and I hain't got no mother."

"But I want Willie's mother to be yours, and I think she will be very kind to you, if you are good and try to please her."

A shadow passed over his face, and he was silent for a long time. When he once more aroused himself to actual life it had grown quite dark and the child was nowhere to be seen. He called, but she did not answer. Hurrying down the hill he called again; but the echoes were his only reply. For a moment a sense of relief came over him. He had pondered much how he should introduce his little charge to the family circle in her most attractive light, in order to avoid opposition as much as possible. But she was gone, and he could now go to his home with the expectation of a joyful greeting^[55] from all, unless it be save one. Then his great heart spoke.

No, he could not leave her to wander off alone to perish; he *must* find her. Besides, Willie needed a companion. Poor lonely boy, he was denied the sports of other children, and was left alone with his thoughts and books so much that he was growing morbid and silent. This was pitiful in one so young, and it may be that he needed just such a play-fellow as this to draw him away from himself; and he would find her.

Hurrying on he did not stop until he had reached his own door, and to his great surprise he beheld Phebe in the little sitting room surrounded by the family circle, who seemed to be enjoying their strange guest to the utmost. He stepped quickly back into the deeper shadows and listened. They were evidently trying to find out something of her history, for Willie asked:

"But where did you come from? You can tell us *that*."

"I came from way down in the ocean, where the pearls grow, that is what my beautiful mother called me Lily-Pearl for."

A hearty laugh succeeded this answer, while Fanny remarked, ironically:

"I should imagine she had sprung out of *some* dark cavern; but there is not much of the appearance of the pearl family about her."

"What made you come *here*?" inquired Mrs. Evans, kindly; "did any one send you?"

"I thought I'd just come and see if you'd make me scour knives and wash potatoes; 'cause, if you would, I don't want to live here. I don't like to do it and I *won't!*"^[56]

"What a strange child," remarked Willie. "I wish I could keep her; I should like her *so* much."

"Like me? Does *that* mean *love*? Would you kiss me and say, 'Good-bye, dear,' as Lutie Grant's mother does? Maria kissed me once, but *that* was nothing," and she shrugged her shoulders with an impatient gesture of contempt.

"Kiss her," exclaimed Fanny; "I would as soon kiss one of our pigs."

Mr. Evans from the shadow saw the flash in the large dark eyes, as they turned upon the speaker, and thought it time to make his appearance known. As he entered the door Phebe ran to him with outstretched arms, and exclamations of pleasure, while the eager hands of the little lame boy were reached out towards him, and soon clasped in the strong, loving embrace of the happy

father. The wife came forward for her share of joyful greetings, but the daughter kept her seat by the table where she was sewing, extending her hand only as the father approached, but he bowed his head and kissed her brow with a fondness that was not returned.

"Well, Phebe, what made you run away from me?" he asked, turning to the little girl who was still clinging to him, and laying his hand tenderly on her bushy head. "You wanted to introduce yourself, did you? Didn't you know I was very much frightened? I thought, perhaps you had run away to the woods where you seemed so anxious to go and live."

"And where you picked her up, I should imagine," remarked Fanny, without raising her eyes from her work.

"Not quite so bad as that, is it, Phebe? But we will talk about that by and by," and unfolding^[57] a large bundle which he had brought with him he handed Willie some books which made his blue eyes sparkle; then a parcel to his wife and another to the daughter, while a third he held in his hand.

"Here are some dresses for Phebe, which I think will serve to win for herself a trifle more affection than she can expect to get in her present outfit," he said with a smile.

Unfolding some bright calicoes, he called the little girl to him.

"Won't you look pretty when you have these new dresses on?" he asked kindly.

"Lutie Grant never wore prettier clothes than these will be!"

This had the desired effect. How her eyes sparkled and danced with the anticipation.

"Why, isn't she handsome, Father? Where *did* you find her?"

He gave a communicating look to his son and said;

"Tell Willie where I found you, will you?"

"Way out on the ocean," she said, evasively.

"What were you doing there?" Willie again asked.

"I wanted to go out on the waves and hear what they said. I couldn't tell what they said when I was on the rocks."

"You said you came from way down in the sea where the pearls grew."

"And so I *did*, but not now. A beautiful lady picked me up. Will *you* call me Lily-Pearl?" she asked, coming close to Willie and taking his soft, white hand in hers. "I'll be good, then."

"And do what Willie's mother asks you to do?" interrupted Mr. Evans; but there was no answer.^[58]

"Let me call you Lily *Evans*; that's my name, you know, and if you are to be my sister, we must love each other, and I shall want to have you like my name, too. Shall I?" Phebe shrugged her shoulders, and the old unpleasant look came back to her face.

"Then you don't want me for your brother? I thought you were going to love me, and we would be happy together."

Phebe stole more closely to his side, and looking up into the pale face whispered, timidly, "Will you kiss me, Willie?"

"To be sure I will, and *love* you, too—I know I shall!" and the boy kissed heartily the little upturned face just as Fanny's sneering laugh reached her. The flash of indignation darted to her dark eyes, which her kind protector had seen there more than once, and well did he understand the foe that was lurking beneath.

"I think little Phebe must be tired; can you find a place for her to sleep, Mother?" he asked soothingly, at the same time drawing her towards him. "Good night, my little girl; I hope you will have pleasant dreams, and to-morrow we will talk about the new dresses." He kissed her fondly as he spoke, and the face beamed with joy as she left the room.

There was a long family consultation that night after the child had been shown to her bed, and for the first time in her whole life made to repeat the simple prayer: "Now I lay me down to sleep," which she did reluctantly, and with many shrugs. But the quiet, earnest voice of Mrs. Evans subdued her, and she at last submitted with a very good grace. It was finally decided before the family^[59] separated for the night, that the new-comer should for a time, at least, become an inmate of the home circle, and through Willie's solicitations she should be considered his exclusive property. He would be her teacher, guiding all her studies, filling her little untutored mind with the knowledge he had gained, as well as endeavoring to correct her faults; while she in return would be his companion, drawing him in his carriage and amusing him generally. It was with a light heart that the poor lame boy lay down to sleep that night. Bright visions of coming happiness flitted through his mind, and succeeded in driving away his usually quiet slumbers.

The next morning he arose early and soon after "Lily," as he persisted at the time in calling her, notwithstanding Fanny's sarcastic protestations, appeared in a neat chintz frock and pink apron which had not been taken out from their hiding place since the baby boy had grown too large for their use. Her hair was smoothly parted back from the forehead and her face was beaming and animated. She bounded quickly to Willie's side as she entered the room where breakfast was waiting, and inquired eagerly: "Do I look pretty?" "To be sure you do; just as pretty as any other girl!"

"I want to tell you something," she leaned over to whisper as she was being lifted to her seat by the side of her future companion; "I love *you*, but I *hate* Fanny!" "You must not hate any one," replied Willie. "Fanny is my sister and you are going to be, so we must *all* love each other." "I can't," and the little dumpy figure raised itself to its fullest dimensions as she looked into the face^[60] of Fanny, who was coming into the room with the coffee. "I *won't* love *her*, but I love *you*," and she clasped the little white hand fervently in her own.

CHAPTER V.

DEATH IN THE LITTLE COTTAGE.

Phebe was not mistaken in her heart's emotions, as the years proved. She *did* love Willie with all of the ardor of her young affections. His wish was her law; his reproofs her severest chastisements. But the stern, cold Fanny found no place in her love. She trembled under her frowns and anger only to hasten from them that she might hide the bitterness which her secret tears could alone soothe. There was no need of all this. Fanny did not *hate* the child; no, not even dislike her; but there was no summer within her soul—no glad sunshine in her obdurate heart. Yet beneath the icy covering the world saw, which chilled and frosted the tendrils of love her woman's nature possessed, there was a clear silvery fountain of emotion, which would have driven away many a dark hour, with the merry music of its gushing waters, had not a thick cloud of selfishness shut it in, and the frosts of discontent sealed it from human vision. But God saw it all, and looked pityingly into the perverted heart where its rich treasures lay hidden. "The child is very well," she would say, "as good as children usually are, I suppose, but of no use. She does not pay for the salt she eats."^[62]

"I do not agree with you," replied the mother. "See how much happier your brother is since he has a companion to talk to and confide in. *I* was too old to understand his little wants, or even to sympathize with his poor heart's sorrows. I feel it all now. This is the lesson I have learned since Phebe has been with us. We were too selfish, Fanny—your mother and yourself. It may be I was at fault in not tilling and uprooting the evils in your young heart when it was in my power to do so, my daughter, and I am willing to confess it to you now. There should be more flowers growing in the garden of our souls, and less hardy, sturdy shrubs that yield no fragrance and woo no summer birds to come and make music for us. Life has changed its aspects for me within a few short months. It seems all spread out where I can look back upon it; *not* sparkling and glowing with good works and love and gentleness, as it should be; but there are dark places—cold, chill damps that creep over me at times when I scan the crooked paths over which I have led you, while one so smooth and flowery, so full of pleasant places and radiant with beauty, is plainly discernable close beside it, into which our feet should have turned. God forgive me!" she murmured, while a tear glistened for one moment in her clear blue eyes. "I did not mean to do you a wrong; I was worldly and ambitious for your *temporal* good, but blinded to your spiritual prosperity. God forgive me!"

"I cannot see where you have committed any such a great sin," replied the daughter with much feeling. "I have no doubt but that you intended to do your duty, and must say my opinion is that^[63] you succeeded well. We had to toil hard to gain our present ease and comfort, but no one can accuse us of either crime or dishonesty, Mother. I did not speak of the child because I did not want her here. I only think she might make herself more useful. I am willing she should read when Willie wants her to, but she would never do anything else if she could help it."

The door was suddenly opened and Phebe came rushing in, with a light buoyant step, her cheeks glowing with exercise and her dark eyes sparkling with joy and animation.

"O Mother! Father is in Boston, but will not be home for two or three days. You can *never* guess what he has for Willie," and the happy child danced about the floor in the exuberance of her glee.

"What business have you to open our letters?" inquired Fanny, beneath the dark cloud that had gathered during the short recital.

The mirth of the little girl suddenly ceased as she looked at her interrogator for a moment, but made no reply. Willie, however, appeared in the door and answered for her.

"The letter was written to *us*, wasn't it, Phebe?"

"It was written to *you*; and Father is going to bring him a large dog all trained to draw him. O Willie, was there ever anything so nice!" Her quick anger was gone, and the brightness of the joyous anticipations of the *something* that was to bring so much to one she so dearly loved daguerreotyped itself on her expressive features. Willie saw it all, and when he had seated himself by the side of his mother on the lounge he beckoned Phebe to him.[64]

"You are sorry about something, my little sister," he said; "tell me what it is."

"No, no; I am not sorry. I was only thinking. You will not want little Phebe when Rover comes. And—and I *do* like to draw you so much!" and her lips quivered as she strove to keep back the tears.

"Why, my pretty sister, your eyes were so bright when I first told you, and I thought that my new possessions were going to make *you* as happy as myself; and only a moment ago you exclaimed, 'was there ever anything so *nice*!' Can you not think so now? It is true I shall not need you for my horse," he continued, laughing. "But just think how dreary it will be to ride alone, with no one to speak to or enjoy the sunshine and cool breezes with me, or gather the pretty flowers along the road, or the lilies from off the lake! No, no, Phebe; I *cannot* go alone, and Father may take the dog back, if you will not go with me. Or perhaps you imagine that Rover can talk, as well as do many other remarkable things. Besides you must have forgotten that Father wrote that the wagon is large enough for two such 'chicks' as we are. So do not feel badly; you are to go with me, and Rover is to draw us both."

Mrs. Evans clasped them in her arms and drew them tenderly to her.

"My dear children, will you always love each other as you do now? Will you always be his sister Phebe, and never take away the affection that makes him so happy? I shall not always be with you, my children; but before I leave you, promise me, Phebe, that you will *never* forsake him, and I will trust you, young as you are. The[65] time will come when both of you will pass beyond these years of childhood, and great changes may come to you; there will be separations, and other homes where it may be you will live apart. But, Phebe, he is your brother; remember *I* have given him to you. It is a sacred trust, but you understand it. Will it be kept safe and firm when he has no mother to lean upon, and no hand but yours to attend to his wants? Phebe, I love you, and thank God every day that he sent the lonely 'mariner' to our home, and for the sake of that love will you be true to my dear boy?"

"I could never live without Willie," and she threw her arms passionately around the neck of the crippled boy. "I will never leave him Mother; he couldn't do without *me*, could you Willie?" The boy drew her more closely to him but could not speak, for his heart was full of his mother's sad words. He had noticed that her cheek had paled with the fading of the summer flowers; that her step had grown more feeble and her kiss more tender as she smoothed his pillow at night and whispered "God will take care of you my dear, dear boy." And now as he looked into the pale face and saw the tear-drops glisten on her drooping lashes a fearful foreboding stole over him, and placing an arm about her neck he sobbed:

"Mother, do *not* talk of leaving me! What could your helpless boy do without you? I must always creep about in the dust for the thoughtless and cruel to point at, and there is nothing in the future

to hope for or look forward to. O Mother! It is dreadful to be a *cripple* with no prospect of being any body or doing any good to others; only a poor, helpless boy for every passer-by to *pity!*"[66]

"Please do not Willie; it breaks my heart! Remember what God has said, 'the Lord thy God is a merciful God, He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them.' I have many times laid you, all helpless as you are, as a cheerful testimony of my poor trembling faith at His feet, and somehow, Willie, I have felt that he has accepted my precious gift, and that my boy will be ever under his especial care and love. Look up, there is sunshine on the other side of the clouds, and its bright beams will gild your darkness if you will permit them to do so." The slumbering fountain of the daughter's love was stirred at the sight before her and bowing her head she wept!

"Mother," she said at last with much emotion; "have you forgotten that *I* am his sister? Can you not leave him to *my* care? I will never forsake him, and all that I can do to make his life pleasanter *I* will gladly do! Did you forget *me* Mother?"

"Forget you Fanny? You were my first born—my *all* for many years! Together we have worked and talked, but, my daughter, you are older and sterner by nature than my poor helpless one. He wants companionship, sympathy in his little trials that must ever be peculiar to himself, and no one can do this as well as one who has suffered and been lonely as he will always be. No Fanny, *you* will of course be kind to him and your reward will be sure."

Phebe had been an inmate of the new home for more than three years. Happy years they had been, notwithstanding the many trials she had been obliged to encounter. Her foster-parents[67] were always kind, and it was there her heart had first learned the luxury of loving and being loved. How true had been the promise to her "when thy father and thy mother forsake thee then the Lord will take thee up!" He had taken her and she was being fitted by his providences for the life that was before her. A dark shadow was creeping over her path with its sombre forebodings, and young as she was her soul was chilled by it. She had not noticed it before, and it was hard to realize even now that it was so distinctly brought before her. Of one thing, however, she was sure. Willie was suffering and her little heart poured itself out in words of tenderness and sympathy.

It was a happy day when Mr. Evans returned from his long voyage and introduced Rover to his new master. The shadows which had been lingering over the home circle for two long days suddenly vanished. Then came the long rides, for as the father had said, "the wagon was ample for the two," and Rover was able and willing.

But in the pleasant sitting-room that looked out upon the fading lawn where the leaves were falling from the crimson maples there were sad talks about a coming separation, and faint, wistful looks into the far-off future. There were smiles and caresses that fell into "life's eventide" like sunbeams darting through the western clouds as night approaches. The wife and mother knew that her days were numbered, and when the winter storms came and mantled the hillside and spread a pall over the lonely grave beyond the garden where the cold marble stood, and the winds mingled their sighs with the sobs and moans of bereaved ones, the chamber of the slumbering[68] one was entered and the loving mother slept in a dreamless sleep.

A pall of gloom settled down on the inmates of this once cheerful home! The cord that had so long bound them all together was broken. What would the future present to each? Where the wisdom to choose; the firmness and strength to battle and maintain?

The winds moaned and the snow came and went; the "frost-king" fettered and unloosed; then the spring appeared and with it changes not only in the outward world but into the little circle of murmuring ones. The father must go to sea; a summer voyage was before him. It was harder now than ever to leave his almost helpless boy without a mother's love to comfort and cheer him; but it must be done!

"I will take as good care of him as I *can*," Fanny remarked one evening as the father's solicitude broke out into words.

"To be sure I shall have a great deal more to attend to now, but I suppose Phebe can help me more than she has done. She is a great stout girl and might make herself useful if she had a mind to do so. She ought to be made to understand that she is dependent and should do something to earn her own living! I cannot afford to keep her for nothing!"

"This home is yours, I am fully aware, Fanny," replied Mr. Evans with some warmth; "and if you wish it I will take my children out of it and find them another." Fanny burst into tears and arose to leave the room.[69]

"I will endeavor to be a sister to *both* of them," she stopped to say in a subdued tone, and the father was alone.

"I must believe her," he thought at last; "she cannot be *cruel* to her poor brother at least!" So in a few days, before the early flowers decked the garden walks, the father and protector was away upon the waves, and the home was once more desolate!

Ah, there are sad times in life when even hope seems arrayed in the sombre habiliments of mourning. The future grows darker and darker as we gaze upon it; there is no light because we are powerless to penetrate the clouds that are hanging over us. Who shall lead us out? Timid and shrinking we stretch our trembling hands out into the gloom when to the surprise of the fainting heart we feel the gentle grasp of love, while the way brightens and the faltering feet gain a firmer tread as they step forward where the shadows are broken and the rugged road appears in full view.

If Phebe had been a *strange* child when she entered the cottage, the intimate companionship of the thoughtful studious cripple had not made her less so. The events of each passing day had imparted their impress upon her susceptible nature. Her mind had been an open chalice into which her foster-brother had poured the hoarded wealth of his own; and she was learned beyond her years. The little "dumpy figure" was now tall and well-proportioned for her age, and Willie looked upon her with pride and admiration. More than this, her heart with its far-reaching mysteries had been guided close to the cross and around it the tendrils[70] of its unsolved longings twined themselves. Her dreams of the unreal were no less, but her realizations of the sterner demands of life were more. Willie had early learned to tell the pitying Redeemer his tales of sorrow and deprivations, and where he found comfort and sympathy the restless Phebe had been led. How kind in the potter to prepare the clay for his grand purposes of use, although sometimes with a rough as well as masterly hand! And how can its powers be manifested without

the "fashioning process" or its durability secured in the absence of the "mouldings" and the fire? The master understood his work and Phebe lay passively in his hands.

Down by the lake where the wild honeysuckle yielded up its luscious fruits to the children when the blossoms had disappeared, was a little arbor where tender fingers had woven the slender branches of the whispering pines together, and in this sweet bower Willie and his companion sat every day when the snow and frosts were gone and talked of the absent mother, wishing that the gentle spirit might be ever near to check the turbulent winds and smooth down the angry waves.

CHAPTER VI.

"CRAZY DIMIS" AND THE TWILIGHT SCENE.

"What are you thinking about, Phebe? I have watched you ever since we turned the corner down by the big pine tree, and not a muscle of your face has moved, as far as I can discover. Tell Willie, won't you?"

Phebe, thus addressed, drew herself up with a long sigh, and passing her hand mechanically across her forehead, replied, while her eyes remained seemingly fixed on some far-off object:

"I do not know. See how the sunshine falls in golden patches on the pond yonder, like what you read about this morning. Willie, I *don't* want to be *Phebe*—nothing but little Phebe. I—I want to *fly*! See that bird going up, up. He will get away beyond the clouds—far above the top of the mountain yonder. I want to be like him, or something, I do not know what; don't you, Willie?"

"Yes; though ambitions are not for one like me; but you will be something besides 'little Phebe,' by and by. I see it in your beaming face and deep dark eyes; while I must always be 'poor little Willie,' nothing else. I have for a long time been watching you, and reading my destiny of loneliness and utter dreariness in your strange, mysterious words, and knew that they all came from a heart that would never be satisfied with the[72] plodding life where *I* must remain. Two paths are open to us, and I can even now see that they must branch off from each other. O Phebe, hard as it is to be as I am, I would not hold you, little bird, from your upward flight; but just think what a terrible night my future will be without my little Phebe! Then I shall have no sweet sister to comfort and cheer me when out of patience with myself and cross because of my infirmity. And I shall not be your own Willie as now. It is wrong, I know, to feel so, but I cannot help it! It is bitter enough to know that I must lose you, but your love, little sister, how can I live without that?"

Phebe was taking a seat beside him, where he had made room for her while speaking. And, without answering his moan of anguish, she clasped her arms about his neck and kissed his pale face over and over again.

"Love you?" she exclaimed. "I shall always love you. I do not believe at all in those paths you have been telling about. What would I want to go off in another for if you could not follow me? No, no, Willie, I would not fly away up into the clouds without you; or be something that I so long to be, for I always want to be your little Phebe—nothing else. I was only thinking while I sat here and saw Rover draw you out of sight, how *I* wanted to go off somewhere! and then I thought of the *waves*—how they used to talk to me—and just then, Willie, the patches fell down

on the water, and a strange feeling came over me; but it is gone now, and I want to stay with you. Did not Mother give you to me and say that I must never leave you? You are my own Willie, just as you always will be." And with one more kiss she took the^[73] reins from his hand and gave the order for Rover to proceed.

"Ha! ha! ha!" came to them from the thicket near where they had been sitting, and at the same time two large, wild eyes peered through the opening a pair of thin bony hands had made in the thick foliage.

"It is Crazy Dimis; don't be afraid," said Willie, as his companion gave a startled look; "she has been at our house many times when I was a little boy, and she will not hurt any one. She has escaped from her imprisonment as she used often to do, but they know she is harmless."

The figure of a woman, tall and straight, but very plainly clad, now stood before them.

"It is wonderful sweet to love, isn't it silly children? Kisses are like honey—good on the lips; but they kill sometimes. Ha! ha! Waste them! throw them away, silly children. They'll be bitter by and by. It's coming—coming! Don't I know it? Kisses are like candy, mustn't eat too much, little fools! Beware! the roses will fade and the thorns are sharp! They'll prick you! Don't I know? Flowers are not for everybody—plant cabbage! Ha! ha! Crazy, am I? *He* said so, too. But it was the adder's tongue that poisoned *my* life. *His* love—*his* kiss. Beware! Remember I tell you, *beware!*" and with a bound she darted again into the thicket and was lost from sight.

Willie had taken the reins from his companion as this unwelcome apparition appeared, but as she vanished Phebe exclaimed:

"What a horrid creature! What makes her talk so strangely? *Who* is the one she spoke of? Do you know her?"^[74]

"Mother said she was once the brightest, prettiest girl anywhere around; but her husband disappointed her, and was unkind. It was this, I believe, that made her what she is. There used to be much good sense in what she said—shrewd, cunning, and not wholly gibberish. But let us hurry home; Fanny may want you."

"Flowers are not for everybody. Did she mean me, Willie? Her words make me shiver!"

While yet speaking they came round to the kitchen door, where Fanny met them. Something had evidently gone wrong, for she was flushed, and her step was quick and prophetic. She had many cares, and her temper had not grown sweeter by their constant pressure.

"You might as well have staid out the rest of the morning, and let me do everything," was her first exclamation. She was hurrying past, and did not, therefore, wait for a reply.

"Never mind," said Willie, in a low voice, as he saw the flash of anger dart up in his companion's eyes. "Take off Rover's harness and hasten around to help her about the dinner, will you? I will go and read, and perhaps think over what poor old Dimis said until you have got through. But promise me," he continued, playfully; "don't you think of her or a word she said, for it is not true."

"Perhaps we may better do as Fanny suggested, and go out for the rest of the morning. I wish we could." Willie smiled and wheeled himself into the house.

There were busy hands in the kitchen until after the dinner hour that day, but no cheerful word or kindly act were thrown in to lessen its tediousness or lighten the irksome burdens of the[75] unwilling Phebe. The face upon which she looked was cold and hard, and a sort of oppressive bustle seemed to fill the very atmosphere. The knives were to be scoured and the potatoes washed for the noon meal, and her old dislike of this work had in no degree left her since she was the "good-for-nothing child" away in the fisherman's cot by the sea. The departed mother had often laughed at her aversion, and shielded her from its performance, but not so with the thrifty Fanny. Indeed, Phebe imagined that these were reserved for her for the reason that she "hated" to do them, and this morning they seemed more distasteful than ever before. It was with no very good grace, therefore, that she went about her task, and as she stood by the window with the unpolished knives beside her, she thought of her who was sleeping below the garden wall, and wondered if "she knew what she was doing, of her impatience and anger." And then the crazy woman's gibberings came back, "Flowers are not for everybody;" and "the thorns are sharp, little fools."

"I hope you will get them done in time to set the table," were the quick, sharp words that broke in upon her reverie, and brought in her gaze from the far-off to the labor before her. The door was open into the sitting room, where Willie was amusing himself with a book, and Phebe called out, "I don't like to scour knives and wash potatoes, and I *won't*, either. Do you remember it, Willie?" she laughed.

"Well, I guess you *will*," retorted Fanny. "I'd just like to know how you expect to get a living if you are going to do nothing except what you want to do. You are no better than I am, and I want[76] you to do this every day; so keep to work at it, and not be looking out of the window."

Phebe turned, but caught sight of Willie's uplifted hand of warning just as a bitter retort darted to her lips, and for his sake she smothered her rage and resumed her hated labor. She did not enjoy any kind of work, and never hesitated to express her dislike for it. Perhaps, had circumstances altogether different from those that had surrounded her brightened up each compulsory service; or a word of love or praise been dropped now and then over the little burdens, it would have been otherwise. But she was a dreamer, a child with inborn fancies, possessing a soul where poetry and beauty reigned as twin sisters, growing and thriving upon each other's life, but she knew it not. She was only sure that her heart bounded in the sunshine of genial associations, and sank with equal velocity beneath the clouds of depressing influences. A cold word, a frown, would fill her soul with gloomy shadows for many hours, unless a warm sunbeam from some loving heart came to drive it away. Kind and cheerful as our little heroine usually was, there lay coiled up in her nature a demon of anger which sprang forth at every provocation with the fury of ungoverned passion. Poor child! It had goaded her long for one so young, and many times she had struggled to resist its power, but it proved stronger than her will. Love alone can subdue such natures, while opposition only feeds and nourishes their faults.

"Get out of my way!" exclaimed Fanny, as Rover was leisurely crossing her path, while a sudden movement of her substantial shoe gave a new impetus to his velocity. Phebe saw it, and[77] her heart bounded with indignation. Dropping her work she darted forward, and throwing her arms around the neck of the noble dog exclaimed vehemently: "Why didn't you bite her, Rover? she shall not kick you!" A blow from the enraged Fanny, and a command to return to her work silenced her for a moment, then with the fierceness of a tiger she sprang upon her antagonist and dealt blow after blow upon the astonished Fanny before she had time to recover from her

surprise, or to use her powers of defence. In a moment more, pale with anger and fright, the child was torn from her position by superior strength, and forced into her own little chamber with the command "not to leave it until she received permission." Here was a new feature in home affairs.

"This child, this *pauper*, shall go where she belongs! The poor-house is good enough for such as she! At any rate I shall not have such a wild-cat beneath *my* roof a great while!"

Willie listened to the ravings of his sister, while his heart throbbed with unconcealed emotion.

"Yes, and *you* uphold her no doubt! You pity her and think she has been greatly wronged—but it makes no difference!"

"I *do* think, Sister, that had you sought for love you would have found it, and love worketh no ill to his neighbor."

"Love! I *don't* want her love or *her* either! To confess the truth I am worn out with her and she must leave—that is all!"

"I know very well that you do not like to have me advocate Phebe's cause, but did you ever notice that her exhibitions of anger only seemed^[78] to be the echo of your own? I have watched her, Sister, with the most intense interest when laboring under personal difficulties and perplexities, and I have seldom seen her lose her patience under any trial. In all the years we have spent together she has never grieved me by an ill-tempered word or gesture, because *I* never gave her one."

"So it is all *me*, of course! I must of necessity stand sponsor for my own sins and her's too!"

"No Fanny, but I would be plain. You *are* too stern and cold, and at times unjust! You forget that she is a child."

"I have heard *enough*—she must leave the house!" So saying the enraged Fanny left the room, the door closing behind her with a prophetic firmness which Willie well understood.

Phebe sat alone in her chamber until the golden twilight settled down upon the waters of the little lake and tinted the tree tops that cast their long shadows out over its bosom, and watched the "lights and shades" which chased each other down the hillside and over the meadow until they rested on *two* graves just beyond the garden wall.

"My mother! O, my mother!" gushed up from the overflowing heart. "Would that I were beside you! You did not hate me—you did not make me so wicked!" Tears choked her utterance and blinded her vision. Hours passed and then a gentle tap was heard on her door, but she did not move. There had been no steps on the stairs and well did she know who was pleading outside to share her sorrows.

"Phebe, may *I* come in? It is your own Willie—come and open the door if I may enter!" *That*^[79] voice never pleaded in vain. Now it sank down into the wildly throbbing heart as a soft lullaby, soothing every angry passion and illuminating the dark chambers of her soul with the sweet promises of peace.

The door was opened and Phebe returned to her low seat by the window without a word. Willie was soon beside her, sitting, on account of his infirmity, at her feet; his calm blue eyes swimming with tears were fixed intently upon her face, but she apparently did not heed him.

"Will you not speak to me, Phebe? Let me look into your eyes—there is no anger there for *me*! Nothing but love, I am sure of it! I have read it there so many times, but let me read it there once more—may I not?" The arms of the child were thrown about the suppliant's neck and her tears fell fast as she kissed his pale cheek.

"I am so wicked, Willie! I wish I were good like you and loved everybody. *You* never make me angry, but Fanny always does. I can't help it!"

"Phebe, I love you. What would my life be if you were away? Think how long the days would be with no one to talk to and no one to say 'I am so sorry' when sad. In a few years at most Willie will be out there by the side of Mother, and until then I must creep about just as I always have done; but I can bear it if I have you to cheer me," and clasping her to his heart he was not ashamed that his tears mingled with hers.

"I am so sorry, Willie!" she sobbed at length. "I heard Fanny say that 'I should not stay here.' I did not care then, but O, I cannot leave you. O—I will be very good! If Mother was only here^[80] I think I could do anything—but I am so wicked!"

Darkness had settled down upon the occupants of that little chamber when Fanny called: "Willie, *your* supper is ready! Come down immediately and let Phebe stay where she is!" The child darted to her feet and hastened to open the door.

"Fanny," she said, with a slight hesitation; "I want to stay here, but won't you let me ask you to forgive me? I know I am very wicked but I will try to do better!" The stern, cold Fanny hesitated only a moment, and then without a smile of encouragement or a cheering caress *agreed* to the proposition and promised to let her remain for a while until she had tried her once more. "Now come down to supper," she continued, "for I am in a hurry to get my work done!" Was *this* forgiveness? A balm to heal the wounds of injury? Poor, sin-sick soul! Did thy heavenly friend ever look so coldly upon thy penitence? When did He ever pour the "gall of bitterness" into the wounds of a humiliated heart? Small would be the reward of "human justice" if the intercessor did not continually stand between us and our petition, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

"You are a noble girl!" exclaimed Willie as Phebe returned to her seat by the window. "I will leave you now; you may come or stay as you choose—all will yet be right."

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES IN THE COTTAGE HOME.

Be kind to the child! Build with great care and skill the foundations upon which is to be reared a life whose influences are to reach into the ages that have no end. There is no living by one's self, and the great net-work of human existence may be warped and misshapen by *one* chilling neglect or a palpable wrong! Even so does the individual life often become marred beyond remedy when

it is tender and susceptible to the guiding hand. There are natures so finely and sensitively constituted that every rude blast twists and bends the silver wires of the organization until the music is dead, and the case, although polished and beautiful to the eye, stands a wreck of what it should have been. Such were the surroundings of our little heroine. For fourteen years she had been the child of "circumstances," her days filled up with tears and laughter and her nights with idle dreams. No mother's love had ever twined itself about her young heart to nourish and foster the tender plants of sweetness and purity which was to make her life beautiful with their variegated blossoms, or root up the entangling weeds with which she must ever after contend. Mrs. Evans had indeed been kind to her as the "companion of her afflicted boy," as she would also have been to[82] a pet kitten or anything that would have added to the happiness or comfort of her child. Yet she did not fail to perceive when her vision began to grow dim to the world that the "casket" which had been thus opportunely cast at her feet contained jewels which were worth securing. The last few days and weeks of the only one whom her heart ever claimed as *Mother* left their impress on her soul which never faded away. It was a taste at least of that love for which she had so often longed—such as a child must have or be miserable! But even that was all over now. True, Willie had been her dear brother ever since, her comfort when sorrows overshadowed her, her help through scenes of trouble. But a cloud darker and denser than any of its predecessors was spreading itself over them both. Sad news had come to them from over the sea—the far off dark, dark sea. Alone they sat together in the doorway one evening where the last rays of the setting sun came and played about their bowed forms, caressing their damp cheeks; but for once they were not heeded.

"We are orphans now, Phebe—poor, lone *orphans*! Never did I feel the miseries of my decrepitude as now! I am helpless, and *who* will take care of you? The thought doubles my sorrow! I ought to be a man and comfort rather than to add to your depression; but I am a weak, helpless child, even more so, my sister, than you to-night." Phebe raised her head from her hand where it had been resting and fixed her large eyes upon the pale face before her.

"Willie, do *I* look like a child?" she asked. "It has not been twenty-four hours since we received[83] the sad news that our father had been swallowed up by the great sea I love so well; still he is not dead to me, but has only gone where *I* in my childish fancy so longed to go, therefore I cannot 'make him dead;' he's only resting while he calls upon me to act! Willie, I am no longer a child, for every hour has seemed to add a year to my life since that letter came! I am strong, and thanks to you and the dear ones who have so long sheltered me from the storms, I have a little stock of knowledge to begin my future with; I shall act." Her gaze had wandered off to the golden clouds that were hanging over the little lake as she spoke, and a look of firm resolve stole over her features.

"I see my fate written upon your face!" replied Willie mournfully. "How can I endure the lonely hours, the lengthening days? But I am ashamed of myself. Somehow the fates have turned against me, Phebe, and have taken away my years to add them to yours. I will not be so childishly selfish. But Sister, you will need a friend. How can you go out into the world alone?"

"I *have* a friend! Do not, I beg of you, think me so destitute Willie. Have you forgotten Crazy Dimis?" A low subdued laugh escaped the lips of both at the suggestion and mingled itself with the soft evening breeze. Suddenly they started for a voice harsh and cold as a winter's wind was near them which chilled the soft melody and sent it back to their wounded hearts in a low sad wail. It was Fanny who spoke.

"Your grief must have been terrible to have been forgotten so soon!" she exclaimed. "You can go in, Phebe, and take care of the supper table if[84] you have got through crying," she continued bitterly.

Phebe arose without a word. For once her anger did not rise to goad her. Could it be that her power over this her greatest enemy had gained strength also with her seemingly multiplied years?

Fanny took the seat that was just vacated by the side of her brother.

"What is Phebe going to do?" was the abrupt question.

"What would you like her to do? I suppose she will be willing to be guided by your counsel."

"Humph! Willing! It would be the first time that she was ever willing to do anything I wanted her to do, and I have not the least doubt that she would be more unwilling to accede to my wishes at this time than ever before, for I want her to leave the house! *You* do not need her now for you are old enough to amuse yourself I should think, and *I* certainly do not! There is to be a new master here before the fall work begins, as I suppose you know." The last remark was made in a lower tone of voice and Willie readily understood that she referred to her approaching marriage with Mr. Hopkins, a young farmer living a few miles away; but as he made no reply she continued. "I do not suppose he would be pleased to have *too* many incumbrances, and Phebe is old enough and able to take care of herself."

"Perhaps he would like to have me also vacate his prospective premises," responded the brother with an unnatural bitterness in his voice.

"O, no! He is well aware that *you* can do nothing for yourself and has made no objections to *your* remaining." [85]

There were sleepless eyes wet with weeping that night beneath the homestead roof as the midnight hour spread over it her dark wings, but it bore away on its upward pinions the trusting faith—the childlike submission of *one* heart at least to Him who is ever a "father to the fatherless ones."

"Now for a long ride down by the pond and along the sandy beach, where we can see the lilies on the water, and if the boat is not fastened I will gather a few for you once more," prattled Phebe, as on the ensuing forenoon she walked by the little wagon (which was now too small for both), as was her usual custom when the morning's work was done.

How could Willie ever forego these pleasures? He would continue his rides, drawn by the faithful Rover, who had seemed to enjoy these excursions equally with his young master and mistress. But Phebe always walked by his side, now patting his soft coat, or gathering flowers for him who could not skip about so blithely and easily as did she, or now and then helping the faithful Rover over the rough places, praising and caressing him for his valor and strength in overcoming difficulties. Happy trio! And was it possible that all this must end?

"Have you forgotten, Willie, what my true name is? You have not called me Lily-Pearl for a *long* time," she remarked, as they came in sight of the pure white blossoms that dotted the surface of the lake. "I shall never forget it. See, Willie, that beautiful lily yonder by that large leaf. How the

ripples that come sweeping around the sandbar keep tossing it up and down, never allowing it to be quiet a moment. O, it really makes me tired[86] to look at it. Yet that is *me*, Willie! That is 'Lily-Pearl!' I am going to get it for you to keep. When I am gone, and you look at it, think that I am no more 'little Phebe,' but your own 'Lily,' who will never forget or forsake you, my brother." Saying this she bounded into the little open boat, and with accustomed dexterity soon made her way to the point designated. It was no unusual labor for her willing hands, it being one of her greatest amusements when the little pond was decked with these fragrant blossoms to gather them.

Willie watched her for a moment, as she glided away from him, and then his coming desolation swept over his soul like a flood, and her form was hidden from his sight.

"See, Willie, I have it!" she exclaimed, as she held up the coveted treasure, exposing the long, smooth stem, by which, as she said, the mother pearl held it fast. "It came near pulling me in. Did you see me, Willie?"

But he did not. See her? How could he through all those blinding tears that came bubbling up rapidly from his bursting heart? He had crept from his seat in the wagon and made his way to a grassy knoll close by, and there beneath the shade of the old oak tree where they had often sat together he gave free vent to his emotions. The sky was calm and blue above him, and here and there a soft, fleecy cloud floated through the clear sunbeams of the July morning; the lake, beautiful in its gorgeous frame-work of hills and woods, lay spread out like a mirror, upon which the rays danced and sported close to the water's edge, penetrating the shadows, and lulling the murmur of the leaves, throwing over the prostrate figure of[87] the weeping boy a net-work of lights and shades from the branches above him. Phebe had seen him from the boat, and in a moment more was standing beside him, her heart throbbing with sympathy and grief. She had thought to keep away this dark shadow for awhile by her merry words, but it was over now; and throwing her arms about his neck, she exclaimed:

"Willie, my dear brother, do not feel so badly. It is true, I must go and leave you for a time, but you are mine—all I have to love and work for. What do I care for any but you? Yes, I must go. I heard what Fanny said last night, but it was no more than I have heard before, or than I expected. Yet it makes me strong. I can leave you now, but only for a little while. We will not be separated long. *I* will come to you. Our mother gave you to me, and I promised to cling to you. O Willie, you shall see how I can work, how much I can accomplish! I will do more than was ever done before me by a 'cast-away.' Do you not believe me?"

Putting her hand under his head, she turned his pale wet face up to her view. He did not try to prevent her, but lay quietly as she placed him.

"Look into my eyes, Willie. *I* am not weeping. It seems to me I can never shed another tear. I feel so strong! The future, Brother! O the future! What a great huge painting it seems! But it is not full yet. *I* shall do something there; *my* hands will help to color it. Yes, *I*, little Phebe."

"I do not doubt it. There is a destiny for such as you. A mission awaits you. I will be more brave, more manly. You could not remain with me. A higher position than the partnership with[88] a cripple or hostler to a big mastiff is meted out to you."

A smile for an instant broke over his clouded face, and Phebe laughed outright.

"Give me the lily," he said, at last, reaching out his hand for the coveted treasure. "We will divide it. You shall have the long smooth stalk while *I* will keep the flower. Henceforth you are my lily, sweet and precious to me; while *I—I*—well, I am nothing but the withered, crooked tendril seeking to wind itself about your loving heart."

She darted from his side before the last sentence was finished, and her companion following with his eyes her light, buoyant figure, saw standing on an elevation of ground not far off, the well known form of Crazy Dimis.

"I have found a double blackberry," she called, holding up something between her long, bony thumb and finger, "come and see it."

Phebe went to her.

"Those are not double, Aunt Dimis," she exclaimed.

"Don't two make a double? Put them together and then they do—there! It's a good omen for you, silly child. Make them double, help the time. We must help. Ha! ha! And help Fate! Don't *I* know, child? Fate is waiting for you! Go and help her make omens. But make them good! Ha! ha! *I* didn't but I will. Silly fools. Cry and love; by and by it will be love and cry. Don't I now? Go back to *him!* *I* don't want you." And with a bound she sprang over the fence and was lost in the thick underbrush of the honeysuckle swamp.[89]

Phebe called loudly after her but she was not heeded. She wanted to ask her about a certain good lady, Mrs. Ernest, for this same half-crazed gibbering woman had awakened an interest for Phebe in the heart of Mrs. Ernest, and it was no idle jest when she told Willie that "Crazy Dimis" was her friend. She now returned slowly to her companion, who was watching her.

"What did that crazy creature say to you?" he asked, somewhat impatiently. "Nothing good, I know."

"Yes it was. She told me to go and help Fate. I suppose she meant to have me fill up that picture I was telling you about, and I must go. To-morrow I shall start. Do not look at me so! you shall know all—everything I do or hope to do; and I shall come to see you often. Mrs. Ernest has promised to help me all she can, and I think I can make her my friend. It will be only a short run for Rover, and you must ride over there often—as often as you would like to hear from me, will you?"

She kissed his white forehead, then giving a low shrill whistle, which the faithful dog well understood, she said: "We must go home, for it is time to help get dinner."

In a moment more Rover with his wagon came up in good style, and they started down the path which wound around by the meadow brook through the clump of pine trees which stood as sentinels over the two graves beyond the garden wall.

"How I wish Father were sleeping there instead of beneath the waves," cried Willie; and no other word was spoken. What wonder? How soon the paths were to branch off from each other! Already the lonely cripple felt the shadows creeping over[90] him that were surely to cover his dreary pathway as he wandered on alone. His heart was full of these sad forebodings, and he pressed the memento of his helplessness more closely in his hand as the spirit of rebellion for a

moment arose to goad him. Then "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" came as a soft and gentle whisper to his soul, and looking up as Rover halted by the kitchen door he said mildly: "We shall all come together again, Phebe."

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT INTO THE WORLD.

"There! That is the *third* time I have called that girl this morning! She can lie in bed now until she gets tired of it! It is so provoking! And after telling her last night that I should want her early. I am out of all patience!"

Willie could not suppress a smile as this volley of indignation greeted him upon entering the breakfast room on the morning following the scenes related in our last chapter, although his heart was sad, but he made no reply and Fanny continued: "I *had* made up my mind to let her stay a while longer; perhaps through the winter, for after all it is hard to be sent out into the world to earn one's own living! Besides, *she* would never get along! No one would have patience with her, for work she will not! And how can a poor girl get her living if she will not work? But it is all up now! I can't and won't support her for nothing!" Fanny's rapid step and the brisk rattling of the breakfast dishes kept up all the time an active accompaniment to her words as she continued talking while preparing their early morning meal.

Willie listened to it all as he sat by the window and looked out upon the dewy grass and took in the soft beauties of the variegated landscape that^[92] lay stretched out before him, over which the first rays of the summer sun came gently stealing, driving back the dark shadows into the thick woodland upon the hillside. He then opened the window. There was music in the maple trees near where the robins had built their nests—there was fragrance in the cool fresh breeze that came and fanned his troubled brow. Just outside the yard the hay-makers stood with laughter and jest while they whetted their glittering scythes preparatory to their daily labor, while all the time their brown faces wore the pleasant smile of health and contentment. Poor Willie! He could only sit and look at them and pray for patience and resignation.

A remark from Fanny recalled him, and he replied: "I would go and call her but it would be useless for she is not here!"

"Not here? What do you mean? Has she gone?"

"Yes, she has gone, and it is my opinion Sister that you will miss her nearly if not quite as much as *I*."

"Gone! The heartless creature! This is all the thanks one ever gets for taking care of a good-for-nothing nobody for years! It is pretty pay now to clear out just as she *might* have been of some use, and without a word too!"

"You must have forgotten all you have been saying to her ever since we received the sad news of Father's death," replied Willie with some bitterness. "Still you are mistaken; she did not leave without a word. She has told me several times that she was going, although I could not believe it,

and when I came out of my room I found this^[93] letter under my door. You can read it if you wish when you have time."

Without a word she took it from his hand and read as follows: "I cannot *say* good-bye Willie, and so as soon as the gray dawn creeps over the mountain top I shall steal from this house and go—God only knows where! I came here eight years ago a little strange child, leaving the first real friend in all my life far behind on the road to grieve at my absence, and now I *go* leaving only you my brother to be sad because I am not here. *You* will miss me; and when I think how lonely you will be without your 'little Phebe' to talk to I shall shed many tears. O, Willie! It is dreadful to leave the only one who loves us to go off alone, but I shall find friends, I know I shall! Do not be unhappy. Tell Fanny sometime, if she *ever* inquires as to my welfare, that I should have been happier to-night if she had loved me, or at least had exercised more patience with my many faults. I know I have tried her. Somehow I am not like the other girls about here; they are satisfied, but *I*—yes, Willie, I want to fly—go up among the clouds or down among the pearls—I don't know which, but some spirit goads me on—God only knows where. I am looking out to-night upon the world where I am going for my new life with more fear and trembling than when in a little open boat I drifted away over a stormy ocean all alone. But it is better so. A hundred times I have shivered and shrunk before the storm of Fanny's indignation, and as I remember it, a peace steals over me even now with the great unknown future before me. I did desire to do all she asked of me, but I could not and so I must go!^[94] Perhaps she may yet think kindly of me, who knows? I am strong to-night dear Willie, notwithstanding this paper has so many tear-stains upon it! How a few days have changed me—no longer a child but a woman going forth, as Crazy Dimis commanded me, 'to make my fate, make omens.' So good-bye; remember what I told you you of Mrs. Ernest. PHEBE."

It was finished and Fanny handed it back to her brother without speaking. O how long that day seemed! The sun came out hot and sultry, drinking up the dew from the grass and withering the soft petals of the flowers; the locust sang his monotonous song in the shade and the mowers went busily on with their work, and the hours crept slowly by. Fanny was unusually silent; her busy hands seemed never to tire, but her face all day wore a weary, anxious look such as betokened thought.

It was late in the afternoon, just before the time for milking, that she came and seated herself on the lounge by her brother. Perhaps the memory of that mother who once sat there on just such a bright summer evening four years before came back to her, for it was then when she told Phebe never to leave her poor lame boy, always to love and comfort him. Who was to blame that the child was now an outcast, or that the poor motherless cripple sat there in that very spot lonely and sad? She did not speak for a moment as if ashamed of the womanly emotion that swelled her bosom. At last she said hurriedly: "What did Phebe mean about Mrs. Ernest?"

"She has told me that I could hear about her by going there occasionally."^[95]

"Why did you not go to-day?"

"I thought I would wait until to-morrow, then perhaps I might hear more," was the low reply. "She can have no definite plans as yet, but I will go in the morning."

"I will harness Rover any time for you," continued Fanny as she moved away to attend to her evening duties.

Willie dropped his head upon the pillow beside him and lay there motionless and still until the twilight shadows came creeping in at the window, covering him with a thick black pall. He could have wished that night that they might have buried him forever with their sombre folds, so harshly did life's greatest joys contrast with his overwhelming griefs!

Early the next morning Willie was on his way to the village drawn by the faithful Rover. It was a long time since he had been over that road alone, and at first he felt like shrinking from the task.

A carriage came and swept over the brow of the hill, drew nearer, then passed him. A lady occupied the back seat alone. She was a stranger but their eyes met. Hers so full of tenderness and pity—his bright with apprehension and suspense. He was sure that a tear glistened in her blue eye, but when he turned to look again she was gone. The driver he knew. The carriage belonged to the village hotel, and "Frank" always drove that span of grays. Once more Willie turned to look, and as he did so saw that the lady had bent forward as if to speak to him. "She knows how to sympathize with such as *I*," he thought, "for her expression was so kindly and gentle. Those eyes—they^[96] were so like my mother's. A deep, heavenly look as if wishing for something she had not yet received, which found its way into hers before they closed forever!" and a tear dimmed his own vision for a moment only; then his thoughts returned to the beauties around him and to *her* he was going perhaps to see again. The roads were fine and Rover was in excellent spirits, so that in a short time the village church loomed up in sight. Close by it was the parsonage—beyond the long row of neatly-painted dwellings surrounded with bright green shrubbery and a pleasant lawn reaching to the road, finally the hotel with its balconies and lofty cupola, which overtopped the principal business portion of the unassuming little town. To the farther store on the main street Willie was to go on an errand for his sister, but first of all he would call at the parsonage. How his heart bounded with the prospect of coming joy, then sank again as the uncertainty rolled over him. Where was Phebe?

And where was Phebe? That morning, with her eyes full of tears she had stood in the little chamber where she had spent so many pleasant hours and dreamed so many pleasant dreams; the room she must now leave, with all of its hallowed associations, its garnered memories, to prove the Father's unfailing promises of care and protection!

"You could not have forseen all this dear, dear Mother!" she mused as she turned to the window where the white marble stood so chill and comfortless in the morning shadows, "or you would never have placed your helpless boy in my care. But I must go. This pleasant cottage is my home no more! The flowers I have planted in the garden^[97] yonder—the bed of lilies these hands have tended so long for *your* sake must bloom on without me."

The first rays of the morning sun crept up from behind the eastern hills and rested as a sweet prophetic peace on the tree-tops that reared their stately heads above the lingering night shades, and taking the letter she had written the night previously stole softly from the room and thrust it under the door where Willie was sleeping all unconscious of the wretchedness that was wringing such bitter tears from her loving heart as she thought how he would miss her, and how lonely would be his morning ride down by the little pond without her. "Farewell!" she whispered, and then descended the stairs, stopping a moment to kiss the noble Rover and quickly passed on out in the world! The short past with its changes, its reachings and its longings were to be left behind, while the broad future with its hopes, allurements and ambitions lay before her. With a shrinking heart but firm tread she stepped into the untried path and walked steadily forward.

Someone has said that "the secret of true blessedness is *character*, not condition; that happiness consists in not *where* we are but *what* we are. Our lives resemble much the Alpine countries, where winter is found at the side of summer, and where it is but a step from a garden to a glacier." Our little heroine found this to be so. It had been summer in the little cottage, not all sunshine nor all storms, for the days were as ever changeful and the years scattered over her life their shadows and their peaceful calms. "Go help fate make omens" Crazy Dimis had said, and with many a firm resolve she had said to Willie, "I will do it!" There[98] was a world of mysteries before her out of which the "omens" were to be created, and little did she understand the way in which she was to be led. The perjured woman whose daughter had given birth to "Lily-Pearl" had listened to the whisperings of the serpent, and the great problem of justice was to be worked out in the ever changing adventures of "poor little Phebe," and now with a satchel in her hand she had left *all* she had known of love, and was alone upon the road where the cool morning zephyrs petted and caressed her. "My life!" she thought as she walked on towards the parsonage. "If we are God's children we need not fear the developments of His changing providences," Mr. Ernest had said to her one day while speaking to him of her future, and now these words came to her as bright and cheering as the rays of the morning sun, for both had driven away the darkness from her faith. Years after did memory return to this early morn to tread again the sandy road and listen to the chorus of the birdling's song, or watch with palpitating heart the silvery glories as they spread themselves over the eastern sky; and then return to the noonday scenes of an eventful life through which she had been guided.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UPPER ROOM IN THE HOTEL.

Mrs. Ernest while bustling about in her kitchen saw her visitor approaching, and with broom in hand came out to welcome him. He was no stranger here, and few ever came who received a warmer greeting.

"How bright and fresh you look from your early morning ride," was the good lady's salutation, and throwing down a piece of carpet on the damp ground stood patting Rover and chatting merrily all the while as Willie crept into the house.

"I suppose *I* am not to feel at all flattered by this early call, for already something tells me that Phebe is the object of your visit," she laughingly said, while following him into the house; "so I will turn you over to Mr. Ernest with all the indignation I can muster," and patting him on the shoulder she cheerily invited him to the study.

The occupant of the quiet room was stretched in an attitude of languid repose upon the sofa as they entered, but probably in deep meditation. When, however, he discovered who had intruded into his season of reveries, he arose with a face all beaming with smiles, and took the little extended hand in his own and placing an arm about his visitor lifted him with ease into a chair close by.[100]

"Now, Ella, you may go and give Rover that plate of chicken bones you saved for 'some hungry dog,' for he above all others deserves it."

Here was a happy home.

"There was always sunshine at the parsonage," Willie would say. If clouds ever came they were so effectually concealed that they never fell upon another. The brightest spot on earth—the place more to be coveted than palaces or posts of honor—is the peaceful, happy home, the nucleus around which fond hearts are gathered, where the compact of love remains unbroken only as death comes and steals away a link of the golden chain that binds fond hearts together.

"Is not Phebe here?" Willie asked after a few moments conversation.

"O no; she did not remain with us many hours; but she is not far away," replied Mr. Ernest, pleasantly. "I will tell you about her. There is a lady boarding at the hotel, an invalid, I believe, who has come to our village, as gossip tells us, after health,—happiness, rather, as I believe, for she seems very sad at times. I have called on her often, and at one visit she expressed an earnest wish for some one to read to her. I thought of Phebe at once, and when she came to us yesterday morning and told her story, of which, we were not wholly ignorant, I thought nothing could have been more *apropos*, and so I went over there with her. The lady seemed much pleased, and I have no doubt Phebe will be very happy there."

"I think I must have seen her when I was coming," interrupted Willie. "A lady passed me in the hotel carriage who had a sad, pensive look; I am sure it was she." [101]

"I have no doubt you are right, for she rides out every day. I wonder, however, that Phebe does not take the opportunity to run over here for a moment."

But she did not.

Willie stayed longer than he first intended, hoping to see her again, but finally started for the store on his errand, passing the place where *she* had found her new home without even catching a glimpse of her, although he sought diligently to do so. Had he known that she was then engaged in penning a long sisterly letter to him he would not have been so thoroughly wretched all that day and the next.

It was some consolation, however, that Fanny seemed so much interested in her now that she was away. She was minute in her inquiries on his return, yet did not appear *quite* pleased when told that Phebe was *only* to read to her new mistress.

"Worse and worse," was her exclamation, "she was good for nothing before, what will she be now?"

"We shall see," was Willie's quick reply.

But he was thinking how much he would enjoy being there to listen as she read. He was not mistaken in regard to his conclusions about the lady in the carriage. It was Mrs. Gaylord, in whom Phebe had found a friend and protector. She had taken rooms at the hotel only a short time before, having no other company than a young mulatto girl about Phebe's age, who seemed devoted to her mistress, and mild and affable to all, yet she answered very few of the questions that were put to her by the inquisitive.

"They had come from Virginny, and would go back dare when Missus had got nuff of dis 'ere [102] norf," was about the extent of the knowledge obtained from "Tiny" on any occasion.

Three weeks passed away and Phebe had not once seen "dear Willie." Mr. Ernest had told her of his frequent visits to the parsonage, and of the pleasure that would beam in his blue eyes as he received her letters from him; but no amount of persuasion could prevail upon him to make a visit to the hotel, which was much to Phebe's disappointment. She was always busy now. When she was tired of reading or the lady of listening, she was engaged with her needle.

"Young people are inclined to home-sickness if not employed," Mrs. Gaylord would say, pleasantly, and so Phebe was seldom idle.

During these seasons of occupation they had talked much. Phebe had told her all she knew about her early history, and her listener had many times laughed heartily at the recital, but not a word had she ever spoken of her own life. There was a dark cloud resting upon her, it was evident, for her companion had often looked up suddenly from her book to see the tears falling silently from the calm eyes, who would brush them hurriedly away as she said "go on;" and Phebe obeyed. At one time she smiled when detected, and drying her eyes she said, mildly—

"What is jealousy, little one? You have just been reading about it. What is *your* definition of the word?"

"Willie would say 'an unjust suspicion; a sense of imaginary wrong without proof,'" answered Phebe, hesitatingly.

She laughed now.[103]

"O you little novice! How far you are behind the times. That definition might have done for your grandmother, but it will never do for these modern days. I will tell you, child, what it is, or what it means now. It is a wail of despair which the heart gives over the loss of its dearest treasure. The anguish of its desolation when the fire of love burns low; the cry of woe when it sees the vacant chair in its most secret chamber, and desolation looks with hungry eyes out from among the shadows of its former trysting place! Does the poor heart murmur? Does it put on the sackcloth and the sprinkling of ashes? Love is not dead, but straying, *straying!* This is jealousy. The vacation of one heart for—for—well, child, *you* know nothing about it, and may you long remain in ignorance."

She bowed her head and wept long and bitterly.

Phebe moved the ottoman on which she was sitting close by the side of the agitated lady and laid her head upon her knee. A bond of sympathy drew them together. A chord had been touched to which the heart of each vibrated in unison. Desolation was creeping among the shadows in the secret chamber of both hearts, and the feeble wail of woe which came from the lonely hearthstones mingled in low, solemn cadence, and they two were united by these bonds of sympathy. A soft, white hand nestled lovingly among the braids of the young girl's hair as the bowed head still rested its heavy weight on the lady's rich dress, and from that moment a sweet confidence took possession of them both.

Ah! there is nothing so invigorating and comforting in this ever changing life as the sweet assurance[104] of reciprocal affection in the hour of despondency and gloom. A mother's kiss, a father's fond caress, soon dries the tear and soothes the pain of childhood, and can it be that their power grows less towards the children of accumulated years?

"Did I speak bitterly just now; my child?" the lady asked, after a long silence. "I hope I did not frighten you."

Phebe looked up into the sad face that was beaming now with a full glory of consolation as she answered:

"O no; I was not frightened. Even in my short life I have seen sorrow, and know well what it means. Ever since we have been together I have believed that something troubled you, and it has made me—"

"Made you what, my child?"

"Made me love you, O may I do this? Will you let little Phebe creep into your heart and find a resting place there? O Mrs. Gaylord, I am so lonely! Nobody but Willie—and he is lost to me now."

The large eyes were gazing with their far-off, mysterious look, which Willie had so often watched with a tremor of apprehension in his heart; but there were no tears in them. The wail was from the secret chamber, and the lady recognized it.

"Yes, dear," was her answering refrain. "You shall nestle cosily in this poor quivering heart if you desire it. I was once a lonely orphan like yourself, and I pined for a love I could not find. It is dreadful—this chilling desolation of life. At twenty I married, and was alone no longer. My yearning heart was satisfied, not because of the luxury that surrounded me, or the honors with which I was crowned as the bride of the rich young southerner. No, no. Sweeter by far than all of this was the assurance that I was loved. That was many years ago, when my face was fair and my cheeks covered with bloom. It is over now, and with my youth and beauty went the love which was more precious than all. *His* hair has lost its glossy hue and his step its elastic bound; but for these my heart has suffered no reaction, yet it bears to-day the scars of *many* wounds. Some are not yet healed, and memory often rends them anew until the tears *will* come trickling through the torn fissures. But I must not grieve you, my child. The world calls me happy, for it penetrates not the covering that my proud spirit has thrown over all, and I am willing it should be deceived. I came to this quiet village to gain strength to endure; when I have accomplished my object I shall return to my Virginia home. It is a bright spot to the looker on, full of plenty and repose for one whose soul has power to take them in; and to this home, my sweet comforter, I would take you."

Phebe started.

"Smother that refusal in those bewitching eyes, for I shall take none of it," she laughed. "You have just pleaded for my love. What good under the sun will it do you when hundreds of miles are piled up between us? No, no. We need each other. The days we have been together have made you a necessity to me. Do not answer me now," she continued, gently placing her white hand over the lips of her companion, as she saw them move for utterance. "Take a few more days to think of it. We have plenty of time. Talk to me now^[106] about this Willie, of whom you have spoken. You did not tell me that you loved him, but is it not so, my child?"

"Yes, I love him more and better than any one else. He is a poor cripple, four years older than I, and we have been together every day since his father brought me to him. His mother loved us both, and when she was about to die, she gave him to me, and told me never to forget or forsake

him. How can I leave him to go with you? He has been such a dear brother to me for so many years; *you* would love him, too, I am sure, if you knew him as well as I."

"How your cheeks glow, little enthusiast! Now let me ask, is your hero drawn by a dog usually?"

"Yes. I was sure you must have seen him during some of your rides for he has come to the village often since I have been here."

"I have met him only twice, but even these faint glimpses into his peaceful face takes away my wonder at your heart's bestowal. It was pity that caused me to notice him and long for another beam from the liquid eyes, and now that I know who he is I can but feel hurt that you have not invited him to our rooms. It would do me good I know to study that character and learn resignation from its teachings."

"May I? O—you do not know how much I thank you! I will go this very day to the parsonage, with your permission, to tell him. He may be there, when it is cooler, to hear from me; and *if* I could meet him!"

"Did I not say that it was *my* wish to study him for sake of the good it might do me?" and she kissed the glowing cheek of the young girl with a[107] passion unusual to her. "Then go at once if you hope to see him, but hasten back for I am too selfish to permit you to remain long away. It is lonely, darling, and I cannot understand how I ever lived without you."

"You are so good!" and Phebe pressed the soft caressing hand to her trembling lips.

Nothing is more sweet than to be guided into this realm of thought by the precious foretaste of the love that awaited her when the end should be reached. She had gone out into the darkness expecting nothing but chilliness and gloom, but instead she was walking "by the side of still waters" and there was freshness and beauty all along the way. Still a portentous cloud was floating in the clear blue of her gilded sky, for how could she ever leave Willie to go with Mrs. Gaylord to her southern home? The weeks were rapidly passing, and when the hot summer days had all flitted away there would come a change, and her life had received so many already! "Where would the next one take her?" As she stepped in front of the mirror for a moment a smile of satisfaction stole over her young face. The new hat Mrs. Gaylord had purchased for her was very becoming, as that lady had asserted, and she thought how it would please Willie to see her looking so well. He had often lamented during the last two years that it was not in his power to procure these little luxuries, and she went on her way with a happy heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE OPENING OF A NEW LIFE.

"And whether we be afflicted, it is for our consolation and salvation, which is effectual for the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we be comforted it is for our consolation; for as all hearts suffer, all have the power of consolation."

"Mrs. Gaylord had suffered, and out of the sad experience of her eventful life had come the power to administer to others." Such was Phebe's thought when on her way to the parsonage,

which stood in the suburbs of the village surrounded by its fresh green lawn that had always appeared so winning to the lovers of beauty, and peaceful to the seeker after "consolation."

Mr. Ernest also knew how to bestow this gift on the weary heart. His early days had not been filled with the bright things that rightfully belong to childhood, and his after years were those of toil and strugglings. He understood well how to apply the sympathies so consoling to those whose feet are torn with the thorns by the way.

Our little pedestrian was walking away from one minister of comfort to another who was equally skilled, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could keep her airy feet down upon the well-beaten track which ran along by the side of the[109] broad highway to the pleasant home of the village pastor, where she hoped to find Willie and extend to him Mrs. Gaylord's pressing invitation. Mr. Ernest had told her that he usually came in the early morning or in the cool of the evening, and now the sun was fast sinking down behind the western clouds. There might be a storm approaching, for the breezes were fresh and cool, and she could but think how the ripples were sweeping around the "sand-bar" and lifting the broad lily-pads among the rushes not far out from where the pleasant row-boat was fastened to the old oak tree. Should she ever glide in the little boat over the lovely blue waters again? And then, when the stern old winter had thrown his coverlet of ice across its throbless bosom, when the lilies were all asleep in their cozy beds, what delightful rides she and Willie had enjoyed on its smooth surface as Lloyd Hunter drew them on his large comfortable sled. Was all this gone forever? She reached the door, and as no one was in sight, stopped a moment while her thoughts went on.

Willie was not there, for his visit had been made in the morning.

"I am going by there to-morrow."

Phebe's eyes brightened.

"May I go with you? Mrs. Gaylord will not let me walk so far, it not being 'lady-like,'" she smiled. "She has invited him to our rooms, and I am so anxious."

"Certainly, my dear; but be all ready, for I have an engagement at nine, eight miles away."

There had been no need for this last suggestion, for Phebe felt quite sure that with such a prospect before her she could not sleep at all. Still, after[110] talking the matter over with Mrs. Gaylord, and getting her consent for the proposed visit, her heart felt a reaction at the thought of again meeting Fanny. It seemed long since she had been there, and the partition wall which had divided them while still together, had not been lowered by a single act, and now really appeared more formidable than ever when viewed at such a distance. How could she ever meet her?

When the morning sun sent his bright beams into her window she sprang from her bed with the question still unanswered.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Gaylord, putting her head in at the door at that very moment.

Phebe was surprised. Seldom did the lady leave her room before all of the rest had breakfasted.

"O, you needn't look so wonderingly at me," she continued, laughing. "I only thought I would tell you to put on your new white dress, as it is such a lovely morning, and then I want you to appear your best, for I know *he* will appreciate it," and she was gone.

"Well does she know how to be a comforter," thought Phebe.

How well she remembered at that moment the last walk she had with Willie down by the little pond, and his mournful wail of desolation as they talked of his lonely future without her!

The bell sounded along the hall telling all who desired an early breakfast that it was now ready, so hastening with her toilet, she opened the door leading to Mrs. Gaylord's room, and to her surprise found her also ready to go with her.

"I have had a new thought," she said gaily, "and have ordered the carriage. We will go together^[111] and take him out for a little airing. Rover, I have no doubt, will be much obliged to be excused for one day. Two miles and a half is a pretty long road for such a brute to draw so heavy a load."

Phebe made no answer, for she was a little disappointed. She had anticipated the walk back and the uninterrupted talk more than she had herself been aware of.

"Do you not like my arrangement?" queried the lady, artlessly.

Phebe expressed much pleasure at the prospect, and, come to think of it, "the new plan was preferable, as it would take away all embarrassment in the meeting with Fanny."

The carriage was at the door when the two were ready, and in a few minutes they halted before the parsonage to report the change. Then away they rolled on their delicate errand of pleasure and comfort.

Never had Phebe looked so fresh and pretty as now. Her plain hat of white straw sat jauntily on her heavy braids of jetty hair, from beneath which her dark eyes shone with a new brilliancy, her dress, about which Mrs. Gaylord had been so particular, set off her well rounded form to the best advantage, and as she sat by the richly attired lady no one would have imagined that the two were mistress and menial. Some such thoughts must have passed through the mind of the young girl, for her cheeks glowed, and an air of worth if not superiority, sat with easy dignity upon her every movement.

"There he is," she exclaimed, as they came in sight of the white cottage among the maples. "He is waiting for us."^[112]

"Hurry Frank," said the lady, "he does not yet recognize you Phebe."

"Willie, dear brother Willie!" she called out as the carriage drew up before the gate, and in a moment she had darted down by his side, and throwing her arms around his neck said cheerily: "Come, Willie, Mrs. Gaylord wants to take you out for a ride! It is lovely, and Rover can have a rest!" His face crimsoned as he realized that strangers were witnessing their joyful meeting. Unperceived Mrs. Gaylord had approached, and holding out her hand said pleasantly: "Phebe was so selfish that she was going to have you all to herself but I concluded to defeat her plans. Will you be so kind as to go with us and spend the day at our rooms? We will try to make it very pleasant for you." All this was said with so much tenderness that it would have been impossible for the poor boy to refuse.

"Let me get your hat, for I see that you are all ready as usual," and Phebe forgetting her dread of the "frigid Fanny" rushed into the house, meeting that important personage on the very threshold.

"Good morning" was her cheerful salutation; "we are going to take Willie away from you for a few hours, and I have come for his hat."

"He has not been to breakfast yet," was the chilling reply. "I think you had better wait and give him time to eat."

"Perhaps it would be better," ejaculated Phebe as she passed her, hat in hand.

"In the meantime would you not like to go with me down our pleasant walk to the pond?" asked Phebe, as she came back where Mrs. Gaylord^[113] and Willie were conversing familiarly. The lady cheerfully consented and they were soon out of sight among the trees that skirted the meadow brook. When they returned, Willie was sitting by the side of Frank and his usually pale face was flushed with excitement.

"If you like we will go around by the old town road," said the driver as the rest of his company became seated. "It will be two miles farther back but it is cool and shady." "All right!" and the happy trio were rapidly borne away. Phebe had told her friend how her "dear brother" became so helpless and his sensitiveness in regard to it, and had more than once seen the tears of sympathy glisten in the fine eyes of the listener at the narration.

"His feet and limbs below the knees have not grown since he was a baby," she had said; "and of course they cannot bear the body, which is well developed. He can creep about very well, but is unwilling that any one outside of his own home should see him. When a mere child he has told me his manner of locomotion was to sit and *hitch* himself about, which gave him the appellation among the boys of 'hitch Evans' which so mortified his pride that he would not appear among them."

"Poor boy!" was the low response. Now, however, Mrs. Gaylord chatted pleasantly with him about the beauties of the landscape—the fading glories of the passing summer and of her own home in the sunny south, until as he said after, "I forgot that I was a mere cypher amid it all." At last they arrived at the hotel, and as Frank with his strong arms set him on the broad winding^[114] stairway he scrambled up to the top on his hands and knees, laughing as he did so because Phebe would wait for his slow movements rather than trip forward with Mrs. Gaylord, who wanted to see if Tiny had all things in readiness.

It was a delightful day to them all. Dinner was served in the upper room, and Phebe thought as she watched the glowing face of her brother that it was never before half so beautiful as now. Was it because Phebe was again near him? Or had the kind words and suggestions of his new friend aroused energies of which before he was not conscious? It was true that every moment had been filled with reading and conversation and it was all so new to Willie! "It is a fact," continued Mrs. Gaylord after Tiny had taken off the last dish from the table; "that many with far less brains and more inefficient than yourself have filled important places in the world's history. With exercise I do not see why your body should not become sturdy and robust. I have a friend in Boston who has a large clothing store and manufactures his own goods, and the great object of insisting upon your company to-day was to tell you that I will, if you desire it, bring your case to his notice, and if he favors my suggestions will let you know all about it."

"O—if I could!" came from his overflowing heart. "If I could only do something! I have always been told that it was no use for me to exert myself for I was helpless, and I had settled down as far as it was possible on that supposition."

"But you are not! Your present skill with the needle has its advantages and in a very short time you would be independent at least. Labor brings^[115] contentment and with it the years would not pass so laggardly." Phebe had come up behind him and was smoothing his brown curls with her gentle hand, and reaching up his trembling one he clasped hers tightly as he asked:

"Phebe, more than sister, can I do this? Will the time ever come when I shall cease to eat the bread of dependence? Tell me Phebe, for your words have ever given me strength; am I truly only the long withered stalk you hold as the emblem of myself?"

"No, Willie! Believe what Mrs. Gaylord has said and grow firm! You can—you will! I feel it in my heart you 'will go up the stairs' and leave some at the foot who do not now expect to stay there! I thought of it to-day and determined not to let you go ahead of me, and so kept close by your side." She laughed while he warmly pressed the hand he had been holding.

"You see," interposed Mrs. Gaylord, "Phebe and I have talked a little about this but I did not mention, even to her, the plans which for more than two weeks I have been maturing. Tomorrow we will go to the city, Phebe and I, and see what can be done, and if you will come to us on the following day all can be decided."

It *was* decided! Mr. Bancroft of Boston would do well by him; take him into his own home and see that his wants were attended to until he had become efficient in the business, and then give him a place in his establishment if he proved himself worthy.

"Worthy?" exclaimed Phebe; "he is noble—he will be all you can desire!"^[116]

"The hearts of young ladies are not always reliable in *business* relations," replied the gentleman with a mischievous twinkle in his bright eye. "However, Mrs. Gaylord, upon your maturer judgment I will try him, for really you have excited in me an interest for the young man; and I see no reason why he cannot be a master workman. *I* began life by coiling my feet under me on the bench, and I could have done it just as well had they not been incased in No. 9's." He laughed. "His Rover will be just the thing; he can soon be taught to bring his master to his work and return to his kennel for protection. And by the way, I shall be obliged to see that *his* animal has an 'ordinance' of its own. They kill dogs here so promiscuously."

"I had thought of that and concluded to set Pompy at work training another for his use as soon as I return home. You know he is famous at such work."

Willie received the report of their successful mission in the city with almost ecstatic joy. "Can it be true?" he thought. There would be difficulties; any amount of pride must be overcome—shrinking sensitiveness subdued—but he would try! To have aspirations—anticipations of success—what more could he desire?

In three days Mrs. Gaylord would go with Willie to his new home and Phebe was to accompany them.

CHAPTER XI.

"ROSEDALE."

Come with me, gentle reader, to the sunny south, to the land of orange groves, where the air is sweetest and the sky is bluest; where nature's lyre does not of necessity get unstrung or lose her summer melodies as winter breaks in with harsh, discordant notes to jar the ear and chill the rich, warm blood. Come to the land of flowers, of poetry, of dreams. Hard seems the fate which thrusts a "serpent into every paradise," in whose trail death follows, withering up its freshness and throwing a net-work of decay over its richest beauties. Yet such is the intruder blighting many homes in the cold regions of the bustling north, as well as in the clime where the sweet singers of the faded woods delight to pour out their winter's songs. Alas! that it should be so.

"Why, my Lily-Bell, how faded you look this morning! Worse than the rose you wore in your hair last night. Now let me wager something. What shall it be? Ah! my yesterday's letter against your's of yesterday, also, that I can divine the cause. Shall it be? Ah! that smile! It was like the morning zephyrs sporting with the withered petals of my 'Lily-Bell.' Let me kiss back its beauty, or breath some of my exuberance into it, which seems so worthless in its prodigality," and^[118] the lively little lady bent over the invalid's chair and kissed over and over again the brow of her companion.

"There! there! Look quickly! Two little rose leaves of unquestionably pinkish hue are fluttering in close proximity to those lovely dimples. But they have flitted away again. What a pity that beauty is so fleeting."

"I should think you would despair, dear Grace, of charming one into life who has been so long dead. The task would be more congenial to your taste, I imagine, to roll me up and lay me away in your casket of precious relics for memory to grow sentimental over in future years. Why do you not do it, *la Petite*? Own that you are weary, as the rest do, and thrust me out of sight."

"No, indeed; I have no passion for musty relics. Come, let us away to the drawing-room. It is nearly time for breakfast."

"Are you aware, cousin mine, of the compliments you have been showering upon me, 'fading, withering,' etc.? To tell the truth, I am quite unwilling, under their pressure, to appear before our brilliant guests, understanding now the full array of blemishes of which I am the possessor."

"I was only prattling, Lily-Bell. Nothing human could be purer or sweeter than that face of yours. Let me picture it," and kneeling on the carpet before her companion, she took a little white hand and pressed it lovingly in her own.

"No, no; do not call me silly. There, keep that smile. That little mouth was just made for such glowing sunbeams to play about. How I would like to tear away those lines of sadness which so mar its exquisite formation, and bring^[119] back the soft tints to those lips. Not that it would enhance its perfection, but it would denote health of body and heart. Then those eyes, so dark, deep and fathomless! I cannot look into their depths without a feeling of purity and holiness stealing into my soul, as though I had taken a peep into the land of spirits where there is no sin. What, a tear? Forgive me, darling. I should have known better. I too often pelt the door of your

heart's sepulcher with the pebbles of my thoughtless volubility. Thank you for that look of forgiveness. Now let me depart before I sin again. But, just a moment. Whenever I plant my tripping feet on sacred ground, bid me hush, begone. Check me, dearest. I want to be your sunbeam, not the east wind that blows up dark clouds; will you?"

"I will let you act and talk naturally. I like it. If at times you discover tears, it need not frighten or silence you. They seem as necessary to my existence as the rain to the summer flowers. Now begone; *I shall go out among the zephyrs awhile that they may freshen up these 'withered petals.'* Do not mention me below. Good bye," and Lillian, kissing her hand to her companion, glided through the open door and away out of sight.

At the time of which I write there could not be found in all Georgia a more charming home retreat from the cares and tumults of the bustling world than the home of the Belmont's.

"Rosedale" was what its name would seem to designate, a garden of roses. The house was built around three sides of a hollow square in the center of which a fountain sent up its sparkling jets above the cool twinkling shadows of the trees^[120] which surrounded it, up into the sunlight, catching its rainbow tints and falling back into the marble basin beneath, with a cool trickling sound that charmed the weary and enervated into quiet and repose, lulling the restless spirit into dreams of future peace and rest. The open side looked towards the north, and as far as the eye could reach the most charming landscape was extended. A thoroughly cultivated cotton field was near by, but it wound around to the right and was lost sight of behind the orange grove. On the left the white rude huts of the negroes were just discernable. On—on, the distant hills kept rising, over which the blue sky seemed to hover lovingly, giving to the bright green fields a darker hue, and to the little busy river below the terrace, a robe of its own soft color.

The constructor of this beautiful home had been sleeping for many years where the fir trees nestled together and the purling river sang all day its rippling song as if to hush to more silent repose the quiet slumberer. The widow, however, who had never laid aside her weeds, had well maintained her position. There was no plantation in all that region more thrifty or prosperous than this. It was a pleasure to visit Rosedale, particularly now, as Charles, the only son, had returned from his European tour as reputed heir and proprietor of the beautiful estate, and of course the spacious drawing-rooms were crowded.

One hour after Lillian had left her chamber she was sitting alone in a quiet summer house at the foot of the terrace looking dreamily out upon the landscape, listlessly plucking the roses which drooped about her and scattering their bright^[121] petals on the ground at her feet. Perhaps she imagined who would look for her there at that hour, still when the sound of a footstep fell on her ear she started and her pale cheek flushed for a moment; but when George St. Clair entered she smiled and extended her hand in welcome. He took it tenderly in his own and seated himself at her feet.

"You have carpeted the ground for me with rose leaves which these little hands have wantonly spoiled," he said with his usual gallantry. "O, Lillian, how cruel you are!"

"Do not George; I want to talk with you! I have spent a sleepless night trying to summon sufficient resolution for this interview. I feel that you deserve some share of my confidence at least, and it is sweet to know that after all this struggling I can give it to you."

"And I shall be glad to receive it, although I have a presentiment that it is my death doom!"

She bowed her head and her white lips touched his forehead. "I love you, George, with the purest sisterly affection, and in my poor heart your sorrows will ever find a sympathetic response. I feel that I shall give you pain by what I must say, and God knows how gladly I would save you from it if it was in my power. But bear with me; I have long loved another! You have surmised it—I now confess it! I was not yet fifteen when I met and loved Pearl Hamilton. You remember the time I went north to school? He was a Philadelphian by birth and a nobler, truer heart never beat! Could you see him George you would not blame me for what I did! I was a child—a petted, spoiled child! My wishes had never been disputed^[122] and why should they be then? In a very few weeks I became his wife. Do not look at me so wildly! It is *all* true—I *am* a wife!"

"Lillian, *why* have you deceived the world and me so long? Why did you not tell me this three years ago when I returned from Europe? Had you done so I would have spared you all of the torment my repeated proffers of love must have caused; and it might have been had I known the truth at that time less bitter for me to-day. But I will not chide you." The young man had risen to his feet while speaking and paced to and fro the full length of the arbor.

"Come and sit by me," she pleaded; "I have not yet finished." He obeyed. "It was not *my* fault, George, that you did not know all at the time, but let me continue my narrative. It will not detain you long. I was married, not however without the approbation of my aunt, with whom I resided. As soon as it was over a sudden fear took possession of me. I did not dare tell my mother. For the first time in all my life I had acted without her approval, and now I was fearful of her displeasure. It came at last. After much persuasion from my husband and friends I told her all. One bright day when Pearl was absent from home my aunt sent for me. I obeyed the summons, and there met my mother after a separation of more than a year. Her greeting was cold, her manner stern and commanding. It seems that she had been in the city three days, and during that time had accumulated legal documents sufficient to prove to *me*, at least, that as neither of us was of age our marriage was null and void. Her words overpowered me. But I will not picture the scene^[123] that followed. I was a *child* again obedient to her will. We left the city before the return of my husband, and I have never seen him since. I have written many letters, but have received none in return. Only *once* have I heard that he yet lived. My aunt wrote that he stood very high in the estimation of the people and remained true to his boyish vows. That letter was not intended for my eyes, but they saw it, and my heart responded to his fidelity. Thus to-day you find me what I am. Now, tell me, George, do you hate me for what I have done? I had not the power to break away from the injunction laid upon me. My mother said that in time I would not only regret but forget, my folly, and would thank her for placing me in a position to marry some one equal to myself. O George, think of these long years I have carried this aching, desolate heart. My whole being has seemed enervated. But this fresh proffer of your love has aroused me. I *am* a *woman*, and there is *injustice* in all this. *You* are good and noble; for this reason I have confided in you, breathed into your ear words that were never before spoke by me."

"Thank you! But, Lillian, what proof has your aunt that *he* remains true to his early vows? Do you think *any* earthly power could keep *me* from you were you *my* wife? And yet you tell me that you have not received one answer to your many letters."

"Did I not also tell you that there was *injustice* in all this? And more—I am fully convinced that there has been and *now is a criminal* wrong being enacted of which *I* am the subject." [124]

"It *cannot* be! O Lillian! henceforth I am your friend and your brother. Command me at all times, and I am your obedient servant. Henceforth my country only shall be my bride. I will wed her with good faith. I will suffer, I will die for her. But you will be my sister, Lillian. Call me *Brother*. Let that appellation, at least, fall from those sweet lips like the refreshing dew, for I feel that my heart is withering, and then I must go. I came to bid you farewell. New duties are calling me, and I am glad that it is so."

"God bless you, my brother," came like low, plaintive music to his ear.

For one moment he held her close to his heart, and gazed into the beautiful eyes where a world of love and suffering lay hidden; then imprinting a kiss upon her fair cheek fled from her presence. He was gone.

For a long time Lillian sat like one in a dream. Could it be? Had the friend of so many years really spoken the last farewell? How much she had prized his love; his demonstrations of tenderness; and now they were to be hers no more. How much it had cost her to sever this sparkling chain of gold which the heart of woman ever covets, God only knows. But the work had been accomplished at last, and the thought brought more of relief with it than pain after all. She had pondered it so long and shrank from its performance until the burden of her coming duty pressed heavily upon her; but it was lifted now, and a sense of peace stole into her mind as she realized the truth. Then there came a wave of apprehension that suddenly dashed its murky waters over her. "What would her mother say?" She had so long been [125] the submissive *child* in her strength and power that it was a marvel *how* she had dared to loosen herself from them or act for once upon her own responsibility. There was one reason why that mother had so insisted upon her wedding George St. Clair, but the daughter had never been able to obtain it from her.

"But I could *not*—O I could not," she exclaimed, rising and standing in the doorway of the arbor as she looked away down the road where her lover had ridden at full speed, taking with him, as she well knew, an aching heart, but one not more wretched than her own.

Raphael made the transfiguration a subject for his pencil, but died before it was finished, and how many of us will do the same? We begin life with glowing tints, but the sombre colors are demanded. We lay aside the brush as incapable of the task, and other hands interfere to spoil its designs or destroy the first intention altogether. Lillian's life had opened with a few glowing outlines, but a masterly hand had changed the subject, and the canvas was yet to receive its filling up, and God was marking the designs upon it for her; and, discovering this, she bowed her head with reverential awe before the solemn realization, and with a firmer and steadier step than had been hers for years, she walked to the house and entered her own room.

CHAPTER XII.

HEART'S SECRETS REVEALED AND UNREVEALED.

"He—he—he! Didn't Massa George make Spit-fire fly, tho'? Gorry! 'specks them bobolishenis 'll have to take it now, no 'stake. He—he—he!"

"O you get out. What you talk 'bout bobolishenis anyhow? Think you're mighty smart nigger, don't ye? It's my opinion ye don't know nothin'—that's all." And Aunt Lizzy moved away with the air of one who did understand and utterly despised one who was not as fortunate as herself, as the toss of her lofty turban perfectly demonstrated.

"Specks old woman, ye'd jus' like to know all what dis nig' duz. 'Mighty smart! He—he—he! Gals ain't 'speeted to know nothin' no how," and Pete, who was the especial favorite of his young master, turned away from his unappreciative auditor with all the dignity supposed to have been handed over to him with the last suit of young massa's cast-off clothing in which he was pompously arrayed.

Just then the soft folds of a white dress peeped out from behind the foliage of the "Prairie Queen," which scrambled about in native abandonment everywhere over the corridor on one side of the moss-covered terrace. Pete saw it as it waved in the noonday breeze, which was scarcely sufficient^[128] to move a leaf or flower, so stealthily it came laden with its burden of perfume. Discovering that some one was so near, the astonished slave was about to retreat in much confusion, when Grace Stanley stepped from behind the massive vine and stood before him.

Evidently there had been tears in her brilliant eyes that were unused to weeping, but they had succeeded only in leaving transparent shadows over their brightness. Sad traces, to be sure, of what had been, as well as presentiments of what might be. Her soft cheek wore a deeper tint than was usual to it, and her long lashes drooped lower, casting a sombre shade beneath them, and that was all. Yet the little heart, all unused to sorrow, throbbed beneath the pure white bodice with a wound it seemingly had not the power to bind up. She had come to Rosedale as free and joyous as the birds that flitted among the orange blossoms where the zephyrs were then gathering their sweets, and the future over which her feet would gladly tread decked with the brightest and sweetest flowers, among which the trailing serpent had never for a moment showed his treacherous head; but she had found that the blossom of hope will wither and the golden sunshine fade; and this consciousness had pierced her sensitive nature as a cruel dart, and the pain had made her cheek tear-stained and brought shadows of disappointment. She had met George St. Clair two years before her present visit, and thought him the most noble and true of all his sex, and who can tell of the dreams that came uninvited into her nightly visions as well as in her peaceful day reveries? Can you, gentle reader? There comes a day to us all when the^[129] kaleidoscope of every heart's experience gives a sudden turn as it presents to view more complex minglings of brilliant colors and perplexing designs than has ever been seen in any previous whirl, weird fancies through which we are all looking.

Grace Stanley had been watching their ever changing glow until the brilliant tints had imprinted their rosy hues over every hope and promise of her life; but on this very morning there had been another turn, and the sombre shades were now uppermost. He loved "Lily-Bell," and had flown from her presence a rejected lover, but without one word of farewell to her. "My country shall henceforth be my bride," she had heard him say, and who could tell what the terrible war might bring to them all. He was gone, and this fact alone was sufficient to sadden her future, still "no one shall know it," she thought as she walked across the garden and stepped upon the moss-covered terrace. "This hour shall be covered from sight forever, even from myself." She had grown calm as she stood there listening to the conversation just outside, and with a faint smile flitting among the sombre tints of sadness that were retreating from her pretty face, she bluntly asked the bewildered Pete—

"What did I hear you say about Master George?"

She had drawn more closely the thick veil of indifference, and suddenly her face was wreathed in smiles as she stood there looking into the dark, perplexed visage of the scared negro boy; just as flowers will grow and thrive in beauty on the graves where our idols lie buried.[130]

"O nothin', Miss Grace—nothin', nothin' at all. But he did make Spit-fire look buful, sartin, sure. *Gorry!* didn't she *go*, tho'? Dat's all, Miss Grace, sure dat's all."

"I thought I heard you say something about his going to shoot the abolitionists, Pete, was I mistaken? Do you know what they are?"

"Don't know nothin', Miss Grace, sartin. 'Spects dey be somethin' what hunts a nigger mighty sharp, 'cause I heard Massa Charles say he'll pop 'em over—dat's all, young missus, sartin, sure, dat's all."

"Well, Pete, let me tell you something. In my opinion you will be wiser than you are now, and that before many years; only keep your eyes open."

"Neber you mind, Miss Gracy. Dis nig' 'll keep his eyes peeled, dat's what he will."

Grace Stanley passed leisurely into the hall which ran through the main building leading to the open court beyond where the fountain was throwing its cool, sparkling jets into the sunshine. She did not heed it, however, but passed on up the broad winding stairway, meeting no one on the way as she ascended to the hall above. The sun had nearly reached his meridian glory, and the oppressive heat had as usual driven the inmates of that elegant home to their shaded retreats, where in comfortable *deshabille* they lounged on beds and sofas drawn up by the open windows, that perchance they might catch some stray breeze that would flit up from the orange groves or come from the woodland far away on the hill side.

"Grace," called a sweet voice through the half-open door of Lillian's room, "I thought it was[131] your light step I heard on the stairs. Come in here, darling. See how nice and cool it is." Grace obeyed, but Lillian did not notice the sombre shadows that were playing over the usually sunny face of her cousin, so absorbed was she with the hovering glooms that had fallen from her own passing clouds, and so she continued, pleasantly: "Perhaps you would like to make yourself a little more comfortable? Put on this wrapper, dear, and then come and sit by me, will you? I want to talk a little."

This was just what her companion did not care to do; still, remembering that her mission to Rosedale was to cheer by her lively mirth and vivacity her drooping cousin, she hastened to obey. Yet how was she to accomplish her task? Only three weeks had passed since her arrival, yet weeks so heavy with their weight of circumstance that her very soul seemed pressed down beneath their weight. Where now was her native joyousness? The cheering powers she was expected to impart to others? She must recall them. Yet she was chilled and oppressed; what was she to do? Act. Her retreating volubility could only be summoned again to its post through action, and it *must* be done!

"What a sweet little bouquet," she exclaimed, arousing herself to her work. "A delicate spray of *jesamine*, a few tiny rose-buds and geranium leaves. Do you know that I never could have done that? There is something so exquisite in their arrangement. Somehow as a whole they send an

impressive appeal to the inner senses, my 'Lily Bell.' There must be such a bubbling fountain of poesy in a soul like yours. Teach me,[132] dear cousin, to be like you." And the pensive speaker dropped upon the floor at the feet of Lillian, where she most delighted to sit, and drooping her head wearily upon her companion's knee.

Both were silent. One heart had that morning drawn back the rusty bolt on the door of its inner chamber and rejoiced to find itself strong enough to drive out at last, its long imprisoned secret of gloom that had made it so wretched through the revolving changes of many years, while the other was even then busy with the fastenings of the secret closet where the unsightly skeleton of her lost love was to be hidden from the world, from herself. Yet so doing might eat the bloom from her cheek and the joy from her buoyant nature. Why did she wish to be like Lillian? She had not asked even her aching heart this question, but all unconsciously to herself a response came up from the hidden recesses of her soul where a fresh grave had been dug by trembling hands and into it a dead hope had been lowered and closely covered, while the damp earth was trodden down hard about it, and the low whisper said, "If like her, this poor heart to-day would not be draped with its sombre emblems of bereavement." To be as she was, to possess the power to win. O the poor throbbing hearts all over the world that must keep on through the years with their wounds and pains, for in them are many graves hidden away among the cypress shades, where the passer-by can never spy them out; but the eye of the eternal one sees them all, and at every burial the tear of sympathy mingles with the liquid drops of bereavement that must fall on the stone at the mouth of the sepulcher which by and by will be rolled away at His command.[133]

Lillian aroused herself after a long silence.

"You give me more praise, darling, than I deserve," she said. "I am as incapable as yourself in performing these little touches of the fine arts which you see every day on my table. Black Tezzie can alone teach you the mysteries of a skill she so fortunately possesses. Do not look so incredulous, or I shall be obliged to prove it to you," she smiled.

"I am not unbelieving, sweet Lily-Bell," she answered, "but I confess that you have surprised me. I should sooner have suspected either of the other servants of such a gift as that ungainly biped," Grace laughed, but Lillian remained silent.

"This only proves that it is sometimes impossible to read the soul from the outside, my pretty cousin. I learned long ago that there was more beauty and a brighter reflection of heavenly glory shut up in that ebony casket, so unprepossessing in its general make-up, than in half the more graceful and elegant ones. But perhaps you are among the number who believe that these dark forms we see every day have no souls within them?"

"Why, Lily-Bell! what a suspicion. Still, how am I supposed to have any knowledge regarding the matter, seeing I have never dissected one of them?"

A gesture of impatience followed this remark, but her companion did not appear to notice it, for she continued:

"I believe that old auntie has as pure and white a soul as ever inhabited an earthly tenement. I have laid my head on her bosom with a deeper sense of rest than it was possible for me to obtain[134] elsewhere. Her prayers that have gone up so continually for 'de poor wee lamb' have

imparted more real comfort and hope to this tempest-tossed soul of mine than any that could have ascended from consecrated temples. No soul? What could I ever have done without her in this life? And my anticipations regarding the brighter one to follow are stronger to-day because of her."

Grace Stanley arose from her seat and walked to the window, while her companion did not fail to perceive that a cloud had risen and was spreading itself over her features. Not wishing to press the subject further, she remarked calmly:

"Some of our company are leaving to-day, and George St. Clair wished me to hand over to you his adieus, as he departed in great haste, regretting the fact that he was not able to meet you again."

At the first sound of her voice Grace had returned to her seat upon the carpet, and Lillian, taking the sweet face between her little hands, gazed tenderly into it, as she continued:

"You will pardon me, darling cousin, I know, but did you not hear our conversation in the rose arbor, at the foot of the lower terrace, two hours ago?"

The dimples stole out of the cheeks the soft, white hands of the interrogator was pressing so lovingly, and the light joyousness in her bright, sparkling eyes became dimmed, while a veil of crimson spread itself over it all. The head bowed low as it released itself from its imprisonment, and tears that had long been struggling to be free came now unrestrainedly.

"I do not chide you, darling; I knew you were not far away, for I had espied a portion of your^[135] white dress fluttering through a crevice of the vine outside of the trestle-work, and rejoiced that it was so."

"I would not have remained, Lillian, had not my dress become so entangled that I could not loosen it without revealing my presence. Believe me, cousin, I was not a willing listener. You will not doubt this?"

"Certainly not; and, darling, let me assure you that my heart is lighter for the circumstance, for we are confidants now. I have had such a longing to tell you all; but this one secret had become habitual to me. The very thought of revealing it filled me with a nervous horror. But it is over now, and by and by I want to impart to your tender sympathies half of the burden I have so long carried. You do not know how unendurable its weight has become. O Grace, it is dreadful to be obliged to endure for years the pains of a wounded heart. To feel its throbbings day after day without the power to claim a panacea from another's love."

Grace started.

"It must be true," she thought, "and am I to thus endure?"

Ah! little did she know how the first deep wounds, that seemingly "will never heal," can be soothed in some hearts, while in others no power can assuage the pain. Grace Stanley could forget, for the sunshine of her nature was salutary.

At this juncture Tezzie appeared in the doorway, and announced that "Missus wanted do young ladies to dress fine for dinner, for Massa Charles was coming back wid a strange gemman."^[136]

"Very well, we will be ready in good time," replied Lillian. "Now go and call Agnes to arrange my hair."

The dark, dumpy figure disappeared from sight, and Lillian, bowing her head, kissed again the pure white forehead of her companion.

"To-morrow, dear, I want your little heart to beat in sympathy with my own. Good by," and Grace left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MOTHER'S CURSE.

"There, Agnes, you may go now. How do you like my looks? Will I do to appear before the the strange gentleman?"

"Look, Miss Lily? Why you look like the buful cloud I seed lyin' so soft and still in de sunshine, honey. But I like the white dress more, for den you look just like de angels, waiting for de wings."

"That will do. You have imagination sufficient for a poet, Agnes, but you may go now."

She smiled as she waved her hand towards the door with a delicate movement, and she was alone. Only a moment, however, for the faithful servant had just disappeared when the door reopened and Mrs. Belmont entered the apartment. She was still graceful and queenly in her bearing, and her long black dress swept the rich carpet with an imperious air. Time had been very gentle with that fair face, touching lightly her brow with his unwelcome traces, neither quenching the fire in her dark eyes nor dulling the lustre of her glossy hair. Yet her regal head had a habit of drooping, as if weary of its weight of thought, and her lips became more and more compressed as their color faded and lines of anxious care grew deeper as the years rolled by.[138]

"I came to tell you that there was to be company at dinner."

"Not before? I understood Tezzie to say there would be a stranger here at lunch."

"It may be so; Charles is to bring home a college friend, I believe."

This would have been very unsatisfactory under some circumstances, but Lillian was not curious. As her mother entered the room she discovered that strange, wild light in her eyes which she had seen there many times before, and well knew that beneath it a hidden fire was raging. Mrs. Belmont had not once looked into the face of her daughter, but had seated herself by the open window, her elbow on the heavy frame-work, while her head rested wearily upon her hand. A soft, warm breeze came softly and caressed her with its perfumed wings, fanning her heated brow, and whispering all the time the sweetest words of purity and peace through the interwoven branches of the luxurious vine outside. In her heart, however, were discordant notes to which she was listening, having no ear for other sounds, were they ever so melodious.

"Lillian," she said, at last, "did you reject George St. Clair this morning?"

"I did, Mother."

"You did?"

"Yes, I did."

The daughter spoke quietly and calmly, but Mrs. Belmont arose hurriedly from the chair and stood before her.

Lillian did not quail before the burning look which was fixed upon her, but returned it with a determined gaze, out of which pity and filial affection beamed their gentle rays.[139]

"Child! child! this must not—cannot be! I command you to recall him. It is not too late. He loves you, and would, without doubt, overlook this unparalleled freak of foolishness in which you have been so unaccountably indulging. Recall him, Lillian; your whole future happiness depends upon it."

"You are mistaken, Mother; I never could have been happy had I accepted that true, noble heart, and given in exchange my poor broken and divided one, and certainly he never could have taken me into his great love after knowing me as I am, which he surely must have done, or I, at least, would have been eternally wretched."

"You did not tell him?" was the quick inquiry.

"I told him that *I was a wife*. That my heart was forever bound up in those matrimonial vows still unsevered, and that I loved him as a brother, and no more."

"You are mad! a fool! You know not what you do," and trembling with excitement she sank back on the chair from which she had risen.

Lillian did not speak or move, but tears came welling up through the freshly opened wounds in her poor heart, and filled her large pensive eyes with their bitter moisture.

Again the mother spoke.

"I feel disposed, just now, to enlighten you a little in regard to your future prospects if you persist in this silly sentimental mood, which you seem to think so becoming! I have striven hard to keep it from you and your brother for many years, and to surround you with every luxury your inherited station really demanded. More than this, I have planned, wrought, and guided with true maternal[140] skill and instinct the fortunes of you both in such a manner that you might, if you would, ever retain your enviable position in the social world, for which I have exerted myself to fit you."

"I do not understand you, Mother. Be merciful and enlighten me, as you offered to do."

"Yes, I will; but you will not find much mercy in it. Know, then, that we are not owners of this beautiful estate. On the contrary, it was mortgaged to the father of George St. Clair by your own father some time before his death. Think, if you can, of the long years of toil I have experienced since that time, and ask if you are right in pulling down about our heads the whole structure of prosperity and affluence that I have been so long in building."

"I discern your intricate plans, my Mother, and pity you."

"Pity me? Do you then persist in your folly? I have proven to you then that it is in your power to avert this ruin! Mr. St. Clair told me not long since that Rosedale would eventually belong to his son, and he was happy to feel quite sure that my daughter would share it with him. I cannot much longer keep the Gorgon from devouring us! All we can then call our own will be the negroes, and these, without doubt, will depreciate much in value if the anticipated war of the North really comes upon us! Decide Lillian! Tell me that you will accede to my wishes in recalling George St. Clair! That northern mud-sill has, without doubt, long before this returned to his native element. He is dead to you—as wholly, truly so as though you had never been guilty of so great an indiscretion!" Lillian started to her feet.[141]

"Mother, one question! Did you not receive a letter from my aunt in Philadelphia not many months ago saying that my husband had risen high in the estimation of the people and was true to his early vows? Has that information ever been contradicted? I read in the pallor of your face that it has not! His heart beats as truly for me to-day as it did sixteen years ago—and I am *his wife*! He is the father of my sweet Lily-bud, and this bond can never be severed! No, no! I cannot, I *will not*, wed another!"

"The curse of the heart-broken then rest upon you!" She had moved away with rapid steps while speaking, and although Lillian reached out her hand imploringly the stately figure disappeared through the open door. O the speechless agony of the next hour! O the suffering in that lonely, sad, luxurious chamber! All the misery of her eventful life came rushing over her! Spectral thoughts, that she had supposed were long since banished forever, haunted her brain! How vivid and real they now appeared in this new darkness. Then the future! Where was the black hand of destiny to lead her? Even now she could see it reaching out its bony fingers from among the mysteries that enveloped her hidden path! The thick folds of an interminable gloom seemed to have fallen about her, and everywhere she beheld that "mother's curse" written in letters of fire! A rap was heard on the door and she arose mechanically and turned the key. Soon the sound of a heavy tread was heard along the hall—then down the winding staircase and lost in the distance. It was Tezzie, and she was alone again! By and by the echoes of music and laughter came[142] floating up through the open window and mingled harshly with the dreariness which pervaded that silent chamber! There was a merry group in the spacious drawing-room before the dinner hour arrived. Where was the wretched mother? Could it be that those rigid features which disappointment, consternation and rage had blanched with their inhuman concoctions was covered with a mask of conviviality and pleasure? Lillian wept! It was well that tears came at last or the poor brain would have become parched with the fever of its wild despair! The sunshine at last departed from the window and night let down its black, silken curtains around a weary tumultuous world. O, how many hearts sink helplessly beneath their weight of woe, crushing under it the joy from the outside world with its wealth of pomp and gaiety! Yet there are those who, when the day departs, throw aside the sackcloth with which they hide their misery and come with all their sorrows to the feet of Him whose smiles alone have the power to dispel their gloom. Lillian did not know how to pray! In all her years of perplexity and doubt she had not reached out her hand to the only one who could have led her safely out of it all. Now her heart called for something it had not yet divined, but the perplexed soul was wistfully gazing upward through the thick clouds that drooped so closely about her, and a feeble wail issued from beneath the sombre darkness. Another low tap was heard on the door which again aroused her. There had been many during the hours of her self-imprisonment, but she had not heeded them.

However, a low, sweet voice penetrated her solitude and fell with soothing cadence upon her ear.[143]

"It's Auntie, honey—open the door, poor lamb;" and Lillian's quick step revealed the willingness with which she complied. The faithful old slave came in and the door was relocked.

"What fo' you killin' yo'self here all alone, honey? I know'd dar was trouble all day and I just been askin' de good Lord to take care of you; but I did want to come and see if he'd done it—poo' lamb!" Aunt Vina had drawn her chair close to the side of Lillian, and the weary head with its heavy weight of sorrow had fallen upon the shoulder of her faithful friend. "Dar—bress you honey—cry all yo' trouble out. Dat's de way de bressed Lord helps us to get rid on 'em. By an' by sweet lamb He'll wipe 'em all away; den ye'll hab no mo' sorrow, honey, bress de Lord!"

"But I have now more than I can bear! You don't know what a terrible load I am being crushed beneath!"

"I know a good deal, chile. Missus told me to-day dat you wouldn't marry Massa St. Clair, and she 'spects you was pinin' at somethin' she said! I axed her if I might come and see you and she didn't care, but wanted I should make you "bey yo' mudder"; now de Lord knows better dan she do."

"Did she tell you that she cursed me? O—Auntie! I could bear all the rest, even the miserable future she has pictured to me; but it is dreadful to carry through life the terrible burden of a mother's curse."

"Neber you min', honey; de Lord'll pay no 'tention to such cussin', an' it won't hurt ye a bit, if ye don't keep thinkin' on it. Why can't ye tell Him all about it, poor chile, den t'row it all away?[144] He'll take good care ob it, sure, and it won't hurt you."

"Do you believe, Aunt Vina, that God cares anything about me? Would He listen if I should ask Him to take my cause into His hands?"

"Sartin He would, honey. He lubs you ten times mo' dan old auntie, and wouldn't she take ebery bit ob it if she could?"

The rough hand of the slave woman touched with soft caress the tear-stained cheek that was resting so near her own, and the cheering words fell into her aching heart with a soothing influence.

"Pray for me, Auntie, and I will try to do as you have bidden. The road is very dark and gloomy where my faltering feet are standing, but it may be as you say, that God will drive it all away."

"O bress de Lord, bress de Lord! Auntie knows ye'll fin' it. Never mind nothin', go tell Him eberythin', and see how de dark will all go 'way. Dar, honey; old Vina'll go and get ye a good cup o' tea, and bring in de lamp and make it more cheery like. De good Lord'll take care ob de lamb!"

"Where is Grace?" was the plaintive query.

"O Miss Grace, she's 'most crazy 'bout you. I seed her alone in de little arbor cryin' dreadful awhile ago; but den she puts 'em 'way quick, and her pretty face looks all happy agin. She was singin' at de pianner when I come up."

"Tell her, Auntie, not to come to me until to-morrow. I wish to be left alone to-night. You may bring me a cup of tea, then tell Agnes that I shall not want her," was the pleading wail of the sorrowing heart as the slave woman disappeared on her errand of love and tenderness.[145]

Fold thy wings lovingly over the bowed form of the humble suppliant, O angel of pity, for the Father hears the cry of his suffering children; not one ever pleaded in vain, and Lillian prayed!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

It was not until late the next day that Lillian granted the oft repeated request of her cousin to be allowed to come to her, and not a moment was lost ere the two friends were together.

"It was cruel in you, my sweet Lillian, to banish me so long, but how ill you look," and Grace Stanley clasped her arms about the dear form and kissed the pale cheek tenderly.

"You are mistaken, pretty cousin, in my general appearance, for I have not been so well in a long time. In fact, your 'poor despondent cousin' is almost happy to-day."

Lillian was looking into the face of her companion while her pure liquid eyes were overflowing with the new-found joy that was filling her heart.

"I have been troubled, Grace. Yesterday a heavy wave rolled over me, that came near burying your 'Lily Bell' beneath it. But it has passed on, and I was left out of the tempest, and a hand reached out to hold me as I was going down beneath the roaring billows. At any rate I am standing firm to-day, and have no fears of winds or storms. Somehow I feel secure in the belief that I shall be shielded and brought through it all," and the fair head drooped for awhile on her hand, and the joyful tears came and baptised afresh her[148] trembling new-born hope. Grace had no word of trust to lay on the altar of consecration, and could only sit at the feet of her who was casting her all upon it, and be silent.

"Forgive me cousin, my heart and thoughts have been straying. I wanted to talk with you that I might, if possible, break the last cord that binds me so tenaciously to the dark scenes of the past that I would bury forever."

"Are you able, Lillian, to bear the agitation such a conversation would subject you to?" interposed Grace, with much feeling. "It would make me very happy to know you had opened wide the door of your poor heart and taken me into its sacred places, yet I would not give you the slightest needless pain."

"Thoughtful as ever, darling; but I feel quite sufficient for the task. Yesterday you heard me tell George St. Clair of my marriage, and how my mother came to the city and influenced me to go with her. No doubt you think it strange, as he did, that no greater effort has been made by my husband to reclaim his lost bride. I could not tell him all, the old habitual fear made me silent. I am free to-day, and my confidence is unfettered. No power could have kept him but the one this guilty hand set up between us."

"You, Lillian?"

"Yes, Grace, I did it. Not willingly, not quite consciously, yet I did it."

Grace looked puzzled, and her bright eyes were fixed intently on the sweet face she so loved, then she said, "Go on."^[149]

"It was the night before our departure from Philadelphia when, seeing the postman coming down the street, I ran out to meet him, for something seemed to tell me he had a letter that would gladden my poor heart. I was not mistaken. It was from Pearl, and O what a wealth of love it contained. He would be at home in a week. The business that had called him away was almost finished. 'Then, dearest,' he added, 'no king was ever more ecstatic over his crown than I shall be with my own pure Lily.'"

"Pure! How that word thrust itself home to my poor quivering heart. I had run with the precious missive to my room, and there, as the evening shades settled down about me, I raved in my agony with the madness of delirium. *I would not leave him!* Alone that night I would fly into the darkness leaving behind me forever those who would tear me from him. By and by my mother came in with her soft, soothing tones, she pitied and caressed me. It was not at all strange, she said, that I, a child, should struggle in the arms of wisdom. I was weak now, but by-and-by I could walk alone, then would come her reward. She was laboring for my good only, and when I could look at it I calmly would bless her for it. We would go to England, where my father's relatives were living, and she would cause pleasure to fall around me as bountiful as summer rain. After a few years of travel and study, if I then should find my heart still clinging to its 'imaginary' love, I should return to the object of my tried devotion. O how gradually but surely did my silly heart yield to this sophistry! In a few hours I was her submissive tool. The fascination of a European tour, the^[150] pictures of Parisian frivolities, and the glitter of pomp and fashion in the society into which I might plunge and come forth sparkling with its polished gems for all future adorning, captured my bewildered senses and stilled my whirling brain. In the morning we were to start on our journey, would I like to leave a few words for him who would probably for a while grieve at my absence and mourn over his disappointment? It would not, however, last long, such troubles never do with these of his sex, she said, and I should not certainly make myself uncomfortable about it. Nothing could be more to my wishes, and then I was told that she had written a short letter which I had better copy, as my head was not clear enough to think intelligently. It would help him to forget his disappointment and make him happy, just as I wished him to be. O *that letter!* I can only give you its purport; that I can never forget. It told him that terrible falsehood that I went from him willingly believing it not only to be my duty, but better for us both. Then it went on to say that I had come to the conclusion since his absence, that my affections were fleeting with my childhood; but if in after years I found that I was mistaken I would frankly write and tell him so; until then I wished he would not try to see or hear from me. Georgia would not be a pleasant place for a northern 'abolitionist' like himself to visit, and should he presume upon so rash an act, I had no doubt my mother would not fail to incense the people against him, and pleaded that for my sake he would not attempt it. He might have suspected the origin of that infamous epistle, had not a cunning brain devised and executed it. O Grace, dear Grace!^[151] how can you hold that perjured hand so closely in your own?"

"It is pure and white my Lily Bell; no sin-stain mars its beauty. Heart and hand are free from such implications. But you told him also that you were going to Europe?"

"O, yes, and that it would be uncertain when we should return. We went as anticipated the next morning, taking with us one hired servant. This seemed strange to me at that time, as I supposed we were to return to our southern home immediately and would need no one if this be so. I soon found, however, our route lay in a different direction. I cannot tell where we spent the summer months, but it was in a small cottage in a wild, dreary place not so far from human habitation but that Margeret could go twice a week in a few hours to procure the necessities on which we subsisted. The first of October we left this retreat where I had spent so many wretched hours under the surveillance of my mother, and after two days of tiresome travel by private carriage and cars we arrived at the seashore. There we took possession of a summer residence on a high cliff that overlooked the water, which showed signs of not having been long vacated. Here in less than three weeks I became a mother! Can I tell you about it? O the terrible suspicions that arise in my poor brain as I remember that scene! Only once did I look on my sweet lily bud! I cannot make you understand the rapture of that moment! It was *mine*—it was *his*! How I longed that he should see our beautiful flower; and then I said 'her name shall be Lily-Pearl, and that shall be the inseparable tie between us.' I was very ill^[152] for a long time they told me, and when my fluttering life came back with its full powers I was informed that my beautiful bud had withered and died and lay sleeping in the elegant robe my hands had taken such pleasure in forming. Grace—God forgive me if I impute wrong to the innocent; but here in the presence of Him into whose hands I have committed my cause I assert my belief that the terrible blow that came near severing the brittle, trembling thread of life was a base fabrication and that my child is not dead!"

"Lillian! Lillian! I know it is a dreadful accusation, but listen! You know I was in London five years and then my mother came for me. In one year more we returned home. Not many weeks after my arrival I was passing through the east hall when little Tommy came running to me with a folded paper in his hand. He said he had picked it up from the floor and I took it. It proved to be a letter written to my mother without date or signature. It was hardly legible, for it was evident that the hand by which it was written was unused to the pen. The writer, however, complained of neglect and said the bargain made in regard to the child had not been complied with; that she was worthless to them, and if the three hundred dollars did not come soon my mother must find another place for her. *What child can my mother possibly have any interest in?* Something further was said about her being six years old which I could not make out. A terrible conviction took possession of me! *This was my child! My Lily!* And who knows but ere this she has been sent out into the world in default of this paltry three hundred! Goaded by my suspicions I^[153] rushed into the presence of my mother with that mysterious paper burning in my hand! 'What is this? *What* does it mean? *What* child is the heartless wretch talking about?' I almost gasped so ungovernably did my brain reel beneath the weight of this fearful apprehension. Never shall I forget the look that greeted me! She was standing before the mirror in her dressing-room as I entered, but turned quickly as my tremulous voice fell upon her ear. Her face was as pale and livid as the marble statuette near which she was standing, while her eyes flashed with the inward fire she vainly endeavored to conceal. '*Give me that paper!*' she demanded with extended hand; 'how did you come by it?' 'Tell me first!' I exclaimed; '*who is the child* spoken of in it? *I must—I will* know!' She stared wildly at me, while a ghastly smile spread itself over her pallid features and suddenly her voice sank to a low musical cadence peculiar to herself as you well know, Grace, and somehow it has never failed to bring my most stubborn will in meek subjection to her feet. 'Lillian, my child,' she said; '*why* are you so much agitated? Compose yourself; such fits of anger is not at all becoming! The story of the child in whom you seem so much interested is a very short one. I should have confided it to you long ago, if by so doing I would not have been

obliged to reveal a secret which I could not have told with honor. I will now, however, satisfy your curiosity in a measure. You know that I have both relatives and friends in Savannah, one of these had a daughter who a few years ago became a mother of an illegitimate child; of course the mortification must be hidden if possible from^[154] the world, and much against my will I became an accomplice in the affair. This is the one alluded to in that document you hold so tenaciously in your hand. Now give it to me and forget the subject altogether.' She reached for it, and with her eyes gazing steadily into mine took it from me and walked with a firm tread through an opposite door, leaving me standing alone conquered but not convinced. Do not think harshly of me, dear Grace, I know my mother is your beloved aunt, and for this reason I confide in you. I would not let my suspicions loose upon the world, but something has whispered to me many times since that day that Lily did not die in her infancy, and can you imagine my agony when I realize that now she may be homeless and friendless, or what is equally dreadful to me surrounded perhaps with evil associations growing up into womanhood unlovely and unloved?" The head of the agitated Lillian sank down on the shoulder of her companion, and clasped in each other's arms the two mingled their tears of sorrow and sympathy. During all this time Lillian had spoken kindly of the cause of all this treachery and guilt! She was dealing with the great sad past—unclasping it link by link from her present and future as one throws off accumulated burdens when preparing for laborious action. She had secretly before this laid them all at the feet of Him who had said, "cast thy burdens on the Lord and he will sustain thee." His promises she felt were true and she expected to be assisted over the road that seemed stretching itself among the thick shadows farther than her faith could penetrate.^[155]

A few hours before this conversation when alone with her blessed Saviour she had said with quivering lips and wildly throbbing heart: "Forgive the poor wailing cry, for I cannot hush its sobbings! Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted—my child is not—not dead, or the mother love would cease its calling," and then she prayed: "Thou who noticest the fall of a little sparrow watch over and protect my Lily! Shield her—lead her in a path where I may find her."

Did the Father hear?

CHAPTER XV.

SCENES ON THE PLANTATION.

Autumn came at last. The heart of the great Republic throbbed with unsteady pulsation, and, every nerve in the body politic thrilled with excitement as the looked-for crisis drew near. There were faint whisperings in each breeze, so low at first that every ear was strained to the uttermost tension to catch the vibrating strains, but soon they became louder and louder until the foundations of peace and prosperity were shaken to their very center. "War, war!" It was talked of everywhere. In the salon, in the dining hall, not even were the parlor and boudoir exempt from the unwelcome sounds. The politicians discussed it over their wine, and unfledged aspirants for fame probed the bare possibilities in secret conclaves. Ebony forms crowded beneath windows and balconies with eyes and lips protruded, eager to catch the mysterious meaning of the universal subject, "war!" Aristocracy in the brilliant halls of pleasure and revelry saw the strange hand appear and the finger writing upon the wall. How flushed cheeks paled, and rosy lips

changed to ashy hue, and how knees smote together with fear. "War! war!" A cloud, dark and murky, rolled up from the horizon full of terrible mutterings, and loaded with death and devastation, moving steadily onward, until the^[158] broad clear sky was covered, and the rays that had so long fallen upon a prosperous people were shut out, and shadows deep and portentous drooped their heavy folds about the agitated nation. Mothers all over the land gazed through blinding tears upon their noble sons, who stood with elevated brows around the home fires. Wives thrust back their true devotion into the secret chambers of agonized hearts, and pressed more closely the pallid lips, and remained silent.

Perhaps there was not another in the whole land who was more bitter towards those who had caused these preparations of calamity than was Mrs. Belmont. True, she had her own ideas who these were, as well as all others throughout both sections of the Republic. Having been for so many years upheld in her present position of luxury and ease by sable hands, it was no very agreeable prospect, surely, to discover a mere possibility that they might at some future time be giving way beneath her.

The lady of Rosedale with her son and daughter had been in the habit of spending several weeks during the winter in Savannah, but now her arrangements for the season were materially changed, Lillian having gone to New Orleans with her cousin Grace for an unlimited time, the mother and son would go immediately without her.

The cloud had never disappeared from the family horizon since that eventful day when George St. Clair left Rosedale a rejected lover. The daughter would not recall him with a promise of her love or her hand, and consequently the shadow of her mother's anger hung over her, dark and gloomy. There were no filial tears shed at parting,^[159] nor were there words of regret, or even one sweet, maternal kiss. How sad, how very sad, that such things must be. Can human love die? That healthful seed which God planted so tenderly in every heart to make life endurable as well as beautiful with its buds and blossoms—can all this ever be rooted up? True, its flowers may wither, its bright green leaves may fade and fall, its tender stalks even be broken, but the roots, the deeply imbedded roots—*they* can never, never die. Smother them with cruelties and wrongs, if you will, bury them beneath the accumulated rubbish of selfishness and misconduct, there will come a time when the warm sunshine of tender memories and the soft dews of genial affections, which the hand of divinity shall scatter over it, will bring forth fresh shoots from the hidden life of the heart's immortal love.

No, it cannot die; or why did Mrs. Belmont hurry into her private apartment, as soon as the sound of the rolling wheels that were bearing her daughter from her was lost in the distance, to give vent there to pent up tears? It might have been remorse, it is true, for the last look on that pale face, as Lillian waved her adieus from the carriage window, would not leave her. There were tears also on Aunt Vina's cheeks, although she endeavored to hide them, amid her merry laughter, as she took off her well-worn shoe to throw after her departing darling. But Lillian felt that there was more good luck in her parting words and benediction than in this. "De good Lord bress ye, honey, and bring ye back to poo' old Vina!"

"Pray for me, Auntie, while I am gone," was the feeble response from the sore and aching heart.^[160]

"Dat I will ebery day, sartin! And don't ye mind nothin'! Just ye be happy; dat's all!"

But there came an hour when the warm sunshine gathered up its little gems of joy from out the poor twisted life of the humble slave, and left the heart bleeding beneath the gloomy shadows where it had been stricken. No one knew how it came about—but one bright morning when the orange groves were full of birds, who had arrived from their northern homes before the wintry blasts had reached them, little Shady was found in the store-house lying beneath a huge bale of cotton quite dead! The overseer "had seen him frolicking like a kitten among them and told him not to climb to the top one, as he seemed inclined to do;" and that was all that could be revealed of the sad story! It was night now to old Vina! Nowhere in her desolate heart could she find the sweet balm she had so often poured into the wounds of other's griefs. Above her shone no star with silvery ray to light up the dark despair! Grief has many fangs, all sharp and poisonous and hard to be borne as they pierce through the sensitive nerves of the human heart; but some strike deeper than others, letting out the very life of the soul and flooding the secret chambers with the malaria of woe! Aunt Vina felt all this when at last the little form she had so loved and cherished was laid away in its cheerless bed among the buttonwood trees, where her hand could reach him no more with its cheery good-night. What was there now to keep her tired feet from faltering by the way, or her heart from sinking under its weight of life's sorrows? When the last sod was laid tenderly on the little grave, and "Parson Tom" had said in^[161] his most solemn tones "de Lord gabe and de Lord hab taken away; and bressed be de name ob de Lord," she turned away from it all with no responsive "bress de Lord" bubbling up through the torn fissures of her bleeding heart, and sought her accustomed place by the kitchen grate. Without a tear or moan she sank down upon a chair, her head drooping low upon her broad chest, sitting there as motionless and still as though the lamp of her existence had also been blown out. In vain did dark forms gather about her with their tears of sympathy and words of condolence and love! She heeded them not! The soft, warm beams of the noonday sun came in through the door and gathered themselves about her bowed form, but she moved not. When the shadows of night crept in she arose and stole away into the thick darkness of her chamber to pray alone! No eye but His who wept tears of sympathy at the tomb of Lazarus witnessed the agony that night of the poor heart-broken slave. No ear but His who will wipe away all tears listened to the moans and prayers that were borne upward on the wings of departing night from that humble chamber! God heard them, however, and a register was made in that book which is to be opened on that great day of accounts when one more spotless robe of white was ready for her who had "come up through much tribulation!"

The next morning, earlier than usual, Aunt Vina appeared in her accustomed place. Her cheeks were hollow and her eyes sunken, yet she moved about with steady step gathering up every trace of her lost darling, burning the few scattered blocks he had brought in that sad day he went out^[162] to come in no more, throwing far back into the dark closet the tattered hat and much-used whip, as if by so doing she could hide the sorrow that was eating away her life. And thus she labored on.

The house was indeed empty now! "Pete" had gone with his young master, and Emily, the particular favorite of her mistress, was with her in Savannah, and poor Aunt Vina turned her heart's longings towards the absent Lillian. "If she was only here," she would say over and over again; "de wee lamb! De Lord knows how to pity dem dat lub Him!"

"And don't you lub Him, Vina?" asked the kind old preacher, who strove in his feeble way to comfort the bereaved one.

"Yes—yes—brudder Tom; but somehow dese old eyes can't see out straight. He was all that was left; it seems as how I might hab dat one little head to lie on dis lone bosom! It won't be long 'fore I shall be 'tro wid it all—and it wouldn't 'a' hurt nothin' if he been lef till I went home!" Tears mingled with her sobs as she bewailed her loneliness.

"De Lord say 'come unto me when tired and can't find nowhere for de sole ob de foot, and He will gib you rest;" and the good man laid his ebony hand on the bowed head as he spoke.

"Don't I know it, brudder Tom? He's all right; but it's hard to bress de Lord when He makes it so dark; maybe by and by old Vina can look up! If Miss Lillian was here *she* would tell me how."

How many have thus bent beneath the rod as they hid the light of faith from them, "refusing to be comforted" when the pitying Father was so^[163] ready to bind up the heart His careful love had wounded? "Before I was stricken I went astray" is the testimony of many a happy soul. The clouds are about us but the sun shines above them all.

Lillian was gone and Rosedale somehow seemed deserted and dreary. Perhaps it was because the flowers were all withered and nature seemed going to sleep; at any rate Mrs. Belmont and her son concluded to go to the city immediately, even should one or both of them be obliged to return to the plantation during Christmas week.

"The servants always expect their holiday gifts, and it would be too bad to disappoint them," so the mistress said, "but it is insufferable here!" Besides, Ellen St. Clair was to give a birthday entertainment in two or three weeks, and as everybody hinted the betrothal of the fair heiress with Charles Belmont it really did seem a necessity that he at least should be there. The mother of the young gentleman also was exceedingly desirous of satisfying herself upon this one point, not feeling quite as sure as the veracious "Mrs. Grundy." The reason being, no doubt, that the said son, who had inherited from the maternal side an abundance of the very commendable element of secretiveness, did not seem at all disposed to satisfy any one in regard to the matter as *he* understood it. Neither was the mother quite sure that he would from any cause be persuaded to sacrifice any of his self-will for her accommodation, for he was fully aware that her heart was unswervingly set on this union. Thus she was kept in ignorance which she was determined should, if possible, be dispelled. All these things^[164] were taken into consideration by the intriguing mother—and the son, not at all averse to the arrangements, the next week found Aunt Vina sole mistress of the great house at Rosedale.

Little Shady was in high spirits. Every day the hall door was thrown wide open for the free circulation of fresh air, then such a scrambling up the broad stairs on all fours and such rapid rides down the heavy balustrades! "Bress de chile! Can't see no hurt no how! Missus say she lick him, but she don't see him!" and the good old grandmother turned her own head that her eyes might not be at fault in the matter. The love for this child was all the earth-spot the withered old heart contained. All of her children, not excepting her last, the mother of little Shady, had been taken from her, some by death, others by the greedy hands that snapped the tenderest cords of the human hearts that its own mercenary ends might be reached. "But it's a mercy dat I'se got dis one," she would often repeat to herself as if not quite sure of her resignation in the matter. Certain it was that the merry gambols of the frolicsome boy as her loving eyes followed him through the day, and the joy of feeling his plump arms around her neck at night, shut out in a great measure the dark agonizing past from her view.

Outside of the elegant appointments of the home and its surroundings all was left as usual in the hands of the overseer, who was expected to administer kindness and justice with wisdom, if not with discretion; but as Pete had often said in the quiet of Aunt Vina's kitchen fire, "Massa Firey and old Tige look jist like 's do' day was brudders," and as to disposition and characters it^[165] could not be disputed that they were similar. Still, at the "quarters" he was not only feared but regarded with a kind of respect and awe. Three weeks passed away and little had been thought of the dark cloud spreading itself over the nation, for "Massa Firey" said nothing to those under his care, if indeed he knew what was really going on in the outside world.

There was plenty of work in the cotton-fields, for Mrs. Belmont had said before her departure that Charles would want some money and the product of the plantation must be put into the market as soon as it was open. Shady was in high glee, snapping his whip at some imaginary intruder about the extensive grounds or rolling his hoop, when the sweet voice of the child would steal in through the open windows and doors into Aunt Vina's kitchen, awaking the worn-out melodies of her own heart which would come forth in answering chorus. A little curly head was often thrust in through some aperture near, when the song would suddenly change as the dark eyes sparkled with mock terror at the words caught from the sabbath services,

"Git away you Satan, fo' de Lo'd is on the way,"

and the rotund figure of the old grandmother would shake with suppressed merriment.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BIRTHDAY ENTERTAINMENT.

During the night, when poor Aunt Vina was bemoaning her loss, very different scenes were being enacted at the residence of the St. Clair's, in which Mrs. Belmont was happily participating. It was the birthday of Ellen St. Clair, the youngest and pet of the family, who had but a few weeks previously returned from New York, where she had been for three years at school; and this, her twentieth birthday, was to be the occasion of unlimited enjoyment. The grounds as well as the mansion were brilliantly illuminated, and the spacious apartments crowded with wealth and beauty. Nothing was left undone that could add grandeur to the fete or pleasure to the loved one for whom all this magnificence and display were brought out.

Mrs. Belmont was a very particular friend and distant relative of the family, and therefore had gone over at an early hour that her suggestions and experiences might not be wanting. She was immediately shown to the private dressing-room of Mrs. St. Clair, who was patiently suffering under the skillful hands of her French dressing-maid.

"I am exceedingly glad that you came so early. Pauline, ring the bell for a servant. You see the house is to be crowded before dinner with friends and relatives from New Orleans and Atlanta, and it is as much as I can endure to be dressed three^[168] times in one day. O you need not laugh at my indolence, as you usually do."

No one laughed, however, but the lady herself.

"Why, Pauline, you make me look like a fright," she exclaimed, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror before which she was sitting. "Can you not bring those puffs back a little?"

"*C'est a la mode, chere Madame,*" replied the maid, smiling.

"You mean to say by that, I suppose, that it is the latest style, and I must submit."

"*Oui, madame.*"

"Very well, proceed then with the inevitable," and settling herself down quietly she went on chatting with her visitor.

Mrs. Mason, a widowed daughter, who had returned the year before to her childhood's home with her three little children, came in for a moment, then retreated as silently as she entered.

"Poor Bertha," exclaimed Mrs. Belmont, with much feeling, "what a look of suffering she wears upon her face. She seems to bemoan her loss now as deeply as when first bereaved. How I pity her!"

"Yes, the dear child, she misses her husband much; but I tell her it is far better to rejoice over the living than to mourn over the dead. Every widowed mother has not three such beautiful and interesting children as she. This, in time will, I have no doubt, take away the acuteness of her sorrow, but we must wait for the work to be accomplished."

"Yes."

Was Mrs. Belmont thinking of the time when, years ago, beautiful children nestled into the inner^[169] chamber of *her* soul, which had been desolated by the hand of death? Or did her memory go no farther back than the last parting scene with her only daughter? There were many dark pictures that might have been brought up, but the volubility of Mrs. St. Clair drove them from her sight. She continued:

"I dare say I shall shock your sensibilities very much, but Ellen has declared her intention of bringing the governess out to-night as one of her honored guests." And the lady laughed heartily as she looked into the face of her visitor.

"But *you* are not going to permit it, certainly. The affair would be decidedly absurd. You ought most positively to interfere."

"But you know, my dear, that I was never emphatic about anything. I have not the needed strength for a battle. And then, on this occasion, I am left perfectly powerless, as her father declares that for this once she shall have her own way in everything, just as if she did not always have it;" added Mrs. St. Clair with much merriment.

"But does she not know that she may offend many of her dear friends by such folly?" interposed the lady of Rosedale.

"I imagine she cares but little as to that; she is so much like her father—and mother, too, it may be;" and the thick folds of her rich brocade rustled with the contagion of her mirth. "The fact is, cousin, she is such a fine musician that I have no doubt you will be charmed with her yourself. To be sure she holds a menial position in our home, but I cannot help admiring and loving her

too. There is something so mild and unassuming about[170] her. I often tell Ellen that I wish she would imitate her manners."

"No doubt she is well enough in her place; but the drawing-room, which is to be filled with the elegant and affluent who are to come from aristocratic homes, bringing with them refinement and culture, must overshadow her. She ought certainly to have sufficient sense to understand this, and refuse such publicity. Why not as hostess appeal to her yourself? If she is as amiable as you have represented, she would not act in a way contrary to your wishes."

All this was spoken hurriedly and with much feeling.

"I presume she would; but the trouble is that I *have* no objections. Under these circumstances you will discover that I would make a poor deputy to do the business;" and the merry peals startled the demure maid who was putting the finishing touches to her lady's toilet. Then turning to the mirror she continued, without giving her visitor time to reply:

"There—how do I look? Not much like Venus, as I can readily perceive. Is not that trail too long? and these hoops too large? But it will have to do, I suppose. Now I will go and see what the girls are doing, while Pauline's skillful fingers put you in order. I had your dressing case brought here so as to be ready;" and the good lady bustled out of the room, leaving her cousin in no very amiable mood.

At an early hour the sound of mirth and gayety was heard everywhere in the elegant home of the St. Clair's. The drawing-rooms were filled with gay, flitting forms which kept humming and[171] buzzing like a swarm of busy bees, mingling and changing their bright colors until with kaleidoscopic distinctness the last brooch was fastened and each delicate toilet had received its finishing touch from skillful hands, and on the broad stairway the tripping of feet and the rustling of silks mingled with joyous laughter as the chorus of many voices were heard coming up from the hall below. It was a brilliant sight! So many happy faces gleaming with the excitement of the hour as they gathered together in little circling eddies in the drawing-rooms, radiant with gems which flashed and sparkled in the full glare of the overhanging gas-lights that glowed in subdued brilliancy upon them.

"How very strange!" was heard from many a rosy lip that night as familiar friends met in sly nooks where confidential words could be interchanged. It was true that Ellen St. Clair had never appeared at such an entertainment so plainly dressed; what could it mean? A rumor had been floating about purporting to have originated with her sister Bertha "that it was to please some one," but who was the honored one? Then there came the response. "A governess who had declared her dislike to appear in so large a company because of her unfitting toilet!" But why this should so strangely influence the "pretty heiress" was still a mystery. "And where was the governess?" No one was more eager to be satisfied on this point than was Mrs. Belmont; and no one was more anxious to hide that desire which so fretted her.

"I never saw Miss Ellen look prettier or fresher than she does to-night," remarked a gentleman to the captivating young Mrs. Mason. "That spotless[172] dress of white becomes her airy figure and combines with her purity of look and manner. Her appearance is truly ethereal—and that one diamond star at the throat reminds me of something in the good book my mother used to read! In fact I like it." A toss of the regal head beside him was the only answer. "I am sorry, however, that her motive for throwing aside her little feminine adornings is so much beneath her," continued

the young man with some volubility. "But where is the governess? I beg pardon!" and the head of the speaker bowed low with mock seriousness.

"I do not know, sir; I have not troubled myself about her!" was the haughty reply. "Exquisite! Pray tell me who is that at the piano? A wonderful voice! So sweet and flexible!" exclaimed a lady near where the two were standing. "Listen! I wish I could get a peep at her!"

"I do not know," interrupted Mrs. Belmont who had been addressed. "I will inquire," and she pressed her way through the crowd and was lost from sight by the enraptured listeners. The melodious voice soared aloft in little rippling eddies to die away in the distance, then fell like liquid drops of silvery cadence upon the ear, while it hushed into silence the sound of mingling voices until the spacious apartments were filled with naught but the wonderful music of the unknown singer. Mrs. Belmont had made her way to a group of grave gentlemen and ladies in the parlor opposite, where they had been discussing the great topic of the day.

"I cannot see well," replied Mrs. St. Clair with a merry twinkle in her gray eyes as she returned to the sofa she had just left to look about her for^[173] a moment. "But it is some one Professor Edwards seems to honor, for he is beside her turning the music. Ah, there is 'Cathedra'—listen," and the same voice came floating and circling about their heads in the very ecstasy of delight.

"You never heard that *sung* before;" interposed Mr. St. Clair laughingly. "I mean as now!"

"You know who it is, cousin; tell us, will you?" But Mr. St. Clair was wholly intent upon the music and only shook his finger menacingly at Mrs. Belmont for interrupting it.

"There! That is over! Now who says he *ever* heard anything better than that?" and the kind-hearted old gentleman gazed appealingly about him.

"Let me see, cousin. What was it you were saying about the 'uncultured females' of the north? Well, I remember but will not repeat, so you may save your blushes," and his plump hand came down with emphasis upon his well-developed knee. "Yes—they do soil their fingers with toil it is a fact. Ellen has often spoken of her visit to the home of a schoolmate who lives on the banks of the old historic Hudson, and she declares that the home into which she was ushered on her arrival was superior to almost anything she had seen in our sunny clime; but the mistress many times during her stay of two weeks actually made tea with her own hands and served it at her own table! And what was even worse, there was not a day that she did not visit her kitchen—order her own dinner—and, it may be, stuffed her own turkeys—made her own jellies, puddings, etc.! I should not be at all surprised!" Here the speaker burst forth into a merry peal of laughter, which^[174] did not seem at all contagious as no one but the wife joined in his glee. "Ah, there is the singer. I know her by the blue silk," interposed one of the ladies who had striven to get a look at her while she was at the piano. "Prof. Edwards seems to monopolize her entirely." "She is *very* pretty," remarked another. "All but those blue eyes," chimed in Mr. St. Clair; "those tell the tale of frosts and snows—do you not think so, cousin?"

"You annoy me, somehow," said Mrs. Belmont with much feeling; "perhaps it is because I do not understand you. I would like to cover your lack of gallantry with a soft cloak of charity you see."

"It is the war, madam, that had fired his bitter animosities," suggested a gallant knight near by.

"Have I indeed then been so boorish? I beg your pardon," and he bowed obsequiously. "Now for plain dealing, as I feel you will like that better! The young lady to whom we have been so rapturously listening, and who has drawn such a large circle about her yonder," pointing with his finger towards where she was sitting, "including your honored son, I perceive, is Miss Anna Pierson—our governess. Look at her now! Her face is like her music, all soul, all feeling. Now clear and smooth with the most exquisite pathos, yet never blank or uninteresting; now brilliant and sparkling, rippling all over with enthusiasm; a face one never tires of watching through all its changes; never growing weary no matter how often the repetition comes."

Immediately after supper Mrs. Belmont ordered her carriage. She was anxious to return and bury^[175] her chagrin in the privacy of her own chamber. Why was she so wretched? She asked herself over and over again, yet received no definite answer. It might be that a gentleman with whom she had been talking assured her that the war so much commented upon could not, or would not be averted. "Even now," he added, "extensive preparations are going on in Charleston for its early commencement." But certainly this could not be the cause of her disquietude, as she scanned over the immensity of southern political power. After all that has been done the fight must be short and the victory speedy and glorious. The pall lifted slowly from about her heart, and before she reached her own door she stigmatized herself as a coward for retiring so soon from the gay scene, appearing, as she imagined, like retreating before a phantom foe. In her own room, however, the fire broke out anew. There was something in the tones of her cousin's voice that angered her. "What right had he to allude to my words, spoken in private, and display my peculiar views, as he called them, before such a company? But above all, what could have induced Charles to hand that detestable governess to the table and leave Ellen St. Clair to another?" Nothing had gone right, and the indignant woman paced the floor goaded by her agitating thoughts until the footsteps of her offending son were heard entering his room. How true it is that when the heart opens its "guest chamber" to evil spirits and gives them welcome, it will wake ere long to find its most sacred place invaded, and its halls of innocence desecrated by the madness of associated passions that come to take up their abode in it! Poor heart! What a struggle for purity^[176] must follow with opposing foes before it ever again becomes a fit temple for the high dignitaries of a God-like nature to enter and dwell in! Better far to bar the door at their first approach and set its seal of truth and nobleness upon it which, like the "blood of sprinkling," turns away the footsteps of Death with his destructive power. Alas, with Mrs. Belmont it was too late. She had not counted the cost of her misdeeds from the beginning, and now found herself in a labyrinth of difficulties that were thickening about her, and out of which she could see no way of escape.

She was angry, too, for Bertha had said that Ellen was indignant that her name should have been coupled in an outside gossip with that of her son, and had improved every opportunity to contradict the rumor. Here was another disappointment to be thrown into her cherished plans; and the very depths of her soul seemed embittered.

Chafing under the accumulating power of her goading thoughts, she walked her room with rapid steps, while her angry soul went down among the roaring billows.

CHAPTER XVII.

A THRILLING REVELATION.

Charles Belmont was twenty-six years of age at the time of our writing, but owing to the indolence of his disposition and the selfishness which had always governed him, he had not as yet stepped into the position as "master" of the plantation to which he supposed himself heir; nor had he troubled himself regarding his prosperity. It was enough for him to know that a hundred pairs of hands were laboring for his comfort and fully capable of supplying every desired luxury. "Mother has never failed me yet," he would say, "and when she does it will be time enough for me to dabble in business."

Thus did the years roll by while his manliness became more and more engulfed in the lethargy of indolence until his whole being was enervated and possessed not the power to sever the manacles that were destroying the pure and noble within, even had he the disposition to do so. How many efficient natures have thus been destroyed! The soul of man is progressive; it is ambitious to go onward and upward; fetter these propensities, press them down, and the whole being becomes groveling, its aspirations dwarfed or twisted in the process. The mind is conscious of an unrest, and with its unsatisfied longings, turns away from the[178] ennobling and fills itself with debasing habits that will certainly prostitute all loftier aspirations. Charles Belmont had not, however, sunk so low as all this. But with his most frivolous wants supplied, and the prospect of a large estate before him, why should he be perplexed about anything? He had gone through college, as thousands of others had done before him, had spent two years in Europe seeing what in his opinion was worth looking at, and now what was left for him to do but to look out for an heiress or some one worthy to share his honors, or wait while he smoked his meerschaum or sipped his wine after the physical part of his nature had been satisfied by the bounties which menial hands had provided?

The next day after the events of our last chapter, the young master of Rosedale learned from his mother that for the first time since his remembrance the slaves were to be disappointed in their Christmas gifts, as the lady declared she "would not trouble herself about them."

This piece of information aroused the better feelings of the son, who immediately set about providing himself with the means to carry out in its fullness the long established custom that would make more than three score hearts happy. It was a frail spirit, however, that aroused for the first time the slumbering attributes of his better nature.

"If such is your determination, Mother," was the quick reply, "then I shall for once perform your duties for you." And, true to his resolve, Christmas morning found him standing amid well filled baskets at the end of the long corridor leading to the kitchen, looking upon the happy faces[179] of the merry group as he called their names, and with a cheery word or jest presented their gifts.

"Where is Old Auntie?" he inquired at last, as the sable faces one by one turned away, and he was being left alone. "And here is a drum for Shady, but he must promise not to make too much noise with it before I shall hand it over to him. Here, Shady, you rascal, where are you?" he continued, holding up the exhilarating toy. Poor Old Auntie came out from the kitchen and walked slowly towards him.

"O Massa, Shady am dead—gone—and poor old Vina's heart is done broke. I don' want nothin', massa, on'y dat what ye got fer him. Let auntie have it—'twon't make no noise." She reached out her hand for the coveted prize, and again Charles Belmont felt the promptings of the inward nobility that makes the man. Those plaintive words that came sobbing up from the wounded,

bleeding heart, all dripping with tears, touched a chord of sympathy in his own, hitherto unknown to its possessor.

"How did this happen?" he asked quickly, "and why was not my mother informed of an event so important? Something is wrong. How did little Shady die?"

"Don' know, massa. He's done dead. It's night all de time now; dere ain't no more sunshine for poor old auntie. Will ye gib me dat, massa? I *couldn't* hear de chil'ens makin' a noise on it—'twould be like dey was poundin' dis heart, all broke, Massa Charles. Couldn't bear it—no how."

"You shall have it, Auntie," he said, with much feeling, as he placed the toy drum in the outstretched hands. "I do not wonder it is dark, and^[180] if Massa Charles can scatter a few rays of light across your sorrow, be sure he will do it."

"O thank ye; thank ye, Massa Charles. The Lord will bless ye, Vina knows he will," and the poor old slave returned again to her night of dreary loneliness.

It was a little transient ray that had been sent athwart her darkness, and no one understood its fleetingness better than did she.

The next day Charles Belmont went again to the scenes of pleasure he had so unceremoniously left, but he could not forget the bitter potion the cup of others contained. For a long time "Poor Old Auntie's" wail of bereavement would dart into his pleasures and leave a touch of sadness upon their brightness.

On reaching Savannah he found that his mother had gone with the St. Clair's to spend a week on a plantation about thirty miles distant, and accepting the invitation left for him, he prepared to follow. It was a lovely morning when the party set out on their short journey. They had determined upon a carriage-ride for the whole distance, while the others went by rail as far as they could, and were waiting for the carriage to overtake them. George St. Clair, his sister Ellen and Miss Pierson composed the little party, as they wheeled over the hard road as fast as the spirited horses could take them, while the cool, fresh breeze invigorated their young spirits.

"This air may be a little too bracing; shall I not have the curtains unrolled?" asked George St. Clair.

"O no, indeed!" replied Miss Pierson who was addressed; "this reminds me of a spring day in^[181] the north when there is snow yet upon the mountains while the valleys are green."

"Perfectly natural that it should, for this wind comes directly from your snow-capped hills;" was the answer, while the young man experienced a very perceptible shiver. "I wish it were not quite so cold!"

"You would soon learn to like it as I do! Do you perceive it has given me new life already? But I have discovered my selfishness! Please put down the curtains for you are looking quite miserable," she concluded, as she noticed on the face opposite an expression not usual to it. It was his thoughts, not the cool breeze however that had chilled him. The raillery of his sister recalled him, and he for a time put away the absorbing subject. "Look Ellen! Really that pile of brush and mud yonder is inhabited! Just see what miserable creatures are coming out of it.

One—two—three! I wonder if that can be the mother now following. She looks half-starved and utterly dejected! Do look at them, Ellen!"

"You must not expend all your sympathy on that one family," remarked Ellen carelessly; "for you will see them all along the road. These belong to the 'poor white trash,' as the coachman would tell you with a curl of his ebony lip. They are a small portion of that miserable class who are so thoroughly steeped in degradation that there is no hope of improving them."

Anna made no reply, but sat a long time silently gazing out of the carriage window. Ellen too was silent, while their companion watched the speaking face of the humble governess as its color came and went like the sunshine and shadows^[182] through which they were passing. At last she awoke as from a dream, and laying her gloved hand upon that of George St. Clair exclaimed: "You are good and noble! Tell me, is there no remedy for all this? I have heard so much of these while in my northern home that my heart truly aches for them! To be so utterly outcast as the family appears to be that we have just passed, and without the ambition or power to rise out of it, is truly pitiful! What sad blots on the grand picture of American civilization! Is there *no* remedy?"

"No remedy!" was the low reply. They seemed to be the echo only of her own words and brought with them no consolation. "Pardon me," he said a moment after; "we shall get dreadfully entangled in a web of our own weaving if we continue on this train of thought. Let us weave a few brighter garlands for memory's sake in the remaining days I am to be with you. We will talk of peace lest war should send its mutterings among us; let us anticipate love, not hate! Miss Pierson, I deputize you to gather up the stray sunbeams for me that memory may have a regal crown to wear when I am far away. They elude my grasp and always did!" he continued, bitterly. "But you seem to be more fortunate."

"And I am to be left out, am I, my brother? You do not know how expert I am in chasing butterflies and riding on sunbeams! You may better engage me!"

"I would like to have you both interested in this benevolent work," he replied. "Still you are aware, Ellen, that I have very little regard for butterflies, and beg that you will not put yourself^[183] to any extra trouble to procure one for me;" and they rode on in silence for some minutes. "Ten miles as sure as you live and we have not thought of our lunch," he cried, a little later, as they wheeled by the corners of a cross road. "We must examine the hamper for good old Katie's sake, if not for our own." Ample justice was done to Aunt Katie's skill amid jests and laughter while the gloomy clouds that had flecked each heart were forgotten.

The station was reached at last and the four ladies were soon snugly seated in the family coach, while the gentlemen followed in a hired vehicle. It was almost night when the travelers found themselves at their journey's end.

The residence of the "Washburn's" was a large ancient house, for it had been the home of the father who had bequeathed it to the son many years before with an abundance of hospitality and good cheer, as our visitors were soon made to understand. The ladies were hurried off to their warm, comfortable rooms to prepare for dinner, which had been waiting for "two whole hours" the hostess had said, and now she bustled about the dining-room to see that everything was in perfect order and the finishing touches had been completed. All were gathered in the parlors at

last, merry and refreshed, and as Mrs. St. Clair protested they were dreadfully hungry after their long cold ride.

"What a brilliant party!" exclaimed Mrs. Washburn, entering at the moment to announce dinner; "and yet, my dear Mrs. St. Clair, I have not told you that my brother's wife, Mrs. Gaylord, is here^[184] from Virginia! You remember you met her two years ago."

"That is good news, certainly. I did not know that she had returned from the north, where she went after fresh air I believe."

"She has an adopted daughter, a beautiful girl who has brightened her up wonderfully. I never saw an *own* daughter more idolized."

Mrs. Gaylord my readers have met before; will they also recognize the adopted daughter? She is almost a young lady now, having been with her new friends nearly two years, and, during the time, received every opportunity for improvement, not one of which had been lost. She is taller than when we last met her, her manners winning and graceful, while her eyes had not forgotten their mysterious wonderings or her heart its ambitious longings. At this home in the far south where she had been nearly a week there was much upon which to feed her sensibilities and awaken her imaginings.

"I go in for making money off from my plantation," remarked the host in reply to a suggestion from one of the party as they seated themselves at the table when all were at last gathered. "I long ago learned who is king over this broad land, and like well to do my share in keeping the crown on his head." A hearty laugh followed when he continued: "And if this war, which is so much talked of just now, should really become a fact, I reckon some others will feel his power."

"You must be chary of your words, sir, for we have a northerner in our party," interposed Mrs. Belmont, her keen eyes fixed on the face of Anna Pierson, which crimsoned beneath her gaze.^[185]

"Miss Pierson's principles, whatever they are, must be shielded from irony or ridicule while in our party," said George St. Clair, with some warmth, although in a low tone of voice, intended for Mrs. Belmont's ears only.

The lady was awed and silenced. She would not for the world offend the young man, for in him too many of her fondest hopes were still centered. She had not for a moment given up the idea that Lillian would, after a little sensible consideration, accede to her wishes and recall her rejected lover, whom she was sure only waited permission to return.

The conversation soon became sprightly and animated, but the ladies remained silent, while the face of one, at least, expressed more than words could utter.

A movement to leave the table by George St. Clair put an end to it all, and it was not resumed while the little party remained together.

Upon entering the parlor Mrs. Belmont found herself *tete a tete* with the young lady from Virginia. The company had gathered themselves into little groups or pairs, and each seemed intent upon some individual topic separate from the others, and nothing was left for the stately

lady to do but to commence conversation with her companion or remain moodily silent, which she felt greatly inclined to do. However, her position required action, and she inquired:

"How long have you been in Virginia? I understand that you are an adopted daughter of Mrs. Gaylord."

"That is all. I have been with her not yet two years." [186]

The answer was concise and gentle. Still the deep, thoughtful eyes that had remained fixed with their wondering look on the face of the questioner as she spoke, disturbed the lady, and she moved uneasily. Somehow it penetrated more deeply under the covering of her soul than was comfortable, but she continued:

"Where was your previous home, my child?"

"In Massachusetts."

"Ah, a Northerner, then?"

"I do not know," replied the interrogated with a smile.

"Not know? You are an orphan I suppose?"

"I do not know."

At almost any other time Lily would have been indignant at such close questionings, but there was something about the tall stately lady in black that interested her and during the few moments they had sat there together she had read much in the dark face before her. Therefore, when she was asked further: "Have you no remembrance of a mother or of early years?" she determined to prolong the conversation, and watch closely for a peep beneath the mask she felt sure was there.

"No, I do not remember my mother, and very little about my childhood. There are, however, a few bright memories I have treasured on account of their distinctness, and which will never leave me. The rest of my life, before I was six years of age, is but a dream."

The eyes of Mrs. Belmont were fixed with their burning gaze upon the face of the speaker, and although her heart beat more quickly and the color deepened on her cheek, yet she did not quail or remove her own calm look from them. [187]

"A little deeper," she thought, "and curiosity will be satisfied." Ah! how little you know those hidden depths! The bloom would die on that full round cheek, and the light of the joyous eyes would be quenched could their gaze penetrate that external covering of affability. Therefore be content.

"What are those memories, child? Tell me all."

Lily hesitated for a moment. The command embodied in the request disturbed her not a little, but she silenced her heart and continued:

"I remember being in a small cottage by the great ocean somewhere; I do not know where, and of being unhappy, yet there were bright spots here and there, standing out with such brilliancy that the darkness seems hidden by them. I loved the ocean, and as I learned the fact that at some time

I had been called 'Lily Pearl,' this awoke in me most inconceivable emotions; for this reason, no doubt, connected with a little dream that I had lived down among the pearls, and that a beautiful lady had picked me up from the waves—that dream made me love the music of its waters and long to become a part of the mighty whole. But you are ill!"

She was about to spring from her seat when an iron grasp was laid upon her shoulder and a husky voice demanded her to "sit down!" Still they could not remain longer unnoticed, and were soon surrounded.

"The ride was too much for you," suggested the hostess.

"It is sitting in such a warm room after being out in the cold," suggested another, all of which^[188] met with no contradiction, and excusing herself, Mrs. Belmont retired to her private room. There we will leave her alone with her wretchedness and remorse. Dreary companions are they both through the long hours of one wearisome night; but when the morning draws near, and we find that no kind hand for us to clasp is reached down through the dreary shades, the gray dawn shrinks back and the dark pall of despair drops its thick folds around us, shutting out the glorious day beams from our vision, while the night of the soul still goes on! Wearisome night! full of spectral forms which glide in and out through the darkness, bringing from the past unwished for memories which tell us ever of what we *are* and what we might have been.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LITTLE PARTY AT THE WASHBURN'S.

Rose, the youngest and only unmarried of the three daughters, was not at home on the arrival of the visitors. She came the next day, however, as was expected.

"The same wild Rose as ever," the father exclaimed, as he lifted her from the carriage and continued to look after her, as she bounded up the steps of the piazza, upsetting a little urchin on the way, sending him rolling down among the shrubbery at its foot, without stopping to heed the pitiful cry that came up from the thick shade any more than she did the familiar salutation of her father. Yet this insensibility is not unusual to that class of young ladies who have been reared from childhood under the destroying influences of "caste," wherever it can be found. Why should it be otherwise? The first impression made upon the susceptible heart is, "I am your superior; wealth and inherited power have determined our positions. Wealth and poverty cannot affiliate." Thus does the cultivating of selfishness begin which grows and expands until its hard, crooked, knotty branches reach out and smother the more tender plants of kindness and love, which must by necessity droop and become wholly extinct. Yet Rose Washburn was not wholly cruel or selfish.^[190] She had been used to seeing the little dark forms that sprung up everywhere all over the plantation rolling about from accident or design. "It did not seem to hurt them," therefore the silvery chords of tenderness and love which ever make such sweet music in the truly feminine heart, had ceased to vibrate as they always do when the spirit of selfishness rusts and corrodes them.

"The same wild Rose of two years ago," echoed Mr. St. Clair, as he met her in the door, imprinting a kiss on her cheek.

"I should think you would not dare touch me, for fear of being scratched," she replied, pettishly, as she bounded past him into the hall.

The young lady was not aware that Anna Pierson, the governess, was one of the guests she was expected to entertain, until entering the parlor a half-hour after her arrival. It was a fact not at all anticipated by the party themselves when the invitation was accepted, but George St. Clair most frankly expressed the opinion that it was a shame to give her no pleasure during the short vacation, and there was no reason under the sun why she should not take the place of Bertha, who had positively refused to accompany them, which Ellen echoed with great earnestness. There were many misgivings, however, in the mind of the humble Anna as to the propriety of accepting, after all, for she well knew that Mrs. Belmont, at least, looked upon her with an unloving eye, and how was she to be made sure that her presence would not be distasteful to those they went to visit? But Ellen laughed away every objection, declaring, "I will not go without you; we will stay at home together." [191]

This, of course, was not to be thought of, and Anna found herself happy in the assurance that, although far from home, she was still with those who loved her.

The penetrating eye of the governess saw the sudden flash of scorn that passed over the face of the new-comer at their introduction; nor did the slight pressure of the finger tips betray a cordial welcome.

"I am so glad to get home again!" she exclaimed languidly, throwing herself upon the sofa. "I have heard nothing for the last week but war, war, war! and if I was ever tired of anything it is that hateful subject. One thing, however, I have made up my mind to do. If those cold blooded northerners should presume to raise their plebeian hands against us, you will see me shoulder my musket and go forth to try my skill in popping over a few of them." She rang the bell violently as the mother replied:

"If I were so tired of a hateful subject I would not again introduce it."

A servant girl entered.

"Roll the sofa up nearer the grate." Then turning to Ellen, she continued:

"I feel chilly after riding. It is provokingly cold just now. Did you suffer much from your long journey? Miss Pierson, I suppose, is used to such weather."

They decided promptly that they both had a "lovely ride," and Rose settled herself down in her warm seat by the fire.

"Where is Mrs. Belmont?" she asked a moment after, "I have not seen her yet. The gentlemen, I reckon, are in the library discussing the war." [192]

The mother thought they were, and added that Mrs. Belmont had gone up stairs sometime before inviting Miss Gaylord to accompany her.

"She seems to have taken a great fancy to your daughter, Mrs. Gaylord," remarked Mrs. St. Clair, "you must be careful, or she will win her from you."

"Lily does not appear at all fickle in her affections; I think I am safe," replied the lady, smiling.

"Are you always so industrious, Miss Pierson?" interrogated Rose, blandly. "I beg your pardon; I forgot for the moment that you are from the land of industry. As true as I live, Ellen, she has drawn you into the same graceless habit. What is that on the table by you? A stocking, 'pon my word!" Ellen only laughed as she held up a portion of a worsted scarf in process of manufacture.

"We plebeians do not call this work; only a little amusement," interposed Anna, without raising her eyes. "We awkward people find it difficult sometimes to dispose of our hands, and so we employ them."

"I suppose so."

A toss of the head and some trivial remark to her mother was the only answer given by the young lady addressed.

The door opened and lunch was announced. The gentlemen entered soon after, and the conversation became spirited and general.

One thing Rose Washburn could not understand, she was heard to declare to Mrs. Belmont, and that was how George St. Clair could "devote so much time and attention to 'that menial.'" Of course it was only his excessive gallantry, but he ought to know that it does him no honor.[193]

Mrs. Belmont fully agreed with her young friend, yet showed no disposition to prolong the conversation. Rose also wondered at the unusual dignity and stateliness of the lady, and with renewed admiration for her queenly bearing she remained silent.

The dinner hour arrived at last. The bell had just called but all were not present, and so they waited. The host was in fine spirits. "Always happy," as he declared, but pretty generally more so as the day continued to advance. He was a lover of good wine, and unless attentively watched by his careful wife would often lose his boasted manliness after dinner. She had determined to use her influence during the stay of her guests to keep him the genial gentleman she so much desired him to be. He had, however, unknown to her, ordered wine to the library in the morning, but was quite sure he had been temperate in his potations.

"What do you suppose they call those two girls 'Rose' and 'Lily' for?" he asked, slapping Mr. St. Clair on the shoulder as the bell rang again and the party arose. "Not because their names are appropriate; that is a fact," he continued, after his boisterous laugh had died away. "You never saw a lily with such black spots on it, did you?"

"I have," remarked the young lady, playfully. "You will discover that my eyes are not 'black,' but a positive 'red brown,' as Aunt Dinah would say. We have lilies in our garden at home with just such colored spots on them, and we call them 'tiger lilies.' Now is not my name appropriate?"[194]

"Ha! ha! just so. And I reckon you have roses with terrible sharp things about them which say as plainly as words can do, 'hands off,' haven't you?"

"He-he-he, sharp-toed slippers," squeaked a piping voice from the stairs where they were passing.

"Yes, and see how you like it," exclaimed Rose, making a spring towards him, but with the sprightliness of a squirrel he darted behind a heavy post of the balustrades, which unfortunately

for the occupant of that dainty slipper received the full force of the blow that was not designed for it.

"I like it, Missus," called back the provoking little rascal, as he scrambled on all fours up the broad stairway.

"I'll pay him off," exclaimed Rose, excited with pain and anger. "If I was not so hungry I would do it now."

The laugh became general, and to avoid further remark the young lady joined in with them. Yet her cheek burned and she found it difficult to throw aside the unpleasant incident or make herself believe that George St. Clair, who was unusually attentive to her, did not also remember. But the hour of feasting passed agreeably enough, and when the ladies arose to retire, the young gentleman, who seldom took wine, asked the privilege of going with them. This broke up the after dinner *tete a tete*, and they all returned to the parlor. Anna stood by the window looking out over the beautiful landscape, when a voice near her asked in low tones:

"Are you very unhappy here, Anna?" She hesitated a moment before answering, as she looked into the manly face beside her. It was full of truth and anxiety.

"I am very happy, and have to thank you for my pleasure," was the quiet response.

"I feared I should have to crave your pardon, as I perceive that Miss Rose does not look upon you kindly."

"You may think it strange, but even this does not give me pain; it only amuses me."

"That is right. I rejoice that I have not been the means of troubling you when so much desiring your pleasure."

"Do you play?" inquired Rose, coming up to the window where the two were standing. "I think Ellen has told me that music is one of the branches you teach."

"Yes; and I play a little occasionally, as example is more forcible than theory," was the mischievous response. "Mr. St. Clair, however, will, without doubt, prefer hearing you, as my attempts would be only a story many times told."

George looked into the beaming face of his companion, and his own caught the light. "She spoke truthfully when she said she enjoyed it," he thought, and taking the hand of the hostess' daughter, drew her arm within his own and led her away to the piano.

"Rose sings very well," remarked Mr. St. Clair to Mrs. Belmont, who was sitting beside him on the sofa.

"One more," called out the father, as the last words of the song "Will You Sometimes Think of Me?" died away or were swallowed up in the dense volume of the elaborate accompaniment.

"What would you like, Father? 'Do They Miss Me at Home?'"

The remembrance of these words as sung in a distant home brought tears into the eyes of *one* of her listeners, as the scenes of that last night came rolling in upon the mind, and when at last the voice of Mr. St. Clair was heard calling: "Now, Anna, for Cathedra," she arose mechanically to

obey while the dew of love still glistened in her mild blue orbs. "It is my favorite, you know," remarked the old gentleman, apologetically.

"And it is my delight to gratify you," was the characteristic response.

Anna never sang better. There was something in the wail of the poor exile pining for the scenes of her Italian home which chimed in smoothly yet pensively with the low sighing of her own heart, and when the words "O let me die where my mother died," came bubbling up from the full font of her filial affections, a burst of applause mingled harshly with her flute-like tones. The hand that clasped hers as George St. Clair led her back to the window where they had been standing some time before, did not seem at all willing to relinquish its task when its duty was over; and not until he espied a smile ripple over her illumined features did he speak.

"A little homesick," he remarked, quietly, and changed the subject.

Mrs. Gaylord always retired early, and Lily, either from force of habit or affection, seldom failed to sit by her to talk or read until quietly resting for the night. That evening, as the pale face settled itself into the snowy pillow, the young girl stooped to kiss the weary brow as she asked:[197]

"Do you see anything peculiar about Mrs. Belmont? I do not like to be prejudiced, but somehow she strikes a chill over me every time I catch her gaze fastened upon me; and yet there is a fascination about her from which I find it impossible to disentangle myself. She commands me with the beck of her hand, while a look consigns me to silence, and yet I have met her so recently. Can you tell me what it all means?"

"You love her, my child."

"O no; it is not that. I almost fear her."

"Then she loves you."

"I do not think she does. For some reason I cannot divine she seems greatly interested in my early history. I told you of her strange conduct last evening. To-day she inquired if I had any idea where upon the Atlantic shore my childhood's home had been situated; and when I answered that I had no idea whatever, I could but notice the gleam of joy that flashed over her face. I should have called it satisfaction, if I had found a reason for supposing that the attitude of indifference she assumed was not perfectly legitimate. But I am wearying you when you ought to be resting. All of these are 'idle dreamings,' as Willie would say, so good night," and with another kiss the young girl stole noiselessly from the room.

Mrs. Gaylord, however, could not sleep. It did not seem at all like dreaming to her, and an indescribable sensation of fearful forebodings had taken possession of her, as one feels sure that a storm is approaching, although far away. "But it is only for a week," she concluded, "then she will forget it all and rest." [198]

Ellen St. Clair and Anna roomed together by special request, and long that night did the two friends lie side by side and talk.

"I do wonder so much," said Anna, at last "how Mrs. Washburn could have given her love to one so unlike herself in everything."

"It was strange. I have heard my mother tell the story many times. You know *they* were very dear friends in their school days, and have always kept their affections warm and bright by frequent communications and visits. If it were not for that tie I hardly think we should be drawn here for so long a time. But I hope you enjoy it just a little."

"More than that. I shall always remember you with love for giving me this pleasure. But you have excited my 'plebeian' curiosity regarding this strange marriage. Will you satisfy it?"

"O yes. Know, then, that Mary Gaylord was the daughter of a Virginia planter, who was very wealthy, and fearing to send his daughter north on account of the enmity existing between the sections, he posted her off to Augusta, where she found a husband who did not at all suit his taste. It was an elopement, I believe, and after all was over it was ascertained that the boasted wealth of the newly made groom consisted in the *prospect* of a few acres of pine swamp, which would probably become altogether unproductive before it should pass into his possession. The father, however, at last relented, and revoked his decree to cast her off forever, and gave them a few thousand with which he has by dint of buying and selling amassed quite a large fortune. This added to the estate that has since been left him by his father, has placed him on an equal footing with the planters of the State.[199] Were it not for the wealth he is supposed to possess, Jack Washburn would hardly be tolerated in good society. I have heard, Anna, that in your section of country worth, not wealth, is more generally the passport up the ascending scale."

"This should be true, but there is not such a vast difference between us. The social edicts are about the same. I often wonder how it will be when, as the Bible tells us, there will be a new earth, and we shall live in the society of the 'Sons of God.'"

Ellen laughed.

"Not much like the present state of affairs, I reckon. One thing I am sure of, there will be no master, no slave, nor shall there be war any more. It is dreadful to think of. Do you believe, after all, that the north will be so foolish as to fight? George says he is sure of it, but I hope he is not a prophet."

"You, I am convinced, will pardon almost anything in me, even if I tell you that I am of the opinion that God has this whole matter in hand, and will work it our according to His wise purposes. There have been a million prayers going up to Him for a century or more out of crushed hearts, dripping with the bitterest tears ever shed by human eyes, and will He not hear? Whether there is war or not, His will be done."

"Mrs. Belmont would call that treason, dear Anna, but I feel that it is true. If there is a pitying Father anywhere He will defend and protect His children and bring the guilty to their reward when the proper time comes, and in my opinion the 'mistress of Rosedale' will be obliged to put her keen eyes to a good use if she at last finds a way[200] to escape. But I am getting sleepy; good night," and in a few moments Ellen St. Clair had forgotten the wonder she had planted in the bosom of her companion.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEATH OF UNCLE BOB.

"There is no such thing as a trifle in the world," says the Spanish proverb. "When we remember how inextricably the lives of all mankind are tangled together, it seems as if every word and action moved a lever which set in motion a gigantic machine whose effect is beyond our control." Such has been the workings of those of whom our little history treats, and yet the labor is not completed.

Charles Belmont would arrive before dinner the next day after the incidents of our last chapter, and Ellen St. Clair was expected, of course, to be nervous and excited; but much to the chagrin of the mother of the young gentleman, at least, she was neither. One might well accuse her of indifference or disinterestedness, so calm and quiet did she appear. It was proposed that they should ride over to the depot to meet him, but she thought it "tiresome."

"Then let us go to the village for the letters," suggested Rose; but even that was "unnecessary," and, besides, it was Jim's work, and for one she did not "like to infringe upon the rights of others," she declared, with the merriest of laughs.

"Then," said George, coming to the rescue, "we will take Anna out and show her the orange groves." [202]

"That is just the thing; a walk was what was most needed."

"And Ellen is suited at last," exclaimed Rose, in a pet.

"But you will go without me. Southern luxury is no rarity to one who has always been used to it;" and the insinuating eyes darted to the calm face of her for whom the pretty speech was intended. "I will remain within doors, and listen to the chit-chat of the old ladies, or it may be, finish the 'Missing Bride,' which I consider far more agreeable."

"Do you find entertainment in the works of Mrs. Southworth? There are those who consider them rather effervescent—to speak mildly."

"Of whom you are included."

"Certainly so," replied George St. Clair with a touch of irony in his voice, it must be confessed, for he had seen the glow deepen on the cheek of Anna too many times beneath her scathing words, not to realize the uprising of his knightly indignation, which submerged, for the moment, his native gallantry. But one glance into the mirthful face of his companion, who was already equipped for her walk, brought to his mind her previous assertion, that she really enjoyed it; and he smothered the glowing fire and stepped into the hall for his hat.

Lily was bathing the aching head of her suffering mother, and could not be prevailed upon to leave her post, and so the three started on without her. On the piazza, however, they encountered "Toddy," who was rolling in the sunshine and trying to sing like Aunt Millie. [203]

"Here, you rascal," called George, "come and show us where we can find the store-house. I want you to see first how they prepare and store away the cotton," he continued, turning to Anna.

"Wants to see where dey works 'em?" asked Toddy with a very knowing look.

"Yes, where the gins are."

"Yes, massa." And the boy started off in a rollicking trot, much to the amusement of the young people who followed close after him. On he went, slapping his sides at every step, and casting a sly look over his shoulder at the ladies.

"Here, you monkey—don't you ever walk?" again called George, as he was getting far ahead.

"Yes, massa."

"When, I should like to know?"

"When Miss Rose wants dis child to hurry quick," he shouted back, at the same time bestowing one of his side-long glances.

There was another merry laugh when Anna inquired:

"What do they call you Toddy for? It seems like a queer name for a little boy."

"Don' know Missus; 'spects it's 'cause massa likes me."

This was too much even for the staid bachelor, and he joined heartily in the laugh that followed this bit of wit.

"I reckon they do not give you many whippings," suggested Ellen.

"Right smart, sometimes, Missus."

"Where are you taking us, madcap? Here, this is the way to the gin house."

"Yes, massa," and turning in the direction designated he proceeded with the same swinging trot^[204] as before. "Uncle Bob drefful bad ober dar," he added a moment after, pointing to a small cabin a little apart from the rest. "Reckon he's goin t' die," and he renewed with vigor the peculiar movement of his strange gait, yet this time the drumming of his chubby hands kept up a running accompaniment to the song he had left unfinished when disturbed in the attempt to imitate poor Aunt Millie.

Anna did not join in the amusement of the moment, for her thoughts were with the old man who "was mighty bad ober dar," and she longed to visit him in his humble home. She walked through the extensive warehouse, listened to the explanations regarding the work of the world-famed cotton gin, looked at the huge piles of bales not yet shipped, yet felt no interest in what she heard or saw, so great had become her desire to go to the little cabin where the poor negro was dying; and when they again emerged into the open air, she said, calmly:

"Why not make a visit to the sick now? I have heard so much in the north about the piety and resignation of the negro people in the dying hour that I long to witness it for myself."

The young man looked into the face of the speaker with a shadow of perplexity covering his own. Ellen, however, quietly remarked:

"All of these things have been greatly exaggerated, without doubt, and yet I shall never forget how triumphantly old Peter went home. I was quite small, but my heart learned a great lesson from that death. If you desire, Anna, I will go with you."^[205]

"I think, ladies, you had better commission me to carry the wine and oil, for having had one peep into the sensitive nature of our northern friend, I must consider you very thoughtless, my sister, in forwarding her desires."

This was said with apparent carelessness, yet Anna did not fail to perceive that he did not want them to go. Still she was not willing to give it up, and, laying her hand on his arm, she said, playfully:

"Miss Rose will require a little of your Samaritan kindness, if she is still weeping over the tortures of the 'Missing Bride,' and if you will pardon us we will go to the cabin while you administer balm in another direction. To-morrow, remember, we are to finish our rambles through the orange groves."

"Of course he will excuse us," interposed Ellen, "we will not remain a great while." And with a "Just as you please, ladies," their chaperon, with a most obsequious bow, walked away.

"He hasn't gone to the house at all," remarked the sister looking after him, but Toddy unperceived by either had appeared on the scene and with one of his knowing glances remarked quaintly: "Miss Lily ober dar wid de turkeys; I seed her goin' down de walk. Dis be ole Bob's," and rolling up to the door he opened it, then stepped back for the ladies to enter. "A little gentleman after all," remarked Anna *sotto voce*; but they were in the room where in the farther part lay the old man with closed eyes apparently asleep. "Do not disturb him," whispered Ellen approaching the bedside; but the large eyes opened as she drew near and a smile spread itself over the thin features.[206]

"De young ladies from de house has come to see you," said the girl in attendance. "Bress ye'se honey. I'se most home, got most t'ro' wid de work and de cryin'! Old Bob's done heaps of dem both—bress de Lord!" And the heavy lids drooped again over the large eyes where such a joyous light seemed burning. Anna could not resist the impulse to take the bony hand of the dying man in her own, and as it lay in her warm clasp he looked again upon her. "Does ye pray, honey? De good Lord help ye! It's but a little way down to de ribber whar old Bob's a-goin'! Poo' massa! I'se told de Lord all 'bout him. It's de liquor what keeps de good away—but den I'se most t'ro'—goin' home—bress de Lord!" A spoon was placed to his lips and as he swallowed the few drops he murmured: "*Poo'* massa! It's de liquor," and his voice died away in a prayer Anna was sure for his lips moved almost imperceptibly. There was a moment's silence, then Anna as she raised the hand she had been holding from the feebly heaving breast asked softly: "What are all the sorrows of life to you now? With heaven so near can you feel sad for a moment over what has past? Are you very happy poor, dying saint?" O that look! "It must have been a ray that had darted through the opening gate that so lighted up the wan features," said Anna after, "for it was like nothing I ever saw before." The poor girl by his side was weeping quietly, but she caught the glance of the heavenly eyes, and laying her hand on the white head said soothingly: "Dar's a crown for poor old Bob where dis head won't ache no mo';" and the fervent "bress de Lord!" fell again from the thin lips.

"Are you not afraid to stay here alone?" whispered Ellen.

"O, no; de Lord and de holy angels are close by, and Fanny will be here when de days work is t'ro'. But Bob an I isn't 'fraid. We'll both be dar by and by." Fearing to intrude longer upon the last moments of a departing soul the two stole noiselessly from the humble room which was so

soon to prove the gate of heaven to the liberated spirit, and they stepped out into the cool, bracing air, yet not a word was spoken.

"There come the carriages from the depot," remarked Ellen as they turned towards the house. Yes, Charles Belmont had arrived; as also Mr. St. Clair, in company with the host, from where they had been taking a drive over a neighboring plantation; and shortly after a merry party, to all appearance, sat down to a bountiful dinner. How little we know of the grief, bitterness, disappointment, anger and rage that can be crowded into one dark chamber of the soul over which the spirit of evil keeps its faithful watch, holding in its right hand the keys of its secret domain!

"Old Bob gone dead, sure," piped a voice through a narrow aperture of the door close to the master's chair.

"*Get out* you scoundrel!" exclaimed the host, at the same time throwing a chicken bone at the intruder's curly head which failed in its aim, while the gleeful "he-he-he!" mingled itself with the sound of Toddy's rapid scrambling up the broad staircase outside.

"Did you know Bob was so bad?" inquired the wife, stopping for a moment in her duties as hostess.[208]

"Bad? Bob wasn't bad about anything! But I knew he was going this morning, the old boy! Well, he did have one fault; he loved his good-for-nothing old master and I reckon things won't go quite as brisk now that he has gone."

"One of the faithful ones, I take it?" interrogated Charles Belmont.

"Yes, and a pet of my father's, who, when he was dying, told me to be good to 'Bob' and I reckon I've done it;" and the little ripple caused by the departure of a human soul closed up, and the dinner with its accompaniments of mirth and laughter went on as though the waters had never been stirred. Death! Mrs. Belmont retired to her room almost immediately after the party returned to the parlor, for a flood of contending emotions had rolled in upon her guilty soul at the very thought of the "king of terrors." Then, too, there came to her through the surgings of the inward tempest the last words of him who was sleeping in the shadows at Rosedale, "teach the children to be true, noble and better than we have been, for somehow I can but feel that Aunt Vina is right 'we must have the Lord sometime or be wretched!'" "The Lord! Wretched! Am I not all that now?" and the miserable woman paced the floor as her thoughts went on. Where was Lillian? She was to teach to be good and noble! Under that very roof was her child! The babe she had so desired to thrust out of sight—out of the world! Every motion of the childish figure—every look sent a barb of anguish to her already tortured soul! "It will all be brought to light" something had continually whispered to her awakened conscience for the last two days, and[209] how could she ever meet it? How gladly she would have throttled the power that was so resistlessly carrying her forward! O the agony of a sin-cursed soul! The stately lady stood by the window and looked out upon the scenes before her. Yonder were the rays of the setting sun yet lingering in the tree-tops; near was the rude cabin where the still form of the humble slave was lying. How joyfully would the proud, haughty mistress of Rosedale at that moment have exchanged places with the poor despised menial! But she must live; the future was unfolding itself to her every moment and what *was* to be done? Again the record of a mortal life was sadly closed, for on its pages was written the guilt of a perjured soul!

"It must be done!" she mentally exclaimed, while her long slender fingers clasped each other so tightly that the nails pressed painfully into the flesh. "I never could live with such a tornado of disgrace howling around me! *Never! It must be done!*"

"O what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive;"

what a concourse of evil spirits will enter when the door of the heart is thrown open to the first invited guests!

The miserable occupant of the upper chamber was realizing it all now as she had never done before. She had flattered herself that the great secret that was gnawing at her very life was wholly in her power; but the fantasy was being dispelled! Lillian was—she knew not where! Perhaps at that very moment probing the long-concealed mystery and if discovered would *hate* her mother!^[210] This was torture indeed! She halted in her walk and stood again by the window. "I must go down," she thought after a moments pause; "they will wonder at my absence. Secrecy and hypocrisy is my future work! To draw the veil of indifference over the boiling cauldron— smother the fire and be the gentlewoman of fashion and society! O for a mask with which to cover it all!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE ABDUCTION.

Mrs. Gaylord did not expect to return to her Virginia home for some time, it being her intention to spend the winter as far south as convenient, her physician having ordered a warmer climate and an entire change of scene. She thought her health was improving, and so she would remain until the crocus peeped from its bed beneath its brown covering, and then she would return. But it was a pity that Lily should be shut up so closely when there was so much in the city to give her enjoyment. Tiny could do all her mistress really needed, and "we will make it so pleasant for her," Ellen pleaded; and Mrs. Belmont, who stood behind the curtain, calm and dignified, had, unconsciously to all, set the plan in active operation.

"I suppose I shall be permitted to add my mite to the young lady's happiness, which I shall not fail to do if she will favor us, before I leave the city," she said quietly. All the time she was speaking her fingers slowly turned the leaves of a book on the table as though it was of very small moment whether the invitation was or was not accepted, and as the young lady left the room remarked, quietly:

"I believe I have taken quite a fancy to your daughter, Mrs. Gaylord. It seems sometimes that^[212] she resembles in some respects my Lillian; their eyes certainly are similar. Do you not think so, George?"

"Yes; I have often been reminded of her. The same deep, thoughtful expression, and at times the same sad look I have noticed on Lillian's face since I returned from Europe."

George St. Clair did not remove his gaze from the face before him while speaking, yet she answered calmly:

"I can see no reason why one so young should have such a look."

The young man bent his head almost to her ear, as he whispered: "And there is no reason under heaven why your daughter's face should wear it. There is a curse in a false ambition like the one that is blackening your soul. Unbend yourself and do what every mother's heart should prompt her to do. Seek your child's happiness and despise, as every noble character will, the worldly lust that is governing you."

"How dare you!" she exclaimed, rising to her feet and fixing her keen eyes upon him. But she said no more. The power of his calm, unflinching gaze awed her into silence, and turning she left the room. Yet the slumbering demon in her heart had been aroused and as she strolled out into the open air seemed ready to overpower her.

"What does he know about my false ambition? Could she have told him? Ah, but she knew nothing of her child; let her revelations be what they may, this secret is not his to taunt me with. Lost, lost! Poverty is to crush my pride after all I have done. 'A curse!' Yes, a curse has already set its seal upon my ambition—my life." She walked on^[213] until calm once more stole in among her the contending spirits, and she returned to the house.

"Mrs. Belmont seems like one who has experienced some great reverse," remarked Mrs. Gaylord, after her abrupt departure from the parlor. "I have noticed several times since she has been here a disquietude perfectly unaccountable in one of her position."

The young man made a casual reply, and others entering at the moment the little incident was seemingly forgotten.

"It has been decided," remarked Ellen to her brother the next morning; "Lily Gaylord will return with us, and Anna seems delighted. I had not thought until last evening that a tie of native land drew them together."

"A land of very favorable productions," replied the brother, with a mischievous smile.

During the short visit the war excitement was spreading wider and wider, and its symptoms became more and more positive. In the cities the alarm raged like an epidemic in certain circles, while there were a few who denounced the whole affair, a cooling draught quite inefficient to keep down the devouring fever. Great preparations were being made in Charleston, and a few other places were following its lead, so that, should the campaign really open in the spring, as was prophesied, they might be ready. Mr. St. Clair was one of the number who thought it not well to go to fighting. "To be sure," he would say, good-naturedly, "Uncle Sam is getting rather plethoric, and it may be well to give him a little fright," but he never would advocate the idea of the breaking up of households. "No doubt it would be a very^[214] fine thing to tumble down the old national structure after it was done we were sure of walking in over the ruins and building up to suit our own notions." But to tell the truth he was a little afraid of the old giant. He had learned that his locks might grow again, crop them ever so short. The safest way, he thought, was to let well enough alone.

His son was much of the same opinion, but if the house must be divided against itself he would not let it fall into ruin without a struggle. Therefore, in a few days after the little party had returned to the city, George St. Clair started for Charleston. Lily was in ecstasy as they drew near Savannah. The sea, the great glorious sea, was before her, and the music of its distant waves

thrilled every fibre of her being. It recalled the fancied dream of her childhood when she longed to go out and lay her head on the billows and become a part of its restless life.

Charles Belmont, who had gone to the city a few days before, was at the St. Clair's on their arrival and gave them a hearty welcome. Had he thought that little Phebe, as the adopted daughter of the wealthy Virginia planter, would do to reign at Rosedale?

A long programme was soon made out for the pleasures of the next few weeks. There were rides and public entertainments, select dinner parties and little *tete a tete's*, besides one grand, brilliant soiree at the senator's mansion which Lily must not fail to attend!

"It is so lucky that Charles Belmont has not left us," remarked Ellen while talking it all over. "He is a most graceful *chaperon* and it stands us in hand to court his favor. You will not refuse^[215] him, Lily?" she continued with an arch smile. "He seems well pleased to be called into service." Thus the weeks passed away. The violets peered out from their beds of green along the garden borders and the daffodils turned their broad faces to the sun, and yet Mr. Gaylord did not come south after his wife. He was in Richmond with the leading men of the day discussing the great topics under consideration, while Mrs. Gaylord grew weary with her long visit and more and more nervous with its daily protraction. After much urging and earnest solicitation by her friends she consented to follow Lily to the city, and she soon found herself forgetting, when once the guest of Mrs. St. Clair, that the time had hung heavily. The widowed Bertha became much attached to the pale little visitor, and found great consolation in pouring her sorrows into her attentive ear. One day she came abruptly into the room where Mrs. Gaylord was sitting alone and saw tears upon her cheeks still undried. "Then you too grieve sometimes," she remarked, laying her white hand affectionately on the bowed head. "How true it is that we find shadows where we should least expect them! But then it must be sad never to feel well!"

"O no, dear; it is not that! I seldom if ever have wept because of physical suffering. I consider my pains and aches an indispensable part of the programme of life. We all need a certain amount of refining in order to ascertain how much gold will remain, if any; therefore I bear all this because there is wisdom in it and an end to be accomplished."^[216]

"One would scarcely imagine that you could have a greater reason for sorrow."

"Perhaps not, and yet I surprised you with tears. Shall I tell you why? No idle fancy of mine but only a few innocent lines, the product, no doubt, of an experience similar to my own. Let me read them to you. 'We cannot judge of what the heart contains by the laughter that escapes the lips or the smiles that flit across and illumine the face, any more than we can fathom the soundless deep or discover the contents of its dark chambers by the sunbeams that lie upon its surface. A crown of diamonds and precious stones is a thing of beauty, but when lined with thorns and pressed down by its heavy weight of wealth on the pierced and bleeding temples it will lose its preciousness as it becomes a crown of torture! Thus many blessings, priceless in themselves, may become our greatest source of misery if a cruel hand twines thorns among them. Our most serious wounds are those that no eye can discover because of their depth.' May you not realize all this Mrs. Mason. *I* know it! This is the reason why your words, dropped one by one into the fountain of my soul, create such a melancholy echo!"

"I confess that I am astonished. Rich, talented and beloved; how can there be such pitiful wailings in your poor heart? Were I expecting my husband as you are yours, or had he died

where his last words could have been breathed into my ear I think I could hush every other saddened echo and call myself happy. But to have the light of life suddenly blown out, and with a great shock find yourself in total darkness, covers the heart with a pall hard to remove. Then to feel through^[217] the whole night that it need not have been! O—you never can know! *'The code of honor!'* My soul detests such chivalry!" and the bright eyes glared wildly into the face of her companion.

"My poor friend! The tenderest sympathies of my heart are yours! I am ashamed of my weakness; and yet there are many avenues to the soul through which the bitter waters flow. One of these, it may be, is the closing up of those through which the real practical benefits are expected to enter, leaving room only for the unreal and the unpractical. Here I feel is my fault. It is this binding up of my whole being with these silver cords, upon which every external incident has a power like the touch of electricity to fill my whole soul with discord. In my youth I very foolishly drew my own panorama of coming events, in which I left out everything that was rough or unsightly; in a word, filling up the future with ideal loveliness. I thought my life's path would soon begin to wind along through the valley of roses where no harsh winds ever blow and no dark shadows ever shut out the glowing sunlight. But the time when my slippered feet were to tread on thornless flowers has not arrived. I ought to be ashamed of myself ever to have expected it. It is not in my power to disjoint my nature and reconstruct it with iron! That I was so organized is my misfortune, not my crime!"

"Does all this make you unhappy? It seems to me that a nature so full of beauty or what you term 'unrealities' ought to have a source of joy all its own."

"If one could live to herself it might be so; but it is for the practical that we were created, for^[218] this we are chosen. Fail in the power of bestowal and verily we are guilty of the whole. I am a failure! It is my mission to sow dew-drops where wheat should have been scattered, to covet sunbeams when clouds are more to the purpose! It is not pleasant, surely, to awaken after a gentle nap of self-repose to find that a grave has been dug with your 'incapacities' which has swallowed up the love you once fondly expected would gild a whole life with roseate hues!"

"*Love you?* Why everyone loves *you*! Your husband idolizes you! Is it not so?"

"Go look at my wardrobe; is anything deficient there? My jewels—are they not the richest and rarest? But with it all my woman's heart is still unsatisfied. Ah, there is Lily; I hear her coming up the stairs. She has, the foolish child, the same wild longings, the same idealities that goad me. It was these that woke my heart to her cry for love."

Lily came bounding into the room her cheeks and eyes bright with the excitement of her morning ride.

"I am so sorry you did not go with us," she said as she kissed the pale lips of her dearest friend. "I am sure it would have taken all of the pain out of your head, the air is so pure and sweet. Besides Charles is to return to Rosedale to-morrow where his mother will follow in a few days, and Ellen will not trust herself with the new coachman, he is so easily frightened, the horses are so spirited; and Mrs. Belmont is almost as bad. She says she really believes he would jump from the box and run if they should put up their ears a little higher than usual. But you shall have one more ride, and if he deserts his post I will take it. That^[219] would be only the exercise of one of my early accomplishments. Dear old Rover," she continued, half to herself. Where was Willie?

Frequent letters assured her that he was doing nicely in his new vocation, while her constant memories of him added to his content as new prospects opened before him.

Mrs. Belmont insisted that Lily should spend one day at least with her before leaving the city, and as Mr. Gaylord was expected soon her request was speedily granted.

"We are to have a drive along the beach," Lily went on to say, "returning just as the moon rises. I wish we were to have a larger party, but it was not spoken of until yesterday. It will be delightful I know! Already I feel the uprising of that childhood's memory when I used to steal away to look at the moon as it lay on the water and wished I could go where it was."

It was a delightful evening as the little party started for their pleasant ride with the scent of far-off flowers coming to them on the soft wings of the southern breeze and the music of the great ocean in their ears. Into this the bright day-king was about to take his nightly plunge from behind the royal colors of purple and gold.

"What a little enthusiast you are about the ocean!" remarked Mrs. Belmont in response to some exclamation of admiration. "Perhaps you would like to take another such a ride upon it as you told me of?"

"I do not think I should be more afraid now than I then was if I were on those rose-colored waves yonder rocking and rolling as they are doing. I believe I should still imagine that the[220] voice of my mother was mingled with their song lulling me to sleep!" Lily did not notice the agitation of her companion or perceive that her lips were of an ashy hue and her cheeks sunken and pale, so much engrossed was she in the excitement of the scene about her.

"Turn to the right here," commanded Mrs. Belmont.

"Lor! Lor, Missus! *Dat* road?"

"Turn to the right and keep silent!" she repeated.

"This *does* seem like an unfrequented path leading into the woods," remarked Lily without any seeming agitation.

"Yes, dear; I am going to take you around a little then come down abruptly to the beach. I have been here and understand the way perfectly."

"Have we come a long way?"

"Only a few miles." Both were again silent.

"How soon it gets dark after the sun goes down," said Lily a few moments after. "May we not better think of returning?"

"Presently. There, take to the left now, it will bring us around to the beach."

Sam made no objection to the command this time, but his shoulders evinced unmistakable signs of inward dissatisfaction as he turned the horses into the road which was narrow and half overgrown with grass. Soon they came to a thickly-wooded elevation, when Mrs. Belmont commanded that they should halt! "We must turn to the left again here in order to gain the main road; but I want to show you, dear, more of the ocean than you ever saw before at one view. We

will walk a little way—to the opening yonder, while you will^[221] remain here with the carriage, Sam, until we return."

"It's *drefful* dark, Missus! Sam don't like it nohow!"

"I am very much of Sam's opinion," remarked Lily who had alighted. "The moon will be up in a few moments; besides, it is these trees that make it so dark here!" Once more on firm footing the fearlessness and buoyancy of her nature returned to her, and the young girl darted away toward the spot designated with a light and rapid step.

"Do not leave me to grope my way alone," called Mrs. Belmont.

"I beg your pardon and will stand here and wait for you," came the reply. "I have not gained the light yet, but it is a little way ahead; come!" She waited for a moment as she had said, and hearing a step on the right called out: "This way Mrs. Belmont; where are you?"

At this moment a pair of strong arms were thrown about her and a voice hissed in her ear: "Don't ye bawl, and ye shan't be hurt! I'se got a strong grip and so ye'd better be quiet!" She gave one shriek, and then finding he had bound her hands while speaking shouted again the name of "Mrs. Belmont!" Quick as thought a bandage was thrust over her mouth which almost suffocated her. "Thar, thar—I reckon yese'll be quiet now!" and taking her in his powerful grasp bore her rapidly away.

"Sam! Sam!" screamed Mrs. Belmont; "come quickly! Do you not hear the dear child calling? Something has happened! Run and find her!" She was close to the carriage and there was no^[222] need of calling so loudly; but the poor, frightened negro did not move.

"*Why do you not run?*"

"O Lor, Lor, Missus! Dis nigger can't do nothin'! I'se mighty 'fraid, Missus! Can't go nohow!"

Mrs. Belmont wrung her hands in the very abandonment of grief! "Poor, poor girl!" Then darting into the woods she called with a loud voice: "Lily! Lily!" But the roaring of the waves not far away was her only answer. After many exclamations of sorrow and outbursts of grief; after much calling and many remonstrances with the poor frightened negro for his good-for-nothingness on *all* occasions, and this trying one in particular, Mrs. Belmont reseated herself in the carriage and commanded that Sam should drive as rapidly as possible to the city.

"Dat I will, Missus; but what ye do wid di young lady?"

"Drive to the city as I command you!" was the emphatic answer.

"Yes, Missus;" and after some hesitation and audible ejaculations from Sam they gained the highway and an hour after drove up to the door of the St. Clair's.

"What the deuce does this mean!" exclaimed the old gentleman as Mrs. Belmont entered the parlor with haggard looks and her long black hair in disorder about her face. The sad story was soon told amid sobs and exclamations from her hearers.

"What possessed you to remain down to the beach at such a late hour?" interrogated Mr.^[223] St. Clair angrily. "One could almost suspect you of design."

"My dear husband," said the wife; "do not be too rash! The question is, what can we do for the poor girl?"

"Send to headquarters of the police immediately! The place must be thoroughly searched by moonlight and continued until she is found!"

All this time Mrs. Belmont sat like one who had suddenly lost the power of motion, while her keen, dark eyes seemed to burn the carpet at her feet. At last she arose and with the dignity of former days walked from the room, and her carriage was soon after heard rolling away from the door.

"You have offended your cousin Mr. St. Clair," said the wife.

"I do not care if I have! She had no business to be out in such a place without being better attended at any rate!"

"Mrs. Gaylord must not hear of this to-night," continued the good lady musingly as her husband left the room. "How can I tell her! It is terrible!"

Day after day was the search continued but with no success. Mrs. Belmont had closed her doors against all visitors, taking the precaution, however, to station her servants where they would be able to bring her the first news concerning the missing one. Mr. Gaylord reached Savannah in time to join in the search and administer consolation to his newly-afflicted wife.

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CHAPTER XXI.

BREAKING OF HOME TIES.

Let the human soul wander where it will with its burden of guilt; let it try as best it can to hide its deformity under the covering of complacency, the eye that never slumbers is upon it and an accusing conscience will continue to repeat "thy sin shall find thee out!" Poor Mrs. Belmont! Step by step had she been led forward on the path where she little expected to walk, but in her stepping down from true womanhood she had been met by the spirit of evil and he had guided her tremblingly on.

The third evening after the close of our last chapter a tall figure in feminine attire might have been seen in the street opposite her residence. A half hour after, the side door of that house opened softly and closed again as a closely-veiled woman emerged into the darkness. Passing down the main avenue it came to a street more unfrequented where the two met and walked on together a few moments in silence. At last stopping suddenly the voice of Mrs. Belmont inquired in a subdued tone, "Well—what are you going to say? *Quick!*"

"'Tse goin' to tell ye. I took the gal down to the boat, but 'twas a mighty hard tug. She didn't make no fuss tho', so I took off the handkerchief and told her to be aisy and I'd treat her well.[226] Then came lots of questions but I didn't tell her nothin'. The sea was mighty high and I know'd there was no gettin' to the ship, so I jest hugged the shore as near as I dast to 'til I got away where nobody could find us, then I pulled up where I know'd was good shelter to wait for the tide, when gorry! I'd no more than sot foot on a hard rock than the gal sprung to her feet and was off quick as a wink! How she got her hands untied nobody knows! But she couldn't ha' kept up five minutes for the wind was risin' and the waves was *awful*, so I reckon there's no more trouble for nobody!"

"You are a blunderer!" gasped his listener.

"'Tse done my best, that's all!"

"Here—take that—and remember next week you go to Charleston as a volunteer to fight, and if you get shot so much the better for you! This is the bounty to be given your family! Go—and let me and this transaction die from your memory forever! *Go!*"

They separated and Mrs. Belmont returned to her home with the same stealthy tread as that with which she had left it. Alone in her chamber the wretched woman listened once more long and helplessly to the terrible upbraidings of conscience!

"I did not intend all this," she cried. "O, no! The stain of *murder* cannot be found on my soul! I only thought—the great Judge knows I would never have injured my own flesh and blood! The great Judge!" she repeated, while a tremor ran through her frame. "Yes, He knows I did not mean all this! I was compelled—having taken[227] the first step there was no retreating! Ah, that first act! Whither will it lead me?"

In the morning the storm had passed and Mrs. Belmont came forth to light and life more rigid and stern than before. It was said that "her sorrows had made her grave; yet more grand and dignified," and soon the "presumptuous" whispers of blame were hushed, for one so *noble* as the "mistress of Rosedale" *could not* be guilty of crime! And the wave of public opinion closed over the scene and the waters of social life were calm again.

George St. Clair had remained in Charleston during these excitements, watching the progress of other scenes even more sad and cruel, yet free from the plague spots of crime, and bearing aloft the banner held to be of glory and honor for the reason that a nation, not an individual, had demanded the sacrifice of many lives, not one! South Carolina had drawn her ample robes more closely about her and with one pitiful leap had plunged over the fearful precipice down into the dark and unexplored depths of the yawning chasm of disunion, dragging after her a few of her unfortunate sisters. No wonder they stood and trembled upon the brink when it was once reached, for there were mysteries wholly unlooked for which seemed to lose their golden tints upon nearer approach and assume the dignity of practical realities. The little "affair" at Fort Sumter somehow had cast a shadow of foreboding over more than one chivalric heart.

Col. St. Clair met his commanding officer the morning after the surrender of the little half-starved garrison, standing alone viewing through[228] his glass the noble fort with the new emblem of glory floating over it.

"Well—how do you like the looks of that, Colonel? The Morning Star with *healing* in its beams—ha?" Taking down his glass he turned to his companion, who had not yet spoken, and continued; "what the deuce is the matter with you St. Clair? Your face ought to be shining with victory, but instead it presents a perfect blank!"

"As unreadable as our future," he replied with an attempt at a smile.

"Ah! A discovery! Getting tired already! Hope the white feather has not began to grow as soon as this!" There was a sneer on the face of the speaker which his companion did not fail to notice.

"General," he said mildly, "I acknowledge with deference your superiority in military rank, but do not forget that the blood of the St. Clair's runs through my veins, disseminating through my being no mean cowardice, as you well know!" The general laughed.

"You are awake now my brave boy and more like yourself! I only wanted to arouse you! Now tell us, what is the matter? Something more than our surroundings disturbs you. Out with it!"

"What time do the Eaton's go north?" was the calm inquiry.

"Next Wednesday in the steamer from New Orleans," the general replied in the same indifferent tone.

Another short silence ensued when St. Clair again remarked: "We have won such a victory that we can afford to rest for a time, I suppose? The fact is, general," he continued, "I have received[229] a telegram this morning that has disturbed me not a little!"

"I am glad your ill humor can be accounted for. I never saw you appear so unlike yourself; no bad news I hope!"

The manner of his companion was particularly offensive just then, but smothering his rage St. Clair replied: "You understand that I would like a furlough to return home for a few days! It seems that my father must leave Savannah, where he has been an honored and beloved citizen for nearly half a century, or forfeit his life, for no other reason than that he cannot at his advanced age learn immediately the act of dissembling nor tear from his heart the live-long love for the old flag."

"What do you mean, St. Clair?"

"I mean just *this*! My father was fired upon last night while sitting quietly in his own library, the ball passing a little above his head and lodged in the wall opposite."

The general was excited. "A blood-thirsty *wretch*!" escaped from his lips, while his companion continued calmly: "In order to save our loved ones we must push them off into the enemy's country; now honestly, general, has not that a smack of the ridiculous about it?" Without waiting for a reply he turned, remarking: "It is time that I was at work if I am permitted to go on the next train."

Anna Pierson was alone in the school room, her head bowed upon the desk before which she was sitting. A sheet of letter paper with a few lines written upon it was lying beside her, while the idle pen with the ink dried upon it had apparently fallen on the page blurring and spoiling it. Poor[230] Anna! She had sat there a long time silent and motionless, seemingly unconscious even

when little May stole softly into the room to tell "Miss Anna" that Uncle George had come; she was obliged to run back with the intelligence that Miss Anna was asleep; neither did the tread of heavier feet arouse her when nearly half an hour later George St. Clair quietly pushed back the half-open door and stood irresolutely for a moment on the threshold. She was not asleep as he well knew, for a low, deep sigh reached him, and the little hand that hung so listlessly over the corner of the desk on which her head was resting trembled. In a moment he was beside her, and taking the bowed head between his hands he raised it tenderly and looked down into the tear-stained face.

"Anna!"

"George St. Clair!" she exclaimed with almost a shriek, at the same time attempting to rise. But he held her fast.

"No, Anna! It takes a longer time than you have given me to get a perfect daguerreotype! I want the memory of this just as I found it, tear-stained and all! It is no more than I deserve. I should not have been so cruelly selfish as not to have told you weeks ago to leave Savannah and return to your northern home."

"Is it too late now?"

"No, but you must be speedy! More than this, you must take my father and mother and Ellen with you!"

"With me?"

"Yes, Anna; we cannot leave them here after what has happened."^[231]

"O, no; I shall be so happy! But George—"

"What, Anna?"

"My mother is a widow in humble circumstances—"

"Do you imagine that I would burden yourself or your mother?"

"Not that," she interrupted. "I was only thinking of the change from a home of luxury to one of only comfort, yet very peaceful and dear, at least to me. But it would be delightful if I could make them as happy and joyous in *my* humble home as they have made me in theirs. Will they let me try?"

"Has no one but the three you have mentioned added a morsel to your enjoyment since you have been an inmate of this home?"

The blood rushed to her cheeks and brow and she struggled to liberate herself that he might not look so intently down into her swimming eyes, which she well knew would tell him more than she would have him know.

"Then there was no one else! Well—take them; I will consign them to your care until the detestable struggle is over! When this is done I will relieve you. Bertha is a true rebel and will have no fears in remaining where she is."

The voice of the speaker was low and tremulous as he uttered these words, and Anna thought that she had never before seen his face so pale and thin. He had permitted her to rise and she now stood before him. Did she love him? She had asked herself that question many months previously, and although her lips were prompt in their denial her heart had remained silent. It throbbed now as she met his troubled gaze and beheld the look of^[232] sorrow on his face. It was for a moment only. For the first time her eyes fell upon his military dress; it was a rebel uniform! A flood of recollections rolled in upon her in deadly combat. Would that hand which had so lately touched her cheek spill the life-blood of those who were so dear to her? The thought sent the blood back to her heart and left cheek and lip pallid and cold! With an involuntary shudder she laid her trembling hand on his shoulder and tried to speak, but the words died on her pale lips. George St. Clair passed his arm about her and drew her to a seat on the sofa. "You are ill; sit here until I procure some water!"

"No, no; I am not ill; it is over now. You came to talk to me about going home. It is very kind of you;" and, rising, she extended her hand. He took it tenderly in his as she continued: "I joyfully accept the charge you have placed in my care, and will endeavor to be to them all you could wish; and now, before our last farewell, make me one promise, will you." Her lips quivered, but with an effort she thrust back the tears that were welling up from her full heart, while her hand lay motionless in his. "It is this: Should one or both of my brothers, through the fickleness of war, be thrown into your power, that you will let the memories of the last eighteen months soften your heart with mercy toward them."

"Has this uniform converted me into a monster? I do not wonder? Yet I promise you all and more! God only knows what those memories of which you speak will do with me. Now we will go and talk the departure over with the rest, yet not with that pale face, Anna. It would add a new^[233] pang to the sorrows of my parents, who are now unhappy with the prospects of expulsion, as they term it. Have you not one kind word for me now that we are so soon to part, perhaps never to meet again? O, Anna, I had torn from my life's history several pages which I had determined to read to you to-day, but cannot now." He raised her hand to his lips. "Farewell! we will go. To-morrow, no doubt, you will be busy; the next day we must be in Charleston to intercept a New Orleans steamer going north. This route will be a little longer but more agreeable, as every train is thoroughly searched for any who may be going thither with more information concerning our plans than would be desirable. Again farewell." He dropped her hand and left the room.

Anna sank down again on the sofa, and for a few moments gave vent to her pent-up tears. The succeeding day was full of sadness and bustle. Many tears were shed, and presentiments indulged in. The invincible Bertha alone stood firm and apparently unmoved. Only once did the son and brother appear with the family. He came to dinner, but disappeared as soon as it was over. Anna tried to think of her home, where she would soon be, of the joy of her fond mother at the reunion, but it was piercing the cloud to draw the sunshine from beyond.

In one week the little party arrived safely in Washington; from there they took the cars for Baltimore, and thence to New York.

A few miles back from the noble old Hudson stands a pleasant little village, nestled in among the green hills and wide-spreading trees, cosy and quiet, excepting where the rapid stream comes^[234] rushing down through the valley, turning in its course two huge splashing wheels that

never grow weary as they keep on with their work, propelling the machinery of the massive cotton mills which were the life and pride of the inhabitants for many miles around. It looked calm and peaceful as seen from the deck of the steamer, where Anna was sitting, and her heart bounded with ecstasy as the pleasant remembrances of her home life came sweeping over her. She had been sitting with the hand of Ellen St. Clair clasped tightly in her own, apparently listening to her exclamations of delight at the grand scenery through which they were passing, while in truth she was harkening to other voices that came up from the past, and gazing on the many sweet faces that filled her heart with a new joy, and drew back for a while the dark curtains that seemed to hang between her and the shadowed future.

"I declare, I do not believe you have heard one word I have been saying." This from Ellen at last. "All of that ecstasy is wasted; and I indulge in it so seldom! Tell me, Anna, what were you thinking about?"

"Of home, dear Ellen, and how happy we will all be together."

"But Father thinks we may better take rooms at the hotel; he is afraid."

"I understand all. They will be better acquainted with our habits soon, and, it may be, will think more leniently of us; but I am responsible for your safe-keeping, you know, and could not think of extending my care over more than a mile to the hotel." Anna smiled, while Ellen's laugh[235] reached the parents who were sitting some distance from them.

"They are happy, wife," suggested Mr. St. Clair, "and I reckon we might as well be so too, and make the best of circumstances."

The little circle in the widow's cottage would have been happy, yes joyous, had there not been two vacant chairs at the evening gatherings and at the morning devotions, while the sound of war came to them from the distance, telling of bloodshed, of anguish, of heart-strings breaking and homes made desolate forever. It was sad; but the widow never ceased to pray, and with her petitions there went up a meed of praise that He had given her the power to offer, on the altar of sacrifice, her first born, with his brother, both true and noble.

Colonel St. Clair's letters were frequent, and although full of love and solicitude for his parents and Ellen, he had never more than casually mentioned the name of Anna in any of them. But his sister was with her and she was happy. Having never herself known the love of a sister, she fancied that in this dear friend she had at last found a recompense for her years of unsatisfied longing. Milton has said "The happiness of a nation consists in true religious piety, justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude, and the contempt of avarice and ambition; they in whom these virtues dwell eminently need not kings to make them happy; but are the architects of their own happiness, and whether to themselves or others are not less than kings." And we add, the country who has these virtues and lives upon the principles emanating therefrom needs not war to wipe out injustice and wrong.

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CHAPTER XXII.

LEADING HER ON.

The path downward is easy of descent, even though the end thereof be eternal ruin! There were thousands at the time of which we are writing (as well as in all stages of human life) who threw themselves from the lofty pinnacle of true nobility to grovel awhile in the slough of wickedness, then perish forever! How terrible must be the awakening of such a soul, if the kind Ruler should ever permit the awakening to come, and yet worse, sadly worse, would be the unconscious sleep that plunges its victim over the precipice of ruin to be aroused at last beyond the boundaries of hope!

One night after the first signal defeat of the southern army, which seemed to dim for awhile the bright halo of victory that had darted up the horizon from northern skies, a circle of ladies were gathered in a spacious parlor in Charleston, doubtless for business purposes, and those of no ordinary character, if we should judge by the earnest debates that were carried on in one corner by a group apart from the rest, or by the sage countenances and serious deportment of the others.

One of the number, a tall lady in black, had arisen from her seat on the sofa, where she had been discussing for a long time some important^[238] subject in which all appeared particularly interested, and was now walking with measured tread and folded arms up and down the long parlors, seemingly unconscious of the low buzz of subdued voices which fell on her ear at every turn, for her dark, keen eyes had never once been raised from the carpet on which she was treading.

Just outside of the window stood a large magnolia tree whose upper branches reached the narrow opening made by letting down the window to admit the fragrant air from the blossoms outside. To-night this had not been neglected, and as the heavy lace curtains were pushed slightly to one side a pair of dark, wondering eyes peered down upon the scene below. In the kitchen another group had gathered; their faces were darker and their clothing coarser and homelier than those upon which the slave boy was gazing from his elevated seat in the magnolia tree, but the all-absorbing subject had fired the blood and quickened the pulse alike of each. Harry had determined to learn as much as possible about the excitement, and his heart had beat rapidly as he listened to much that had been said by those who had occupied the sofa directly under the window; but he could hear little now and he waited impatiently for the return of the principal speaker who provokingly continued her thoughtful promenade. He was thinking of the light, frail mulatto girl down stairs who was nervously waiting for his appearance and the new secret he was to confide in her; and the half hour seemed to extend to an interminable length.

It ended at last. The tall figure reseated itself in the chair, and the eager face of the listener^[239] pressed hard to the frame of the window that his ear might not lose a word.

"Yes; *I will go!*" were the first that reached him.

"You have decided nobly!" exclaimed several in a breath.

"It is just what I knew you would do after deliberating upon it!" replied the one who seemed to be particularly addressed. "You are so much better fitted for the mission than any one present!"

Your queenly bearing and imperious manners would command the confidence and respect of strangers. Then your acquaintance in Washington would so materially assist you! It has been proven that our army must act with skill as well as power, and as the colonel says, 'we *must* learn something of their plans before they are brought against us, if we are to overthrow them.' For this you are well adapted as you will have no trouble in mingling with the most refined, or in select circles where such things are ably discussed." Mrs. Belmont had been sitting during this speech seemingly absorbed in her meditations, but the listener outside lost not a word.

"You will disguise yourself in some way, I suppose," suggested another. Mrs. Belmont aroused herself at this.

"I will take one hundred dollars only of the money subscribed, and will return to this house one week from to-day without a card and my name shall be 'Mrs. Southey.' If Harry does not recognize me I shall feel secure. His keen eyes and quick perceptions would penetrate my mask I know if it could be done. I intend it shall be complete, but this shall be my test!"[240]

An approving hum went round the circle. "But supposing he *should* know you?" suggested the mistress. "I fear that half-blooded rascal—he knows altogether too much if I can read aright the merry twinkle in his eyes and the inquiring look with which he scrutinizes every stranger who visits here. But we will try him. We must not shrink from any imaginary ill when you are to risk so much for our good," continued the lady.

Harry gave a low chuckle as he thought, "Nebber you fear dis chile; he won't know nothin' dis time su' as de worl'! Jus' you watch his eye when Mrs.—Mrs.—what de name; well, 'twant Belmont, dat's sartin! He-he—reckon dis 'half-blood rascal' got 'nuf dis time!" And the nimble figure scrambled noiselessly down to the ground and darted away to find Nelly who was anxiously waiting for him.

"O Harry!" she exclaimed as he caught her in his arms; "I was *so* 'feared you'd be wanted! I heard de bell ring and de ladies are agoin'!"

"Let 'em go, Nelly; you'll be a lady some day jes' as good as any on 'em! I heered lots and we's goin' t' be free! Hurrah!"

"O Harry, hush; somebody'll hear ye, sartin'."

"Oh I could yell jus' like de sojers! Hurrah! But dis chile's got to wait; de good time's comin', Nelly, de good time's comin'; but dar's de bell—dat means dis rascal, su'," and away the light figure bounded, leaping up two steps at once as he proceeded to the upper hall where some ladies were standing ready to take their departure.

"Where were you, boy, to make Mrs. Belmont wait so long? I rang twice," exclaimed the mistress, as he came slowly into their presence.[241]

"Spects I must 'a' fell asleep Missus. Didn't hear only dis once."

"You had better keep awake another time. Now hand the ladies to their carriages, and see if you cannot be as polite as your young master would be if he were here." There was a hearty laugh as the servant opened the door, bowing most obsequiously as several passed out before him, he following to do the honors of the "young gentleman."

At the appointed time Mrs. Belmont appeared at the door of her friend, and was ushered into the parlor by the facetious Harry, who bowed as unconcernedly as the lady herself could desire. Upon extending his hand for the card he was supposed to expect, she said, blandly: "Tell your mistress that Mrs. Southey is waiting for her;" and bowing low the servant left the room to obey her command. On the staircase he halted to perform several ludicrous gyrations, while the merry twinkle in his eyes laughed itself out, and when he reached his lady's private boudoir they told no tale of inward excitement.

"Mis' Southey is a waitin', Missus." The sharp eyes of the mistress were upon him, but he remained unmoved, whistling a few low notes at the same time beating a subdued tattoo upon the door.

"Mrs. Southey?" repeated the lady, without removing her gaze, but not a muscle moved in the face she was scanning.

"Tell her to come to me," she continued, and the servant departed. Great would have been the chagrin of the mistress had she seen the humble slave boy as he descended to the parlor below. Catching a glimpse of Nelly at the farther end of the long hall, he threw himself into the most[242] laughable contortions, which provoked in her convulsive chuckles at the same time adding a reproof by a dubious shake of the head. In a few moments more the door closed behind Mrs. Belmont as she entered her friend's room and the two were alone together.

"I am sure he had not the least idea who you were, and no wonder! I do not believe I should recognize you myself if we should meet on the street;" remarked the lady as her visitor seated herself. "How strangely you look in that gray traveling suit!"

"Not more so to you than to myself;" was the low reply.

"Your hair put back so plainly, and those glasses, have really added half a score to your years. No one will doubt your origin, or that you are an English lady of the old school." The speaker laughed merrily, but the visitor remained calm and silent, having been led by her companion far away into the future where new scenes and new duties awaited her. It was a perilous task she had undertaken, and no one understood it better than herself. But the last few years had been fitting her for the risks she were to encounter.

"It was true that no one within the circle of my acquaintances was so well fitted to act this part in the great drama of war," was her conclusion, and no one had such a reason for hating the foe as had she, and while she was performing this great service for her country she could at the same time pay off the debt of her blighted hopes. During the short visit quite another scene was being enacted below stairs. Harry and Nelly were standing together in one corner of the large kitchen engaged[243] in close conversation, notwithstanding the protestations of Aunt Nancy, who reiterated a dozen times a day at least the declaration "Dat boy Harry don't arn de salt in his porridge." For once her words rattled away in the air and fell unheeded on the ears they were aimed at.

"I tell you, Nell," said the slave, "dar's somethin' goin' t' happen jes suits dis chap. We'll have a fine house all our own, and some little Sambo to take care ob de chilerns, and, and—"

"Go away, you Harry," and the girl slapped his round cheek, with a yellow hand that delighted to push back the curtains hanging about her future as well as did her lover.

"Well, I hearn 'em talk, and old Ben sang 'de Good Time's Comin', louder last Sabba-day dan he eber did afore. It's comin' Nell. I jes thought—I'll tell Ben, and set him praying for it. He'll make it all right, sartin, sure; and when we get de big house we'll take old Ben to mind de chilerns. He'll like dat for pay, sartin." Nelly laughed, and declared again that Aunt Nancy wanted her, then darted away, followed by the laugh of her lover.

Three weeks after Mrs. Belmont arrived safely in Washington. In due time she took up her lodging with the family whom she had known several years previously, and who well understood her mission in the city.

As the "wealthy English lady who had fled from the South on account of her anti-war principles," she was admitted to the most private circles, where she promulgated her "abolition" doctrines to the evident satisfaction of her numerous admirers. It did seem a very strange thing that the anticipated movements of the Union army should be^[244] known to the enemy long before they were brought to maturity. But had the puzzled authorities seen the tall gentleman who came leisurely up the long avenue three times a week until he reached the farther end, where he would look carelessly about him, and stopping under a certain tree take from beneath a stone a folded paper, then walk as slowly on, they would have easily imagined that in this was the mystery concealed. Yet it would have required a great amount of credulity to believe that Mrs. Southey, who had so won the hearts of the people, could have possibly known of, much less have written, those mysterious epistles. Only once did her large eyes lose their determined look, or the crimson wave of self reproach roll over her stern face, but the calm face of our noble President, as he held her hand in his, scrutinizing her face, brought them both to view. Did those penetrating eyes pierce the mask she was wearing? Did that manly soul discover the spirit of rebellion looking out through those orbs that so shrank back at his gaze? It was only for a moment. He bowed while the old smile returned to his plain face as he extended his hand to the next visitor.

Abraham Lincoln sleeps to-day in a martyr's grave, but the touch of his warm hand, without one stain of human blood upon it, and that look from those reproachful eyes, so full of love and good will to all, sank with a heavy weight down into the traitor's heart that night and were living, real things to the wretched woman, who lived to mourn over the sin of treachery, not only to her country but her home-loves. Alas! that any should think to subdue the tempest of remorse which comes to beat upon it, by prevarication or^[245] crime. The eye of justice cannot be deceived. Did these thoughts sometimes come to the miserable woman, who tossed upon her bed as the memories from the past came back to torment her? Where was her child? Her Lillian? It had been many months since she had heard from her directly, and there were times when the terrible presentiment of coming disgrace would haunt her dreams and fill her waking moments with dread. The war—the terrible war! Her son was probably in it, surrounded with the dangers of a common soldier. George St. Clair was in it. The mighty wave of devastation was rolling southward, and Rosedale was cut off from her approach, perhaps forever. Where was the end to be? What wonder that she trembled at every report of aggression or conflict that sped towards her! But worse than all this was the terrible consciousness that sin had stained her soul with blood. Never for a moment did the awakened conscience cease its upbraidings. In vain did she answer back: "Say not this of me. Murder is *not* one of my transgressions. I did *not* mean all that!"

But the voice would not be silenced.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DAY IN THE HOSPITAL.

On almost every breeze came the sounds of conflicts or victories, or defeats, or mournings and heart-breakings, which chimed harshly with the shouts of exultations and cheers of the conquering hosts. On every breeze went up also to the great Father and God of battles the wail of anguish, the cry for mercy from breaking hearts, as well as the earnest plea for protection for loved ones in the perils of war; and the gentle spirit whispered to the despairing soul, "What I do ye know not now, but ye shall know." Blessed comforter! What could be done with all the mysteries of life that continually creep about us to chill and paralyze our being were it not for its peaceful influences? But let us return to glance at the terrible battle of Bull Run, which sent dismay into thousands of homes where the dearest ties of love were severed and the strongest links of earth broken forever. Let history paint the dark cloud that hung over the blood-stained field, casting their sombre shadows on the lonely graves of the early sacrificed.

There was much wondering in high circles how the plan of attack was so well known to the opposite forces, which would have ceased could they have looked in upon the "wealthy English lady" for a moment, who with her hostess, was waiting^[248] for their private messenger who was expected every moment with the latest news from the seat of conflict, which was to assure them that the Union army was defeated. The dignity of the mistress of Rosedale was for the time laid aside while she reveled in the very abandonment of her exuberant joy.

"This pays me after all for the risks I have run," she exclaimed with a toss of her regal head. "Wondering eyes will flash to-day, and aching hearts exult. I have been waiting for this. The hour of vengeance never loses itself though the whole world should turn over in wholesale confusion."

"Do not, Mrs. Southey!" pleaded her companion, "for it seems even to me that there is a sure prophecy in your words. Vengeance! Will it hunt us out at last?"

"Hush! I was not speaking of such minor facts as ourselves. The prophecy, as you term it, only incidentally bubbled up with the shouts of victory; that was all." But the stern face paled perceptibly as she uttered these careless words.

"It may be well to shout, still I advise you not to be too highly elated, for remember the reports are not all in yet, and I am in possession of a few drawbacks as to the final results. By the way, did you notice the remark of that senator last night about traitors and spies? I looked up to see if you experienced any peculiar sensations about the throat."

"Did I show any signs of suffocation?"

"I did not perceive it."

"Then your look was not very penetrating. I hope all of my friends will be equally considerate."^[249]

"Then you did feel a little uncomfortable?"

"Only for a moment. I might, of course, make a misstep that would slightly disarrange my mask, and it would, as you know, be uncomfortable to have curious eyes peering beneath it, and the possibility, at times, causes a little unpleasantness." A smile played feebly across the face of the speaker, which soon died away, leaving cheek and brow a shade paler than before. No doubt her soul had taken another peep through the rifted curtain that was shutting out her future, and beheld something that must have appalled her. And what wonder? "The way of the transgressor is hard."

"I have been thinking," continued the other lady, after a long pause, "that we must follow the noble example of the patriotic ladies of Washington and visit the hospitals. We might do great good there. Kindly hearts and willing hands will, without doubt, be in great demand on the present occasion. As for me, I am anxious to be about the work," and she turned to the window.

"A grand thought, and shows conclusively that you have remarkable diplomatic powers, altogether unlooked for in our sex. I shall be ready to follow your lead in such a noble suggestion at our earliest convenience; but it will never do to go empty-handed. The poor fellows will need many things. If we are to be ministering angels, you know, we must take the oil and wine."

How different from all this were the feelings and aspirations of the little group gathered together in the widow's cottage on the banks of the grand old Hudson. Three days after the above conversation in Washington, Anna Pierson returned from the village post-office, as was her custom, bearing in^[250] her hand several papers, which were distributed as usual.

"No letters, Mother," was the prompt reply to the anxious, inquiring look as she entered. "It is not time, unless they were written immediately, and we should not expect that."

Her words were cheerful, for she had carefully prepared them during her walk; but her heart was troubled with fearful apprehensions, and she dared not consult one of those silent messengers that were clasped so tightly in her hand until she had entered her own room and seated herself by the window. Then she cast her eyes over the long columns: "The Great Battle! From our own Correspondent." Why did she not read further? She had longed all day for that very article, and now that it was before her, her eyes turned towards the clouds in the west as though her thoughts were all centered within their shadowy folds. Ah, there are many hearts to-day wherein these sad memories still linger. *They* could tell why Anna Pierson did not read, why she shrank from the terrible revelations that might be before her. There were many names included in the correspondent's letter over which her eyes hurriedly ran.

"Thank God!" Fell from her lips as she reached the end of the list without seeing a familiar name; but below was a P. S.:

"I have just learned that Col. St. Clair of the Confederate army has been brought into our lines dangerously wounded."

The paper dropped upon the floor beside her as she sat silent and motionless among the falling shadows, until a timid rap on the door startled her. In a moment Ellen entered, and without a^[251] word threw herself at Anna's feet, and, hiding her face in her companion's dress, wept aloud. An arm stole softly about her neck and a hand smoothed caressingly the dark braids of her hair.

"Don't, O don't, dear Ellen," she said; "let us talk together. I have been a full half-hour coming to a conclusion regarding my duty in this terrible crisis. Listen, now, while I tell you my

determination." These words of love were so gentle and kind, and her voice so full of sympathy, that Ellen soon found herself soothed and comforted under their tender influences.

"Yes, Anna, do tell me, for I was never at such a loss regarding my own duty as now, and perhaps your decision may aid me."

"Perhaps it will. Well, it is this: I am going to him. He will need tender care, and I will bestow it. You, dear girl, must take my place here; will you?"

"Yes, Anna, but—"

"No matter; you know I was to give you my matured decision, so do not imagine that it is possible for me to waver."

"Your mother, Anna; what will she say?"

"She will not hinder me. But I shall expect you to be a daughter to her as well as to your own parents. All will need you to cheer them during my absence. I shall place them in your care with the full faith that all will be well."

"I cannot understand you, Anna. I came here faint and trembling at the very thought of his sufferings, to find you all ready to go to his relief, willing to sacrifice home for only a friend, while I, his sister, had not supposed such a thing possible." [252]

"Only a friend." Was this true? Could sympathy alone have compelled such a sacrifice? Memories of other days came stealing in upon her senses like sweet odors from a far-off land, but she thrust them aside, and kissing the upturned face before her, said, smilingly:

"Never mind, dear; perhaps you will know me better some day. You are, however, mistaken in thinking me all ready, for I shall be obliged to wait until Monday to finish my preparations. I shall gather a few luxuries with many little things that I feel I shall require; so let us go to work and banish present sorrow with busy hands."

True to her purpose, in three days Anna emerged from her baptism of benedictions and farewells, and, laden with endearing messages and tokens of love for the suffering one, stepped on board the "Vanderbilt," that was to bear her forward on her chosen errand of mercy. Numerous and varied were the emotions that took possession of her heart as, when alone seated on the deck of the noble steamer, she found time at last for calm reflection. Would she find him alive? And would he be glad to see her? Then came stealing into her thoughts the unwelcome fact, like the whisperings of the serpent in the garden of flowers: "He is a rebel!" The suggestions ran on; "will it be possible to minister to the necessities of one like him without incurring censure? A *rebel!*" Tears came to her eyes. She had taken no time for weeping since the sad news reached her, but now she gave free vent to them although knowing that curious eyes were upon her. But sorrow was no uncommon spectacle in those days of bereavement and heart-breakings. Then came a thought as softly as steals the soft sunbeam that dries up the summer rain: "My brothers are safe; his hand is powerless now to do them harm. Who knows but he will cease to contend for a cause he has not loved; to struggle for a victory his heart never desired."

One who had not looked on the scenes in a hospital after a battle, has no idea of the soul-depressing sights that everywhere present themselves. So thought Anna who, after two days of

restlessness and anxiety in Washington, at last obtained permission to go to Alexandria where she was most needed. While standing among the dead and dying, what wonder that her cheeks paled and her eyes were filled with tears of pity? It was where new accessions were almost continually being made of such as had not previously been able to be moved from the field-tents and private houses where they had been carried. The poor sufferers were brought in upon stretchers or blankets and laid on the floor, waiting for their wounds to be examined, or the stumps of amputated limbs to be redressed, and weather-beaten bodies to be made more comfortable generally; before being taken to the next ward, where nice clean beds were waiting them. Just before her a young man with dark brown hair and deep blue eyes was lying on a mattress where two men had placed him. One leg was gone, and a blood-stained bandage was about his forehead. How pale and wan he looked! His gaze was upon her, and his lips moved. In a moment she was beside him. "Water," was all she could make out. Here was work; why should she be looking for any other? She placed the cup to his lips and raised his head tenderly while he^[254] drank. A cup of cold water! How sweet were the blessings that came in upon her soul as she gave it to him! "Thank you," and a feeble smile came to his lips.

"Will you take this basin and wash some of their hands and faces?" asked a cheery voice near her. "I will get another. Poor fellows; they sadly need soap and water before clean clothing can be put on them."

It was a kind, sympathizing face into which she looked while listening to the request, and although she hesitated to commence so strange a task, it was but for a moment. There was a world of thankfulness in the blue eyes that looked into hers as she took away the blood-stained bandage and smoothed back the dark locks from the brow while she bathed and cooled it with a soft, gentle hand.

"You are so kind," he murmured at last; "God bless you."

"He does," was the quiet answer, and the mild eyes closed, but not to sleep.

"Do you suffer much?" she asked as she laid the hand she had been washing back on the heaving breast.

"Not much; yet I shall not live. My mother, O my mother!" A tear escaped from beneath the closed lids and dropped down upon the hard pillow. Anna saw it as she turned to leave and stopped to wipe it away. "I will see you again," she whispered and then passed on.

A burly son of Erin was lying near with an arm missing and a foot thickly bandaged. With an encouraging smile from the nurse who was engaged in administering to one who might have been his brother, Anna bared her arms to the work.^[255]

"Shall I try to improve your appearance a little?" she asked, at the same time kneeling beside him.

"Holy Vargin bless ye, Miss," he ejaculated. "It's not the likes of ye's who should be doin' it; but the Son of Mary will bless ye, Miss. Look yonder," he continued, "d'ye see that gray-back in the corner there? He's a reb; ye's wont wash his face, sure?"

"Certainly we will," replied Anna, who could not help smiling at the eagerness of her questioner. "The Bible tells us to 'do good to them that despitefully use us.' I have no doubt his face needs washing as much as yours, and should I not do it?"

"Faith and I'd put lots of soap in his eyes, and wash up instead of down, if I did it at all, at all."

The girl sighed as she tugged away at the worn out boot that seemed unwilling to yield to her powers, but it came off at last, and with elevated nostrils she continued her labor of mercy. While thus engaged she looked occasionally towards the rebel coat in the corner; but it was not he for whom she had been anxiously searching, yet her heart did not fail to upbraid her for an apparent neglect. She had inquired as often as she thought judicious, but had learned nothing. "Perhaps he will soon be brought in," she thought, and her eyes turned searchingly upon every new-comer. Close by was one who had just finished his mortal sufferings, and beyond another so still that one might have thought him dead; but as Anna laid her hand upon his forehead he opened his eyes and looked at her.[256]

The surgeons were busy with their work, and all day her hands were never idle. Three times had she received the last words of love from pallid lips for loved ones far away, and each time had promised to send their precious remembrances or tokens of undying affection from the lost whom they never in life would look upon again; and no wonder that at last she should return to her lodgings weary and sick at heart!

"I fear I have kept you waiting," she said as she passed her landlady in the hall; "but I have been very busy."

"I understand it; how worn-out you must be! Katy is in the kitchen keeping a cup of tea for you," and with a thankful heart Anna proceeded thither followed by the lady.

"I hope you will pardon me," she continued, "but a soldier has been almost thrust upon me to-day, and I have been obliged to change your room. I was sure you would forgive me after you knew all. He is an officer whom the general did not like to take to the hospital, as it would not be very pleasant for him, being a prisoner from the Confederate army."

"A Confederate?" queried Anna, with some agitation. "Do you know his name?"

"Colonel St. Clair. Why, my dear girl, how strangely you look! Is he a friend of yours?"

"He is. Is he severely wounded?"

"Badly, I believe, yet I do not know how. Would you like to see him to-night?"

"No, unless he needs my services."

"I think he was sleeping when I came down. The surgeon was here an hour ago, and his negro servant is with him now."[257]

"Then I will not disturb him. In the morning I will go."

Anna Pierson forgot her weariness as she seated herself with her writing desk to finish up her day's toils by penning the promised letters of sympathy and condolence to the friends of those who had that day entered the silent land where there would be no more war; and when all was

finished thoughts of home, and loved ones waiting there, came and she wrote on, closing with the promise to finish on the morrow after she had seen him whom she came to seek. And then she slept.

Before the night had gathered up all its dark shadows there came a low rap on her door which aroused her, and, springing from her bed, wondered how she could have slept so long. Mrs. Howard entered.

"I am sorry to awake you so soon," she said, "but he seems so anxious to have you come to him, that I could not well wait longer. I told him there was a lady here to see him, but would not tell him your name. He appears a little brighter this morning, and says he rested pretty well," she continued. "Shall I tell him you are coming?"

"Yes, in just a minute; for you know it does not take us Yankee girls long to dress," she responded, assuming a playfulness she did not at all feel. True to her word, however, in a marvelously short time she opened the door of the sick man's chamber softly and closed it again as noiselessly behind her. His face was turned towards the wall, and he did not move until she stood beside him. Softly laying her hand on his she whispered his name, "George St. Clair." A sudden flush^[258] of joy overspread his face as his fingers closed tightly over hers, while the response, "Anna, my good angel, how came you here?" burst from his lips. "How glad I am that I have not on that hated uniform. You will not despise me now? But tell me first how came you here?"

"Just as any one would who had not wings to fly; but my mission is to take care of you until you get well."

"I am unworthy. But talk to me of loved ones, of yourself, of everything."

A pleasant hour followed, and both were happier than they had been for many a day. Clouds were rising that were to cover the calm blue of the clear sky above them, but they saw them not.

How kind in the Father to deal out his chastenings as he does his blessings, one by one, else the poor heart could not bear them!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DARK, DARK WAVE.

"Anna." It was a faint, tremulous voice that called through the half-open door of the wounded man's chamber, as the young girl was passing; but it was sufficiently clear to arrest her progress, and she stood still for a moment, listening and wondering that she should be called at such a time. The surgeon was in attendance, as was his custom, although the hour was an early one, he being, as St. Clair had told her, an old friend and traveling companion in Europe a few years before, which accounted without doubt for his unusual attention at such a busy time. Anna had not met him during the few days she had been in the house as her services had not been required during his visits, wherefore her surprise at now hearing her name. While thinking the matter over the call was repeated, and without farther hesitation she hastened to him. The wounded man was lying on his side, partly supported by his servant, whose tears of sympathy were rapidly flowing.

The surgeon was bending over the prostrate form with face unmoved, probing and dressing the fearful wound. In a moment Anna was kneeling by the drooping head which hung faintly down on the side of the bed, and, with a sudden impulse of feeling, raised it tenderly to her shoulder and pressed her lips on his cold, damp forehead.[260]

"Poor George," she whispered, as she smoothed back his dark hair, "it is very hard. How sorry I am for you."

"I can bear it all now, and more if need be," and the strained eyes which looked up into the pale anxious face bore testimony to his words.

"It is hard to suffer with no loving hand to wipe the drops of agony from the brow, but endurable when fond lips kiss them away. Dear girl!" he added, in a whisper, just as the surgeon finished his work, bidding the servant to lay him down gently upon the pillow. When this was done he turned, and apparently for the first time discovered that another had joined their number.

"There, my good fellow," he remarked, cheerfully, "I hope you will not be obliged to go through that operation again. It is healing nicely; and if we can keep the inflammation down and the wound open under the shoulder-blade for a few days, the best results may be hoped for. The trouble is, St. Clair, you have too many chicken-hearted ones to care for you. Your servant must be more thorough." While making this remark his eyes were fixed intently on the face of Anna.

"Miss Pierson, doctor," said St. Clair, with an attempt to a formal introduction, "and let me tell you, she would never be worthy of the slur you have just cast. Should you tell her to perform your most disagreeable commands, I feel positive they would be carried out to the very letter."

"You are welcome to try me," said Anna.

"Can I trust you?"

"I came for that very purpose."

"Then listen." Whereupon followed a long list of commands and injunctions.[261]

"You will perceive he has also a fever, which must be kept in subjection, not only by strictly administering the medicines but by shielding him from every excitement. I may not be here again for two or three days, but shall feel comparatively easy now that I can leave him in your hands."

"I shall endeavor to do my duty, as far as I am able, sir."

"I believe you; good morning."

And, taking the hand of each, the busy doctor left the room.

Mrs. Howard met him in the hall below to inquire about the patient.

"Did I understand that young lady's name was Pierson?" he asked, as he was about to depart.

"Yes."

"Has she any friends in the army?"

"She has two brothers, she told me."

"Then one of them was buried yesterday. I was sure of it as soon as I looked into her face. They were very much alike. Poor fellow! I found him near the rebel colonel up stairs, and the long exposure hastened his death."

Again the surgeon bowed and hurried away.

The kind-hearted old lady stood for a moment stupefied with pity and perplexity.

"It was too bad he did not tell her," she thought as she looked after him. Her mind wandered off to the widow on the banks of the Hudson of whom Anna had spoken. She, too, was a widow, and had a son in the Confederate army. It was hard for her that he was there, but how heart-rending if he should die far away and be buried in an unknown grave! Could she break the sad intelligence to the bereaved girl? The colonel needed her. Should she advise her to do what her sympathizing heart prompted? She pondered it over for a few minutes, and then her decision was taken. She hastened up the stairway and rapped gently at the door. It was opened immediately by Anna.

"I would like to see you for a short time," she said, as the happy face beamed upon her.

"I will come soon," and turning to the bed she remarked: "You must sleep now after such an expenditure of nerve power;" and arranging the pillows that the head might more readily rest she placed her hand on the smooth white forehead as she pressed her lips to his.

"I can sleep sweetly now, good angel, since the old scorn has been taken out of my memory!" and he settled quietly down.

"Scorn! One like poor me bestowing such a commodity on one like you?" and laughing she turned to leave.

"It may be that attribute is not in your nature, but—"

"Yes—the uniform," suggested Anna. "Well; you are never to play the 'wolf' again, you know?"

"Never, no *never*!" With a joyous step she tripped from the room to join Mrs. Howard below stairs.

"I have some sad news for you—perhaps I ought not at such a time as this trouble you, but my conscience would upbraid me should I keep it to myself; besides, you must know it sometime."

"O, *do* tell me!" interrupted Anna impatiently.

"I will! You have told me of your brothers and that you had found on inquiry that both were uninjured. Nothing is easier than such mistakes in these times."

"Mistake? Was I mistaken? Are they not safe?"

"I have heard only about one. He was found on the battle field not far from the colonel upstairs. Both had been exposed so long to the rains that your brother could not rally and he died and was buried yesterday!"

"*Died*? Are you *sure* he died? It *cannot* be! Where was he?" Anna did not weep; such a flood of thought and feeling rushed in upon her brain that it forced back the tears. More than a week had

she been in Washington and Alexandria while he had been suffering and dying! O, *why* could she not have found him—listened to his last words and received his last blessing? Ah—this was a cold wave that was dashing over her soul; but there was one to come more chilling, more furious and overwhelming even than this! "They were together!" Could it be that those hands that had so lately clasped hers as she listened to words of love were stained with her brother's blood? They were opponents and found near to each other when the conflict was over! *Enemies!* O how these thoughts maddened her! They seemed to tear her very *soul*! She remained motionless and silent so long that Mrs. Howard ventured to say:

"It may be you would like to find out where he died and where they have buried him? You can, perhaps, procure his body and take it home for interment. This would be a great consolation to his poor mother I am sure; I know it would be to me!"[264]

Those words, "home" and "mother," opened the secret avenue to her soul, and tears came plentifully to her relief. "O, yes!" she sobbed, after a moment's pause; "I will go immediately! I have much to do and must not waste my time in weeping; but it is so horrible! How will my mother endure it?" Again the tears came, but with repeated efforts she drove them back and arose to leave the room. "I will leave my patient with you," she stopped to say. "I have no doubt you can do all that is required; at any rate I must go! Do everything for him in your power and be sure you will be amply rewarded. When he inquires for me tell him the sad story; will you? I go to bury my brother by the side of his father, and where loving hands can care for and protect his grave! He *can not* rest here!"

Her companion looked at her in surprise. Her form was erect and firm; her eyes sparkled with the fire of heroism! In half an hour Anna came from her chamber prepared for a walk. She told her friend that she was going first to the telegraph office and then to the hospital to learn what she could for her mother's sake! "Ellen must come to take my place by her brother's side," she concluded. "But must I see him no more? It is hard! But the *stained hand*! My brother's blood!" How much agony can be crowded into a phantom thought! Poor Anna! Then whispered her heart: "He may die! To agitate him might bring very serious consequences;" she had drawn this from the words of the surgeon. "Ellen must soothe and comfort him;" and she hastened on her errand of love. In a few hours she had done all she could, and was seated in her room, weary and[265] heart-sore, to think over the incidents of the morning.

How full the moments had been crowded! In her hand she was holding the locket that was his, in which was her own and her mother's pictures the kind nurse had promised to send to them. How precious it would always be to her! His last look of earth was on their faces; his last words were blessings implored for them. She had learned it all from the kind one who had bent over him at that moment when his noble spirit winged its way from the poor mangled body towards the land of peace and rest. "How kind in her to be so explicit! How soothing were the tears of sympathy that fell from a stranger's eyes!" Then her thoughts returned to the living. How was he? Had he wished for her? Was he very unhappy without her? Could she ever meet him again? What should she do? What was her duty? O the buffetings of a tempest-tossed soul!

Poor Anna; there was an undefined longing in her heart she did not then understand, and so was left to grieve as one who had no hope! It was a fearful struggle between heart and judgment as she supposed, and *who* should settle it at last? An answer to the morning's telegram was brought in; "Ellen will be here in three days," she concluded after reading it, "and then I shall be at liberty

to return home with my dead!" Home! There was a sacredness in that word now—a sad solemnity that oppressed the heart as she remembered the sombre emblems of bereavement that were darkening it! There had been only the shadows of separations in the loving circle for many years, and even these had been lighted up with the bright^[266] gildings of hopeful reunion! How would that mother bear the first great blow dealt by the crimson hand of war? Where was Elmore? They had told her that he was probably safe and had been hurried away with his regiment, but might be wounded or a prisoner.

"How he will miss the absent one!" she thought. The mother, it was true, had laid her two sons upon the altar of sacrifice, but never had failed morning or evening to plead that the fire might not fall and consume them. One had been taken; and the shadow from the dark-winged angel would settle heavily down upon the widow's peaceful, quiet home! Tears fell fast. She was so happy a few hours ago, now how dark life seemed to her. How fickle are our joys and what a little breath will sometimes blow them out! Strange that clouds should follow so closely in the wake of the summer's sun! Lights and shadows; calms and storms; hopes and despairs make up the individual lives.

Troubled child! Why did she not in her perplexity turn her face towards the source of all wisdom and grace? Why do not you, gentle reader? Her eyes were steadfastly fixed on the ground where the shadows always lie the thickest, rather than with the penetrating vision of faith endeavoring to pierce the sombre clouds above her head. The sound of footsteps along the hall aroused her. "Some one is going to *his* room. His room!" And the shadows clustered more closely about her heart! It was so sad that the great phantom which had appeared the first time when George St. Clair stood before her in the uniform^[267] of the confederate army should come to her now with such an air of certainty!

"They were found together!" She had dreamed of this; she had started from her sleep at seeing that hand which pressed her cheek while he read the secrets of her fluttering heart, stained with the blood of his victim, and that victim her idolized brother! It had come at last, and O, how terrible the realization! Rising hastily she replaced her bonnet and hurried from the room. On the stairs she met Mrs. Howard.

"Colonel St. Clair is very anxious you should come to him," she said; "and seems distressed that you do not. He told me to bear to you his deepest sympathy, and I saw a tear in his eye as he told me. Will you not go to him to-day, Miss Pierson? I think his fever is a little higher this afternoon. Do not refuse, for I fear it will do him harm."

A sudden faintness came over her as she listened to these pleadings, and she trembled so violently that she was obliged to seat herself for a moment. At last with great effort she said: "Take to him my thanks for the sympathy he sent me, and if I can by any means bind up the main artery of my heart that I feel has been severed I will see him again;" and without another word she arose and hastened from the house.

"Is the child crazy?" muttered Mrs. Howard as she proceeded up the stairway. "She has changed fearfully during the last few hours, that is certain!" And this she told the wounded man when he anxiously inquired for her a few minutes after.^[268]

A groan escaped him, but he only added, "Poor Anna! The scourge! O the terrible scourge of war!"

All the afternoon the sad mourner flitted restlessly about among the suffering and dying, speaking a gentle word to one, or administering a soothing draught to another—ever active, carrying consolation and comfort wherever she went. At last she missed the one in whom she had previously taken such a great interest—the young soldier with dark-brown hair and deep blue eyes. "Where is he?" she asked.

"He died last night," answered the kind old nurse.

"Died?" interrogated Anna, "I thought he was getting well."

"We thought he was, but God knew best!" and the kindly lips quivered that were so used to words of consolation.

"More sad hearts!" mused Anna as she became attracted by another scene not far away from where they were standing. A mother had just arrived and now sat by the bed of her dying son, who for the first time, it may be, failed to recognize the soft touch of that gentle hand, or respond to the familiar tones of a mother's loving voice. Too late! He would never look upon her again! The tempest-tossed soul forgot its own tribulations as she watched the anguish of the stricken parent who sat beside her boy with tearless eyes, but with cheek and brow as white as those she was so hopefully gazing upon, pleading for "one word, only one word!" But it came not. Anna turned away. "These scenes are too painful for me to-day," she said to the sympathizing nurse, who^[269] softly touched her arm to recall her. "Tell me where I can go and find peace!"

"I will, poor child, follow me." In the next ward a young man was lying, his face livid from the loss of blood, one limb entirely gone, the other partially, yet a smile shone ever upon those wan features, and his kindly greeting and words of cheerfulness were like rays of sunshine to all who came under their influences. "Mr. Page," said the nurse as she took his proffered hand, "here is a young lady who needs a few words of resignation and comfort dropped into her wounded heart, and you have always such a rich store on hand that I felt you would be willing to administer a few to one who needs them so much."

"I shall be obliged to give them second hand you know." How his pale face lighted as he said this, and extending his hand to Anna invited her to sit beside him. "It is hard to be afflicted," he said, "but you know they sometimes provide a very white robe for such as we." Then he spoke so calmly and soothingly as he inquired into her griefs, while he poured oil of peace into her lacerated heart until the pain ceased and she was soothed and comforted. "What was your brother's name?" he asked.

"Herbert Pierson."

"Herbert Pierson? You should not grieve for him! He had a noble soul. I knew him well, and when the surgeon told me yesterday that he was dead I thanked God for his release from suffering. Could he speak to you to-day he would say as I have, 'do not grieve for me!' How often I have heard him speak of his sister and mother, and pray for them too. Ah—there is comfort for you beyond my poor powers of giving! The^[270] blessed sufferer who atoned for you and me will bestow it! Your brother was mine in heart; how I loved him!"

"O thank you; thank you!" sobbed Anna as she clasped his thin hand in hers! "His mother will bless and pray for you," she continued.

"And will not you?"

"I? I do not pray for myself! I wish to die."

"Then you will! God be praised!"

"I will see you again," she said rising, and catching one more glance of his calm, blue eyes she hurried away. After tea she retired to her room, much against the wishes of Mrs. Howard, who was urgent in her requests that Anna should visit her patient that night, but all to no avail. "Tell him," she said, "I will see him in the morning; I *can not* go to-night; O no, I can not!" and entering her seclusion she closed the door, much to the chagrin of the good lady, and seated herself to collect her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RECOGNITION.

Anna awoke the next morning with the half-dreamy consciousness of some impending evil or gloomy foreboding or trial she was expected to meet or avert. For a long time she lay on her bed balanced between a peaceful unconsciousness and the stern realities of duty that were rising before her, until at last the full burden of life rolled in upon her mind. Springing from her bed she dropped upon her knees beside it. For the first time in her life she discovered her utter helplessness; her inability to go alone! Before her were heavy loads she was expected to take up and carry along, but with this consciousness came also the invitations whispered to her shrinking heart, "come unto me"—"cast thy burden on the Lord and He will sustain thee." There in the solitude of that early morn she came close to Him who had promised strength sufficient in every time of trouble and perplexity. Firmer were her purposes when she arose from her knees; more willing was she to sacrifice all her dearest hopes at the feet of justice, if such stern duty was in store for her. As tears are sometimes the gentle dew that falls upon and refreshes the drooping flowers of life, so prayer is the concentration of the golden rays of light that color and beautify the re-animated^[272] petals, sending into the heart once filled with desolation and despair the freshness of a new life, and driving out the dying fumes that arise from the withered flowers where fond hopes lie buried. Softly came this gentle influence into the soul of her who under the shadows was kneeling and praying! Was it faith or love that was soothing her? Perhaps neither. The burdened spirit may not yet have drunk from the golden cup which the hand of mercy had proffered; but it had listened to the music of pity's hovering wings as she brooded near while gathering up the fragrance of the heart's petitions to bear away with the tears from the overflowing soul. Anna felt these refreshing influences, yet she knew not from whence they came. Her face bore the softening impress as she entered the breakfast room and inquired regarding the wounded colonel.

"He is a little more quiet this morning," replied Mrs. Howard; "but was very restless all night. I was up with him the greater part of the time." Anna seated herself at the table but could not eat.

"I think I will go over to the hospital for a few minutes," she said, rising; "tell him I will soon return and then will come to him."

"Why not go now, Miss Pierson? It is sad to witness his misery! Your absence, I am sure, is now his greatest affliction!"

"Indeed, I must go and get my own wounds dressed before I can attend to others!" This last remark was made partly to herself as she left the room, but enough fell on the ear of the listener to fill her with astonishment.[273]

"What could the girl mean?" she asked herself over and over again, but received no satisfactory reply. In the meantime Anna was making her way to the hospital, and upon arriving proceeded immediately to the ward where she had, on the day before, talked with the one who had known and loved her brother. But he was not there. Even the cot had been removed, and on the floor where it had stood a large dark spot was seen. Sick at heart and without one word of inquiry she hurried into the next room where the kind old nurse could, she was sure, tell her all.

"Yes, dear, these things are dreadful for us to bear," was the reply to her visitor's earnest questionings; "but could you have seen his face as his life rapidly ebbed away you would have been satisfied that sometimes 'it is Christ to live, but to die is gain.' What you saw yesterday was no comparison to it; so holy; so joyous! It was about four this morning they called me, but so rapid was his going that I only caught a glimpse of the glory that shone through as the gate to the 'city' opened for him!"

"Yet it seems so hard to me just now that he must die," interposed Anna as she looked dreamily out over the long rows of cots where wounded men were lying. "Was it because my poor heart reached out after him in its sorest need? Must all be taken?" She had said this musingly, but the nurse heard it and her face shone with interest. "Forgive me," she added quickly, perceiving the look that was fastened upon her, "I was bewildered for a moment."

"There is a Comforter, and it was He that gave him his powers of consolation! You know he said[274] yesterday that he would be obliged to bestow only second hand what he had received."

"Yes, I remember, but tell me more of him."

"It is the story of many others, yet it came all unexpectedly, as it has often done. It was the giving way of the main artery that had been severed so near the body that there was no chance for again securing it. It was not five minutes after he discovered his position before he was quietly sleeping! Such a death has no sadness in it my dear girl, for it was only stepping out of pain and suffering into peace and rejoicing!"

"Thank you," said Anna as she turned away, for kind words were needed elsewhere. Alone in her room again she gave full vent to her feelings. "I am ready now," she thought as she bathed her face that her swollen lids might not grieve him, and prepared to fulfill her promise. It was with trembling steps, however, that she entered the room where George St. Clair was lying. He was alone and apparently asleep as she approached the bedside and looked down into his face so calm in its repose; so gentle in its outline; almost feminine it appeared to her in its tenderness. Yet she had seen it when it was not as it was now. How different! She placed her hand on his forehead that he might awake before the dark thoughts should come back to her. He opened his eyes and looked full into hers! A deep flush overspread his face, yet not a muscle moved or a word escaped his lips. "George, will you not speak to me?" she asked at last.

"Yes, Anna; but why have you absented yourself so long? Have you desired to revenge your brother's blood upon me? Upon my poor head,[275] Anna? Are you so cruel? Tell me that you lay not that sin at my door; or use the dagger for my more immediate relief! Does this shock you? Am I the one who is the most cruel after all?"

Anna sank down upon a chair near by and buried her face in the pillow. Both were silent for a long time; at length Mrs. Howard entering aroused her.

"You must not disturb my patient, you know," she said with an attempt at pleasantry, for she was happy to see Anna at last where she thought she ought to be. "You are to cheer him up, for he seems quite low spirited to-day."

"We shall, no doubt, do very well," replied St. Clair, impatiently; and the kind-hearted lady after administering the medicine, left the room.

"Anna, will you move your chair a little this way that I may see your face? I want to talk candidly with you." She obeyed. He looked at her for a moment, but there was more of sorrow than scrutiny in his gaze. At last he said, "Mrs. Howard tells me you are going home."

"Yes, I must go; my mother will want all that is left of him whom she has so dearly loved! The staff is broken upon which she expected to lean in her declining years. It is a hard task, but I have no power to shrink from it!"

"Have you made all of your calculations to do so?"

"Not wholly. I shall wait for your father whom I am expecting here to-morrow in company with Ellen."

"Ellen? Is she coming? Then you will not return?"[276]

"No!" This was spoken with a tremulous voice, and she knew his eyes were fixed intently upon her. "You will not need me," she continued, after a moment's pause; "your sister Ellen can do all it would have been in my power to perform, and my mother will be very lonely and sad without me."

"You did not think Ellen was so efficient a few days ago, Anna. How changed you are! Yes, I think I understand you; but can you not be mistaken? Look at my hands, dear girl, are there any dark stains upon them? Think of my prostrate form; is he the less guilty who spilled my blood because this life did not escape through the wound? Blood for blood, Anna, and justice is satisfied! Are you sterner than that insatiate power?"

Tears flooded her eyes and she bowed her head to conceal them. Where now was the strength she had expected would sustain her through this trying ordeal? O how weak she seemed! How flitting the sunshine that had but a short time before gilded her darkness!

"Anna," said her companion, "your heart is pleading for me! It is not your better judgment that is sitting at my tribunal at this moment; I know it all! I read it months ago as you stood before me so cold and stern when you first beheld my uniform, and it has followed you ever since. You loved me then and you cannot hate me now! Look up, Anna, and tell me if my words are not true?" She obeyed.

"They are true! I did love you, and God knows how hard it would be to tear that love from my heart! But you will wait; the storm has burst in^[277] upon my soul. When the fury is past and the clouds are broken, in the calm you shall read what now is so bleared and illegible! George, you can never know the depths of sadness that is permeating my every hope and aspiration! If you knew the agony of the last few hours, that has torn me like an evil spirit, you would pity me!"

"I do pity you, Anna; and will trouble you no longer lest my words should prove an infliction rather than a panacea, and I will, as you have requested, bide patiently your time." The young lady arose and stood before him.

"Good-bye, George, make haste to recover," she said without emotion; "your mother pines for you and many hearts will rejoice when you are well again." He was looking steadily at her while she spoke, and their eyes met. Her lips quivered, but quickly bowing her head she pressed a kiss upon his brow and darted from the room.

Early the next morning after a restless, sleepless night, Anna prepared herself for another visit to the young lady who had so tenderly nursed her brother during his days of suffering and death. She did so long to look again into those deep, dark eyes, from which had beamed so much sympathy, and to ask many questions which she had omitted at their former interviews. It was a damp, chill morning, for the sun was hiding behind dense leaden clouds and a thick fog had settled down upon the city. However, she liked all this, for nature was in her most congenial mood with such frowns upon her face, and so she hurried on. She received a warm greeting from the beautiful nurse, whom she noticed was much paler than when she^[278] saw her last, and was at the moment apparently unusually agitated. Not far from her two ladies richly, but plainly attired, were standing conversing in low, soothing tones with a sick soldier.

"Do you know those ladies?" she asked eagerly as she clasped the hand of her visitor.

"No, although I have caught a glimpse of their dresses several times in the other wards during the last few days," replied Anna, stepping back a little that she might look into their faces. But in vain. "I have heard one of them spoken of as a very wealthy English lady who was at the south, but was compelled to come north on account of her anti-war principles; but have thought very little about them."

"I must see that face again!" said the nurse, musingly. "See how persistently they keep their backs toward me! They have been here an hour and seem in no hurry to go, yet it is impossible for me to catch the eye again of that one wearing the gray silk. I have seen her before, Miss Pierson; I am sure of it!" A call from one of the patients interrupted the conversation. Anna moved slowly down the apartment to intercept, and if possible to engage them in conversation, while her friend could have the privilege she so ardently coveted. She was avoided, however, and the visitors soon passed out into the open air.

"Do tell me what it was that came over you so suddenly with sufficient power to shake your dry bones so effectually, and take all of the brass out of your face?" inquired one of the worthies when once again clear of searching eyes.

"Do not jest!" entreated her companion. "Matters are becoming rather serious to me, as you will^[279] acknowledge when I tell you that the young nurse in whom you seemed so much interested is my own daughter!"

"Your daughter! I do not wonder that you shook in your boots! Do you suppose that she recognized you?"

"I feel sure of it, for her cheek paled as she caught the glance of my eye, and I felt all the time we were there that she was watching me!"

"How do you suppose she came here? You told me she was with an aunt in New Orleans!"

"So she was, the idiot!" was the answering exclamation. "I have no patience with her! She has been my tormentor for years! It was not enough for her to throw away all of my cherished plans, depriving me of home and fortune, but now she must appear to add the crowning act to my discomfiture!"

"Would you have me believe all this of one who is so mild and gentle, with eyes as calm—"

"Do not mention those eyes! They were her father's, and she is like him! Yet he was good! I do not think I should be where I am to-day if he had lived! I have been tumbling for years—yes, years! And what a depth I have fallen!" The speaker endeavored to smile, but the attempt died upon her pallid lips. "Let us hasten back to the city," she continued, seeing her companion showed no desire to speak: "I must have time to think!"

They walked on a short distance without another word, and then her companion said, abruptly: "You have not told me why, in your opinion, she is here? Was she always remarkable for tenderness and benevolence? It seems to[280] me that the mother-power was deficient in regard to the little matter of early teaching in the science of patriotism!"

"Your tones are annoying, but I will satisfy your plausible curiosity in a measure! It was not 'tenderness or benevolence' that has drawn her thither, but, in my opinion, an old love affair gotten up while in Philadelphia at school when yet a child. She was supposed to be an heiress, of course, and was wheedled into accepting the proffers of undying adoration from a scheming fortune-hunter! It did not take me long to end the affair after I learned of it, I can tell you; but it spoiled her! It was then that she laid the corner stone of the sepulcher which she has been rearing over me, and now, I suppose, will deliberately pull down about my ears!"

"The sea does look a little squally, I confess," replied her companion sarcastically.

"I own it does!"

"Well, as I am aboard of your ship it may be well for me to be looking out for breakers ahead. And yet I cannot understand how that 'love affair' of which you have told me could affect her now!"

"Well, I do! Without doubt she hopes to find him; but it does not matter what are her ambitions she is here much against my wishes and happiness!"

Happiness! Ah, where can the transgressor find peace or rest? "Who is wise shall understand these things; prudent and he shall know them, for the ways of the Lord are right and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein." [281]

Anna might have joined in the confusion and agitation of her friend had she caught a look as she desired from the keen, black eyes which had so troubled her in former days. But, strange as it

may seem, those penetrating orbs failed to recognize in her whom they tried to avoid the sweet singer of "Cathedra." The "nobody" whom her cousin persisted in raising out of her sphere had dropped from her mind. Neither had Anna ever met the daughter of Mrs. Belmont during her stay in the home of the St. Clair's, and could not, therefore, suspect that the meek, gentle nurse who had so won her heart was the one of whom she had so often heard. She had been told by Ellen of her brother's attachment and of their final separation, and he, only two mornings since, had substantiated her statement with the assurance that his imaginary love had been proved to himself to be only a fostered brotherly affection for his pretty cousin. They looked into each other's faces and smiled at the parting, little thinking how much of mystery was concealed from view.

"If one could only be seen in the light that falls upon them from the eternal brightness what a transfiguration it would work! There are estrangements and alienations," says some one, "that arise from ignorance of one another that divide families into almost as distinct and separate lives as rooms in the house they occupy."

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CHAPTER XXVI.

THE "PHANTOM" REMOVED.

"Hands to work and hearts to God," once said Emerson, while Tennyson adds: "In this windy world what's up is faith, what's down is heresy!" Anna was nervous and restless as she thought over these things, and all of the next night lay tossing upon her bed, vainly endeavoring to woo the gentle slumbers that would not come to her. It seemed so sad now that it was all over, and it *was* strange that George St. Clair should have dismissed her so coldly! It was not her fault that she could not dispel this "phantom" as he called it; yet he *pitied* her! Was this the panacea he strove so hard to apply to her wounded soul? True, she asked him for it, yet pride rebelled at its application! Pity! The long, weary hours were filled with exciting whispers, and ever and anon the chilling words, "I will trouble you no longer," fell like hard, cold pebbles into her sensitive soul. At last summoning all her fortitude she congratulated herself that on the morrow Mrs. St. Clair and Ellen would arrive. Then she could return home, where silently and alone she would dig a grave in some lonely recess of her stricken heart and bury her two great sorrows side by side! To-morrow! The clock struck five and the sound of feet were heard below. The night had passed![284] She arose from her bed and opened the window. One star yet faintly glimmered just above the eastern horizon, up which the first morning beams were slowly creeping. Calmly and peacefully it looked into the troubled upturned face so full of sorrow and flushed with weeping, until Anna thought that in its pensive gaze there was such pity as the angels might bestow upon their weary earth-born sisters. Then her thoughts wandered away to those who would be weary no more; whose foot-prints would never more be seen along the dusty highway of life, for they were resting now, their journeys over, their spirits freed from their crumbling prison-houses! At

rest! The pale tranquil light of the lonely star grew paler and more feeble as she continued to gaze upon it, for a new day was approaching, and in the glory of its brightness the tiny light was to be swallowed up. Fading, changing, everywhere! How sad a lesson is life! How rugged and thorny the way through it! "To look up is faith," repeated Anna again; "Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore! Hush!" It was not her own voice to which she was listening, but the echoing of her poor pleading heart which had suddenly remembered that to look down where all the dreary shadows were clustered was "heresy." The day was before her heavily laden with duties. Why should she grope under the clouds where were doubts and unbeliefs? By and by it may be she too would rest! A step along the hall startled her. It was that of the black servant leaving his master's room. "How faithful he has been," she thought, "while I have only brought discomforts[285] where I had so desired to bring relief." It was over now; her dream of hope, of love, of life! All was over; yet her hand still clasped the "golden bowl," and the "silver cord" was not broken! There was sweet water still in the fountain, although at times it might seem bitter to the taste.

She was standing by the mirror arranging the braids of her dark hair as these reflections were passing through her mind. "How changed I am," she continued, "not only in mind but in face! Perplexities and disappointments are making sad havoc with my good looks! I must away from this," and after preparing herself for a walk she hastened to the hospital. She filled the moments of the laggard morning full of untiring work by the side of the young nurse who flitted among the cots where anxious, loving eyes watched for her coming and grew dim as she disappeared from their sight. Still her thoughts were roving and regrets came to disturb her as she remembered that no more could she place the cup of cold water to fevered lips, or with her words soothe troubled minds. She was going home to bury her dead, while so many were to remain to be buried by stranger hands! The voice of the nurse recalled her.

"There was a big skirmish down the river last night and some of our officers were disabled and are to be brought here to-day, we are informed by telegram!" and she walked on where an upraised hand was beckoning.

"Who knows but my poor brother is one of the fallen?" Anna mused as she proceeded towards her temporary home.[286]

It was nearly dinner-time and she must not let the whole day pass without visiting the lonely one under her own roof. True, he had not invited her to come again at the close of their last interview, but he had hinted a wish that she should read the morning papers to him on her return, Mrs. Howard had said. She had hoped to escape this, but she was calmer now. Herbert was gone; men might be falling on the battle field any day! It was the hand of war, not of individuals, that was slaying the mothers' and sisters' loved ones all over the land! Poor heart! The tidal wave was receding, but the waters underneath were black and unfathomable!

"He is better, I think," Mrs. Howard went on to say, "and in a few days, no doubt, will be able to sit up in an easy chair part of the time. He asked a while ago if you had returned from the hospital, and looked, as he always does, a little out of patience that you should devote so much of your time to others."

Anna was not listening as her hostess bustled about the table prattling in an unusual manner, as it was evident that she was probing with her feminine curiosity deeper than had been her wont, and it seemed the duty of her victim to push the intruding hand away.

"But you will go to him?" was the abrupt query at last.

"It is my intention," and Anna passed into the hall. The door of the sick man's chamber was open, and before she had reached the upper landing she heard her name called.

"I want to see you Anna. Please bring the morning papers, will you?"[287]

She could not resist the pleading of the voice, and, besides, she had expected to see him again; but how could she read to him.

"I was intending to brush away a little of the dust of morning labor before coming to you," she remarked with a smile as she entered and took a seat beside the bed.

"Do a better thing, Anna, and brush away the dust from my hopes and out of my life! Would not that be a more merciful act?"

"Can I do all that, George?" and she laid her hand soothingly upon his white forehead.

"You ought to be able to do so, since it was your hands scattered it."

There was a long silence.

"Is it your purpose to go home and leave me here with your bloody spectre to haunt and distract me? Do I deserve such punishment? Should loyalty to my native land be crowned with such terrible thorns? You have confessed, Anna, that a few months ago you loved me, is that most holy attribute so easily uprooted? If so, then I have been mistaken in woman's heart?" He was looking in her face, that was thinner and, it may be, paler than he had ever seen it, and his manly nature came to the rescue. "Forgive me, Anna, I will not be so cruel! There is somewhere a God who will make all right in His own good time, as Old Auntie would say; and last night as Toby lay snoring on the lounge yonder, I thought it all over. Yes, there is a God; and it may be He is at work in this great war problem, and when the final result is summed up, we shall be glad that the storm passed this way, because of the happy issues. Who knows? But, dear girl, assure me[288] of my guiltlessness in creating the blast, or the terrible lightning that is desolating so many hearts and homes! Will you?"

She raised her eyes to his face, and a smile broke over her own. "How low are the mighty fallen!" and a low, rippling laugh mingled itself with her words. "Did you ever imagine that I thought you such a great man, so strong and powerful?"

"My own Anna!" he exclaimed, taking her hand passionately in his. "You are not going to leave me comfortless, but will wipe away the mold from hopes, and thus brighten up the future by letting the sunshine in upon them again." He drew the beaming face down to his own and their lips sealed the contract of mutual love and forgiveness.

"I did not mean to grieve you," she said at last, "but the blow was a heavy one, and all things seemed to combine their powers to keep my 'phantom' in active existence, but they are gone now."

"Tell me that no more shall this murderous spectre stand between us. This terrible war may have crippled me for life; my home and fortune be taken from me through its ravages; but if you love and trust me, I shall, notwithstanding all, be the happiest of men."

"Is the wound then, so very bad."

"The surgeon has more than hinted that my days of soldiering are over, but was that all you heard of my long speech, made especially for your ear?" he laughed. "You would not care to unite your destinies with a cripple, and how would it be if the fortune was also gone? O, Anna!"[289]

"Do not, George. I had not thought of all that, my mind is not capable of taking such fanciful leaps; I was only thinking how sad all this would be for one like you. But I could not be sorry if assured that you would fight no more."

"Even though a broken back was my preventive?"

"The glimpses that come to us at this moment from the overshadowed future are too bright to be flecked with such dark presentiments; I cannot believe them. But there is Mrs. Howard's steps, on the stairs. How kind she has been, and what a miserable nurse I have proven myself."

"Oh pshaw! I have improved more during the last half hour, under your fostering care, than I should have done in three weeks of her nursing. But you must not go yet or there will be great danger of a serious relapse! I will send the good soul to Jericho as soon as I have swallowed her potion, for I have much I want to say while the opportunity is ours."

"I think it will be necessary for you to begin again on these fever drops, as I see your cheeks are quite red this afternoon," carelessly remarked the good lady, as she placed the spoon to his lips. There was a roguish twinkle in her eye, however, which Anna did not fail to perceive.

"Hang the fever drops!" exclaimed the patient; "I am ever so much better, and am pondering the propriety of going home with Miss Pierson to-morrow."

The kind lady shook with suppressed mirth as she went from the room, for her keen eyes had looked deeper than ever before.[290]

In the evening Ellen and her father arrived. It had been a weary morning to Anna, for she had waited their coming with an anxious heart, but the sky was clear now and she returned their greetings with fervor, wearing her great grief, it was true, but the joys of the previous hours had so covered it that the dear ones were astonished to find her bright beneath the shadow of sorrow.

"My poor son," exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, as the first greetings were over. "Yes, Anna; show us the way to him." She obeyed, and as they were ascending the stairs, the father remarked, "I have no doubt we shall receive a favorable report of your nursing, for I am convinced by the pallor of your cheeks that there have been sad hours of watching and anxiety."

"How I shrink from taking your place," interrupted the sister. "Poor George! He will readily perceive the difference, I fear."

Anna's heart sank within her as she listened to the words of her companions, who were all unconscious of the wounds they were probing. Ellen must not know it; and then she was so soon to leave him! This would be harder now, but he was to fight no more and they might yet be happy! It was a grief to her that she had ever neglected him and brought sorrow instead of joy into his hours of suffering. She opened the door of the sick man's chamber, and as the father and sister passed in reclosed it and retired to her own room. More than one reason prompted her to do this, yet they must know in time that a great joy had been amid her throes of bereavement. She

would not have them grieved by her seeming idiosyncrasies. They might blame her for apparent neglect; and O if it^[291] had not been! Still he had not suffered as had she; her heart assured her of this, and it pressed the thought as a consolation over the bleeding fissure as the wounded bird attempts to hide its ebbing life's blood beneath its fluttering wing! But it was over, and now the phantom had been driven, ah whither? Would it ever haunt her again? He had said: "There is a God somewhere who will make it all right in His own good time," and she would wait.

Tea was ready and the three sat down together, Mr. St. Clair and Ellen to satisfy a sharpened appetite after a long and tiresome journey, and Anna to do the honors of the table after their home style in the north.

"George is looking so much better than I had hoped to find him," said the father. "I think I shall be obliged to bless you Miss Anna for his rapid improvement. It has been so kind in you to think of others, although you were so heavily burdened with your own bitter sorrow! What a debt of gratitude you and yours are heaping upon us!" he continued, musingly. "But war must always bear its 'apples of ashes' and God only knows where the ax should be laid!"

There were tears in Anna's eyes, for the fountain of grief had been for so many days open that the liquid drops flowed now almost unconsciously when the angel of pity stirred the bitter waters. Ellen saw them and the dew-drops of sympathy moistened her own dark ones. "It would be so hard to lose a brother," she thought. "How glad she was that George was better!"

"You must go with us," said Ellen as they arose from the table and went out into the hall.^[292] "You must begin to initiate me in your skill of hygiene; beside, George inquired for you. I see how it will be, you are to be sadly missed when only my poor inexperienced hands are brought into service!" She noticed the agitation of her companion, and placing an arm affectionately around her said, soothingly: "You know my heart, dear girl, and that it is full of sympathy, but my tongue is a miserable medium with which to communicate it to another! Let it be sufficient that I can feel that you are sure of this and will never doubt me!"

"Doubt you, Ellen? Never for a moment! But my mother; how is she?"

"Sorrow-stricken, of course, but strangely resigned. There is something noble in such a grief as hers, Anna! No, you need not shrink from meeting her; she will comfort you! I see by your face, poor sufferer, that you need it! She will do you good, never fear!"

"Just step in my room for a moment, Ellen; I would not have him see me tear-stained again. I have wept so much for the last few days. You speak truly, I do need my mother, for I am very weak. Ellen, there has been more gall in the cup I have been draining than you can ever know! A darker wave has rolled over my soul than can ever lift your bark, my precious friend; but what matters it after all, when we find ourselves sinking we are led to cry out 'save or I perish?' We shall be chided some day for our faithlessness and doubtings, and it is better that we should receive it while yet on the sea, for the calm, Ellen, is peaceful after the storm." She had been bathing her face and arranging her hair while speaking, and^[293] now turned toward her companion with the old smile wreathing her lips.

"You are like your mother," and again the arm of affection drew them closer together as they proceeded to the room where the father and brother were awaiting them.

That night, contrary to the doctor's instructions, there was a long conversation in the sick man's chamber, in which he earnestly joined.

"Let it be settled, Father, that you return with Anna," he said at length. "I shall get along all right with Ellen and Mrs. Howard, with what Toby can help, I have not the least doubt; and, besides, we rebels must not be too exacting or expect too much." His eyes were upon Anna, and she knew it. Her cheeks flushed, but the great hope in her heart kept back the haunting spectre his words might otherwise have summoned.

"He is a rebel no more," she thought. His voice recalled her.

"Besides, you will be needed in the widow's home to assist and cheer. It will not be a great while before I shall be able to join you all there, for immediately on being well enough to sit up for a few hours I shall leave for the North—through my convalescence at least."

There were quick glances into each other's faces, but he was silent.

"I will do as you say, my son," was the father's conclusion, "but I fear we are tiring you. Yes, you will feel better after a rest, and to-morrow we will talk farther on the subject."

Four days afterward a solemn cortege wended its way through the little village of Glendale, bearing its dead from the station to the home of bereavement and sorrow. There were warm hand claspings, and words of sympathy and condolence, and tears, such as mothers alone can shed, when maternal love is stricken; when heart answers to heart with the sad echo of loneliness and desolation.

And so they laid Edward Pierson away upon the hillside; the first martyr in all the region on the altar of freedom!

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEW RESOLVES—AND NEW ADVENTURES.

"Teach me thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies. Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies, for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty."

These words Lillian Belmont repeated to herself as the carriage that was bearing her away from home and early associations rolled down the highway leading to the depot, where she with her cousin Grace Stanley were to take the cars for New Orleans. Mrs. Stanley was the youngest sister of the deceased master of Rosedale, but since his death very little intimacy had been continued between the families, until Mrs. Belmont meeting the vivacious, merry-hearted Grace had conceived the idea of using her for a purpose, and so had invited her to spend a few weeks with her "morbid" cousin. All things, however, had not worked to that lady's satisfaction, as we have learned, and now with a mother's curse weighing her down the daughter had joined with David in the supplication, "lead me in a plain path." Was He leading her? The path as yet was dark and overshadowed, but she had clasped the gentle hand and the promise was, "I will never leave or forsake thee;" and with simple, childlike trust she walked forward. During the winter she had written several times to her mother, pleading she would clear away the mysteries of the past,

remove the maternal edicts, so that over the debris of broken hopes and shattered ambitions they might again come together, reconciled and loving. But no response to these pleadings came to her. To be sure there were letters from loved ones telling of the early removal of her family to the city, of the visit to the Washburn's, of the sudden death of little Shady, with poor old Vina's wail of anguish, but not a word of sympathy from the heart where the maternal love lay buried.

The bugle notes of war sounded through the streets of New Orleans, and the passions of men were stirred as never before. Women too, who had quaffed only from the chalice of ease and pleasure, awoke from the lethargy of indulgence to find themselves tossing upon a sea of excitement and alarm. Lillian was interested, and for a time her own troubled life was swallowed up in the tumults that threatened the peace and harmony of the nation's life. Bustle, energy and activity were everywhere.

"What a useless, helpless thing I am!" she said to her aunt one evening as they sat alone, after the husband, who was wearied with his day's toils in the unpretentious hardware store near the wharf had retired to his room, and Grace was entertaining a friend in the parlor. "It seems to me I am suddenly aroused by a storm, and unless I run for my life shall be covered out of sight in its fury!" She laughed, but there was a seriousness in her pale face her aunt had never seen upon it before.[297]

"I do not wonder you think yourself out in the wind," was the cheerful response, "for Grace is enough to stir up the sleepy faculties of any lover of her country. I do not know but she will 'shoulder arms' and go into the field in defence of her native land!" and the good lady laughed outright. There was a long silence, while Lillian never once removed her gaze from the dying embers in the grate as she actively traced the wanderings and leapings of her busy thoughts.

At last she said in an undertone: "Grace is very gentle considering her confederate proclivities; but has it occurred to you that I have a *husband* somewhere in that confusion and excitement among our enemies, as we call them?"

"O, Lillian!" and the cheerful face put on a look of serious incredulity. "You will not now certainly desire to seek out a relationship from among a people, who would, if in their power, kill or enslave us all?" Lillian's dark eyes wandered slowly to the troubled face of the speaker. "I have fully joined with my daughter in the feeling that a great wrong has been perpetrated on you, still I did hope that this terrible war would obliterate forever all such former ties and leave you free, as free as though they had never been!"

"And here I am shocking you with my heart's cry for its idol, for its tenderest loves, for the purest longings known to woman's nature! Listen to me, Aunt Sylvia, I am going north! The blow has been struck! Fort Sumter has fallen! There will be wounded hearts to bind up and wounded bodies to care for! Sorrow and lamentation will fill many homes, and the cry for help and sympathy will sound over the land. I shall get[298] out of my life of indolence and plunge into the thickest scenes of labor!"

"Yes, Lillian, you do shock me! Why go north? If you must work, will there not be plenty of it to do among your own people? Are they not as deserving of your care and sympathy as their enemies?"

"Auntie, I have told Grace and now will tell you! Somewhere in the north I have a husband and child! Do not look at me with that spirit of incredulity peering out of your eyes, for it is no random suspicion—no new thought. My husband lives, and the letter I received last night from George St. Clair gives me the information that a 'Pearl Hamilton,' who started with a captain's commission from Pennsylvania was promoted to the position of colonel of his regiment by the entire vote of each company upon reaching Washington. This he copied from a paper for my especial benefit; and that Colonel Hamilton is *my husband; my Pearl!* He is true to me—our hearts are one, and the fast growing desire to go to him has, since the receipt of that letter, become full-fledged; and before communication between the two sections is entirely cut off I shall go!"

"Did not the knowledge of his notoriety help to feather the wings of love, my child?"

There was something in the tone of voice with which these words were uttered that caused the listener's face to flush with amazement and indignation.

"This from you, Auntie!" she said at last. "Look at me; remember what I have endured, realize for a moment from what I have been torn, consider the burdens that are weighing me down,[299] and then, if it be possible, repeat the question. You do not know me! For this reason I forgive the cruel thrust! Pearl Hamilton would hold my heart as firmly and truly if he were now the humble clerk in the store where I first knew him, as an honored officer in the enemy's army!"

Mrs. Stanley took the little white hand that lay on the arm of the easy chair where Lillian was sitting and holding it in her loving clasp, said, soothingly: "My darling, I did not mean at all what I said. You are too much like your father to be guilty of such unwomanly selfishness. I was a little indignant that you should persist in keeping faith with your childhood's love, and so uttered what I did not at all feel! I cannot, however, endure the thought of your going through the enemy's lines, and if he is a soldier as you hear, he may be brought to you as a prisoner of war, when you could be more speedily reunited than if you should follow out your own wild schemes."

"Pearl is not all I have in that muddle! Did I not say a husband and child? Grace has told you that I was a mother and that my pretty Lily died and was buried; but my dear Aunt, I do not believe it! I never did believe it! Still I had not the power to combat the story that was told me! O, I have been so weak! But a letter received by my mother, and which accidentally fell into my hands, and her confusion and evident alarm as I held it before her, assured me that I was the subject of a heartless fraud and that my child lived! Ever since I have pondered how I could find her! If I knew the place where she was born; at what point on the Atlantic shore stood the romantic[300] 'Cliff House'; where I was imprisoned those dreadful weeks, I should before this have visited it. The weird old nurse would, I am sure, tell me all, notwithstanding her bribes for secrecy!"

"Surely you do not believe all this, Lillian? No wonder the hungering of your heart has eaten the bloom from your cheek! But there must be some mistake. No matter how lofty may be a mother's ambition she could not be guilty of so vile an act!"

"Auntie, my cry for months has been 'lead me in a plain path', and I have been watching for the shadows to clear away that I might see the road, and now that my plea has been seemingly answered and the 'path' winds alone through the future mysteries so distinctly to my poor, trembling vision shall I not walk therein? Indeed, I *must* go! I can not sit idly here with folded

hands when there is so much to be done and so many links to be gathered up! My mother well understood my inertness and worthlessness; she knew too that my pride would not long allow me to be a dependent on those upon whom I only had the claims of kinship. This, she was sure, would in time bring me in humble penitence to her feet. I cannot do this; and the other path leads me farther away from her! I *must* go!"

True to her conclusions, in a few days Lillian Belmont, the petted child of luxury, weak and enervated by indolence and indulgence, started alone amid the protestations and pleadings of those who loved her, en route for Philadelphia where she knew another aunt, the oldest sister of her father, would give her a hearty welcome. It was a tiresome and exciting journey. Quizzing[301] eyes were upon her everywhere; suspicious glances were thrust at her from every side, and not until she crossed the southern lines did she settle calmly down.

Mrs. Cheevers received her as one risen from the dead. Claspng the slender form in her arms she gazed long and steadfastly into the pale face without speaking. "To think it is Lillian!" she said at last. "O, if Pearl were only here! How he has loved you my child." But tears, the first that had moistened the beautiful eyes of the stricken Lillian for many weeks, were now choking her utterance, and she lay as a weary child on the tender, sympathizing breast where her poor head was pillowed. Mrs. Cheevers had known what the longings of the mother love meant. Well did she understand the hungerings of its unsatisfied greed, and as she kissed over and over again the pure white forehead she thanked God that her brother's child could nestle so closely to her empty breast!

"You can never know how peaceful I feel!" Lillian said an hour after as they sat at a well-filled board, where she was satisfying a keener appetite than she had felt for many day. "I could fly for very joy, so light and buoyant are my spirits! I have carried a burden so long that the release seems almost oppressive!"

"Poor child!" murmured the aunt, while the masculine face opposite wore an expression of the deepest sympathy.

"And to think," he said at last, "that we should have believed for a moment what those letters contained! You will, however, do me the honor, wife, to assure our little Lillian that I never did!"[302]

"I will do you the justice to acknowledge that if it had not been for Pearl Hamilton your guilt would never have been a whit less than my own." A merry laugh followed this remark, and when it died away Lillian asked with as much calmness as she could summon if she might be permitted to examine the letters spoken of.

"Of course you may," interposed the uncle. "Read them, every one, and then forgive your fickle relative for swallowing the absurd idea that she who could believe one of the noblest of men was heartless! But he will be around after the first three months are over, and then we shall see how this matter is to be settled! In the meantime you just rest here and grow fat, for we shall have regular news from the battle field, and he is no private! His mother is the proudest woman in this immense city to-night; and I am going to tell her that the dead is alive, and—"

"Please do not Uncle!" pleaded Lillian. "Permit me to remain secluded and unknown until—well, for the present at least. It would be so awkward to explain, and so impossible to convince.

Besides, I am in my swaddling clothes yet; let me get a little stronger and firmer. I am so happy that I fear any intrusion; and shall be jealous of every interference."

"Say no more; I am not a woman, and can govern the 'unruly member' with true masculine power! Be happy, nothing shall interfere with your growth or pleasure while you remain under my roof;" and he took his hat from the rack and stepped nimbly from the house.

Weeks passed. There had been a dead calm on the Potomac which only served to agitate and stir^[303] up a greater excitement elsewhere. There were murmurings of discontent; whisperings ever so faint of rebellion in high places; there were impetuous longings and low mutterings of censure because the wheels of progress were blocked and the final consummation of overhanging difficulties was not speedily brought about; not realizing that God was marking out the path to a grand and glorious victory. How prone are human eyes to seek after their own paths and rely upon their own strength to "overcome."

But the great battle, which sent terror into thousands of hearts and homes, came at last! Men gathered upon the street corners in the great city, and quivering lips talked over the great defeat! The hearts of women pressed silently the bleeding wounds from which life-blood was ebbing, for loved ones were slain; and the dark cloud which had heretofore seemed no larger than a man's hand was covering the whole sky. Where was it all to end?

Lillian was mute but not inactive. Reports heralded the startling facts that many officers were wounded and many were killed. In the confusion and excitement, names were withheld or not yet ascertained, and three days cleared not away the uncertainties.

"I shall go to Washington on the night train," said Lillian very calmly as the little circle were talking it over at the table.

"You, my child? Pray what could you do in such a place at a time like this?"

"Please do not think me entirely worthless Uncle; I can do many things if sympathy compels me, I feel sure. Why not I, as well as others?^[304] Nurses are called for and if my hands have never learned what belongs to them, my heart has become familiar with the necessities sorrow demands. I can speak soothing words to smooth the pillow of the dying. I can give a cup of cold water if too weak to bind up a broken limb! There is work and I am going to offer myself to aid in performing it. Do not oppose me. I have passed through so many grades of opposition and contention that I have become well skilled in the art of defeating, so do not trouble yourself to combat me." She smiled, but the new resolve had left its impress on the calm, mild face, and no further opposition was raised.

We have seen her in the hospital doing the work of kindness and sympathy nobly and well. There was not one whose gentle voice could woo the sufferer into repose as could hers. Not one whose nerves were firmer when duty laid her demand upon them.

"There was a serious skirmish down the river last night," she had said to Anna Pierson during her last visit to the hospital, "and the wounded were brought in." Colonel Hamilton, however, did not arrive for two or three days, as his wounds were aggravated, being the fracture of an arm and the dislocation of the opposite shoulder, caused by the falling from his horse. A bullet had also lodged in his side at the time he was disabled, and the uncertainties of his situation barred his removal. The papers, however had not been silent, and the young nurse had learned, before his

coming, of the fears entertained regarding him. How she longed to administer to his every need, while her heart shrank from the very thought of standing^[305] before him. How would he meet her? He was true, they had said; but could they read his secret thought, or be sure of the emotions beneath his calm exterior? He was noble and good, but years would deck the saddest grave with blossoms, and spread over it a rich covering of emerald brightness.

She wondered and trembled, and prayed until the day came when the stately form was carried through the long ward and laid tenderly on a neat white couch prepared for it. Then they came to her.

"This new patient we will commit expressly to your care;" said one. "He must soon be able to mount his horse again, and no one can soothe an impatient soldier back to life and activity as soon as yourself, I am told, so do your best. Let me introduce you," and the attendant turned toward the bed where Colonel Hamilton was lying.

How her knees trembled, and what a faintness came over her, yet she walked mechanically forward. "Miss, Miss," and he turned towards Lillian who was waiting for the introduction. "I think you will get along rapidly with this young lady to care for you;" and he bowed graciously. The eyes of the wounded man were fixed intently upon the pallid face before him, as the attendant walked slowly away to conclude another matter in the farther part of the ward. Neither spoke. Sixteen years had, indeed, brought changes into the face of each. He had grown handsomer and nobler, she thought. Her face had become thinner and paler, but those eyes; no, no one could mistake their lustre or beauty.^[306]

"Lillian?" he interrogated at last, with a doubtful tone, "It must be, surely it must be Lillian!—my own—my wife!"

She was beside him—her arms around his neck;

"Pearl! O, my husband! Thank God, you are mine at last! You cannot leave me now, and no one shall tear me from you."

Let us drop the veil; there are scenes too holy for intruding eyes to dwell upon.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLIGHT OF THE SOUTHERN SPY.

Swiftly the weeks sped onward, laden with the events of the nation's disasters. Battles in the far west were being fought, and mourning and bereavements swept as a terrible wave over the land, lighted up here and there with the exultations of victory; but beneath all the waters lay deep and turbid. Mrs. Southey remained secluded for some days after her return from Alexandria. She had no doubt but her daughter had recognized her, notwithstanding her disguise, and in all probability would endeavor to hunt her out. "Would she expose me?" There was madness in the very thought, but the question would often present itself. "Yet what else could she do? Understanding, as she does, my Confederate sentiments, she cannot be at a loss in regard to my mission here," was her daily conclusion, and strongly was she tempted to fly from the city. But where could she go? To Philadelphia? She had been criticised severely from that source in regard

to her treatment of that very one from whom she was now contemplating hiding herself. It would not be pleasant going there, and no other northern home was, to her knowledge, open to her.

After thinking it over, she calmly informed her hostess that she proposed to remain where she was,[308] for the present at least, and trust the pride and natural kindness of her daughter, who she must confess had a goodly share of both these commodities.

"She would not willingly disgrace herself, nor," and she added with some hesitancy, "bring misery, perhaps death, upon her mother: at least I must rely upon all this as the lesser of the two evils."

"Then she is not wholly depraved, as you have been so willing I should believe," remarked her companion. "I thought I could not be mistaken in that face. What if you should go and throw yourself on her mercy? I can but feel sure that you would receive it."

"No, I cannot do that. And then you thought it impossible that she should recognize me. It may be so. There certainly would be a want of discretion should I wantonly expose myself without a surety of protection. The only way I can discover is to trust in Providence and wait results."

"Providence!" sneered her companion. "Meager claims have we on its friendly protection I imagine. The fact is, Mrs. Southey, we must figure this whole matter for ourselves. There seems to be considerable spunk in the plethoric old gentleman this war is stirring up, and I doubt if he would treat such as we with a great amount of gallantry if introduced to him, and, therefore, let us figure closely, and not trust to vagaries of which we know so little. It may do for a *Christian like yourself*, but you know that I am an outsider." This last remark was a little too cynical, and the lady to whom it was addressed arose to her feet with flashing eyes. Her companion only smiled, however, as she motioned her to be reseated.[309]

"I beg your pardon, *mon amie*, I did not really think you would resent the first compliment I ever gave you," she laughed, then continued. "I have been hindering you all the time. Where were you going? Out for a walk?"

No sisters ever understood each other better than did these two women, and seldom was it that two ever despised each other more. They had met but seldom before "Mrs. Southey" came to Washington as a southern spy, but well she knew that in the home she sought she would find co-operation. In this she had not been mistaken. Her mission was carefully guarded, but her everyday life underwent careful scrutiny. Her dignity as the 'Mistress of Rosedale' was continually pierced and wounded without mercy, while she remained powerless in the hands of her tormentor. The morning scene we are chronicling was not an exceptional one; still it left the lady in a burning rage. At dinner, however, the hostess met her with many bland excuses for neglecting her so long, thus pressing the thorns deeper that were sorely goading her victim all unconsciously to other eyes. How true that the spirit of evil despises and seeks to lacerate itself when its reflection is seen in the bosom of another!

"I have an invitation for you to take an airing in the elegant turn-out of our pet senator, by the side of his queenly wife, this p.m., at four." The bustling housekeeper said this amid the superintending of the dinner arrangements. "You will go, of course, and so I told the servant who brought in the card. You are looking so pale and thin that I am sure the ride will do you good."[310]

At the hour appointed the carriage stood before the door, and the senator's wife called out pleasantly, as the two ladies appeared in sight, "the air is delicious, Mrs. Southey, and I can fully recommend its sanitary powers, having been cured of an oppressive headache already. You are not looking as well as usual," she continued, as the lady addressed tripped down the stone steps where the footman was waiting to hand her into the carriage.

"Will it reach the heart and conscience and drive out its ailments?" queried the hostess.

The thin lips of Mrs. Southey parted slightly as she threw back a keen glance at the speaker in the doorway. Without apparently noticing it she continued, "If I thought it would I would order a carriage and perform some long-neglected duties."

It was a lovely afternoon, as the senator's wife had reported, and as Mrs. Southey reclined dreamily in one corner of the luxurious barouche, a sensation, almost peaceful, came stealing over her while she listened to the agreeable words of her companion, and felt the cool soft breezes playing about her. For a while, at least, she forgot herself with all the attending perplexities of her situation, in the musical clatter of the horses' hoofs on the hard road. At last she was waked from her reveries as from a dream, by observing the carriage stop in the street and hearing her companion accost some one outside.

"I am happy to meet you," she said; "I have been so anxious about your patient. How is he getting along?"

"Slowly improving," came back the answer.

"*Good heavens! That voice!*" How the guilty woman trembled! It was that of her only daughter—her^[311] Lillian! Did she long to clasp again that form, once so beloved, in her maternal embrace? Why did her cheeks and lips suddenly become chill and pallid? Why should every nerve quiver as she sat there mute with a palsying fear? Ah, she well knew that a pair of large dark eyes were fastened upon her, reading the emotions of her very soul, avoid them as she would! In vain did she endeavor to adjust her veil, which was thoughtlessly thrown back from her face in her dream of peace; but it became entangled with the trimmings of her bonnet, and it was impossible to disengage it. With a sensation of despair she settled back as far as possible among the shadows and painfully waited for the issue.

"Then you will come to-morrow?" she heard Lillian say. "I want much to see you for more than one reason."

"I think I will not fail," was the cheerful answer.

"Then I will tell him. The prospect, I am sure, will speed his convalescence."

The carriage moved on. The crouching figure straightened a little for a freer breath.

"Did you see those beautiful eyes?" asked her companion turning towards her. "I beg your pardon!" was the impulsive exclamation as she looked into the face beside her. "I ought not to have kept you out so long. You look as though you were chilled through; we will return immediately!"

"O, no! I am not cold! A sudden—dizziness I think—must have come over me! Do not return; indeed—I am not cold—the ride is exceedingly pleasant! Let us go on."^[312]

Her listener was surprised. Never had she seen the aristocratic Mrs. Southey so beside herself. Her words and manner perplexed her, still she made no reply.

"The young lady—who was she? Her eyes? O, yes! They were very fine! I think I must have seen her before!"

"At the hospital then," was the reply; "for she seldom goes out. I must tell you about her. She has been in Alexandria, doing good service I believe, and has now come to the city to nurse her husband, who is badly wounded and was brought thither for better accommodations, as he is an officer in high rank and is much needed in the field."

"Her husband!" almost shrieked the miserable woman; "did you say her *husband*?"

"Certainly! Why not? Do you know her? You astonish me by your looks and appearance! Enlighten me, I beseech you, Mrs. Southey!" exclaimed the lady.

The wretched woman tried to speak, but found not the power to do so.

At last she gasped, "I beg your pardon! I am strangely nervous to-day, I confess. It is true, I thought at first that I had seen the lady some years ago, but conclude I must have been mistaken or she would have remembered me. The mother of the one she so much resembles is a very dear friend of mine and her marriage was clandestine and seriously against her parents' wishes. I knew that the news of their reunion would greatly distress them, and so allowed my sympathies to run away with me and frighten you. You will pardon me?" she interrogated, beseechingly, as she laid her hand on her companion's arm.

"Certainly. I do not wonder at your agitation! But really, I think your friend ought not to distress herself about her daughter's choice were it so. Colonel Hamilton is one of our noblest and most heroic officers, and it is now being whispered in military circles that as soon as he is recovered his promotion will be speedy to the rank of brigadier, whether he is ever able to occupy it or not. I wish you would go with me to-morrow and see him. He is certainly one of the finest looking men I ever saw!"

Mrs. Southey, however, declined the honor. She was "too weak and sensitive to endure excitement," as she had given abundant proof during the last hour.

It was true, and the lady accepted the refusal gracefully. "Sometime you must tell me more about this colonel's wife in whom we both are so much interested, will you?" she asked, as they reached the street where was Mrs. Southey's temporary home.

"I shall be happy to keep you informed as to his recovery, and will call as soon as possible after my next visit to the hospital."

"Thank you!" and so they parted.

How little either knew of the emotions or convictions of the other! What a long catalogue of ills were being chronicled in the inner chamber of the guilty soul! It was a slight peep the penetrating eyes caught through the partially opened door ere the power of self-control returned to close it, but no sophistry could dispose of the horrors thus revealed! When again in her room she dropped into an easy chair evidently exhausted.[314]

"Your ride must have been wearisome," suggested her hostess. "You do not look as well as when you went out," she continued, carelessly, raising her eyes from the paper she had in her hand.

"I am not well," was the prompt reply.

"Have you been driven under a halter? One would imagine that justice had been close upon you;" and she turned the page with perfect *sang froid*.

"Be merciful, I beseech you!" was the plaintive wail of her companion. "I will tell you all! I have not been chased by *justice* as you intimate, but what is worse—I have seen Lillian and she has seen me! The carriage stopped while the two friends talked, and all the time her eyes were fixed upon my uncovered face; and to-morrow they meet at the hospital! I know my uncontrollable agitation has betrayed much, and there is little doubt but she will finish what I have so ignobly begun. Beside this my daughter has found her husband, who is none other than the Colonel Hamilton of whom so much has been said of late! Of course he will aid her in performing what she would never have the strength to accomplish herself!" The head of the wretched mother sank upon her hand, while her whole frame shook with emotion. Her companion had risen and now stood before her.

"The time has come when you must leave!" she said with a tone as ringing and metallic as the clinking of steel when rudely smiting its fellow. "I have the arrangements all made, expecting it would come to this, for, as you are well aware, it would not be very comfortable for the innocent to^[315] be found in such bad company!" The tall figure became erect as her keen eyes were fixed upon the face of the speaker, while she continued: "Send your usual message and add in postscript a command to get that horse ready as ordered and brought around at eleven to the spot designated. I have a suit prepared, and at about ten miles there is a friend who will grant you a retreat for the present. I can send you word when you must fly farther. Now I will leave you, for it is nearly six and the order must be written immediately!"

Alone! What dismal horrors haunt the guilty mind when let loose upon itself! A spy! And in the enemy's country, hemmed in by the barriers of war with no way of escape to a land of safety, if such a place could be found! A rebel! And truth all ready to whisper in the ear of offended justice "behold the traitor!"

"Where is my strength? My pride?" she murmured, as she arose and walked across the room. "How I tremble! The gallows! What a reward for my persevering and arduous labors! I understand it!"

Then her mind wandered to the story of a German monarch who caused the executioner to blow his death-blast before the door of his brother's palace. "Ah, you tremble," said the king, "when the prospect of temporal death is so near; but look a little farther and behold the eternal pangs of the soul! How now? Does the sight appall thee? Go to thy home, my brother, the king desires not thy life; but remember the errors of a temporal death and shun the horrors of the second!"

"If I had done this! O, Lillian, Lillian my child! You cannot see your mother at this hour,^[316] and it is well! The first—yes the second death is for such as I!"

"I shall do no such thing!" she exclaimed aloud at last as she reseated herself by the window. "The horse perish with its rider! I want neither; I swear it! This hateful business stops here! O wretched, wretched woman that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Was

not that in the Bible? Ah, I remember! The voice that has been silent for many years once repeated those words in my hearing when his hour had come. The Bible! I will go to Philadelphia. Mrs. Cheevers will not turn me from her door for—for—she is a Christian! Pride? Away with it! O the curse of a false ambition!"

The shadows of twilight fell noiselessly about her, spreading over the bent figure a pall of tender sympathy. Then she arose, lighted the gas and hurriedly threw into her trunks the plain, rich wardrobe of the elegant "English lady," and locking them prepared to go out. She had remembered that the northern train left the depot at eight, and she was going upon it! She passed out without interruption, and in a half hour the drayman was standing in the hall ready to be shown where the trunks were waiting. "This way," called Mrs. Southey; "you will need help for they are large."

"Where are you going?" asked the lady of the house with great astonishment, opening the parlor door. "Surely you are not going to tear yourself away so abruptly? How lonely I shall be without my aristocratic English guest! But do tell me, where are you going?"

"Out of death unto life," was the quick reply. "This way! Do not mar the railing;" and the^[317] two men passed on with the last trunk. "Forty minutes before train time, I believe?" she interrogated as she stepped forward to close the door. "Yes, madam;" and she turned to the bewildered woman who was silently gazing at her.

"Well, I am going," she said calmly; "it matters not to you where, but remember this! If there is a path for such as I back to womanhood I am determined to find it!" A cynical laugh was her only response. "Nevertheless, it is true! The miseries of the last few days have completed the grave into which I have cast my pride and ambitions; would that the bitter memories of the past could be buried with them! But I must go. Farewell—do not wait to attempt your own rescue until the quicksands have swallowed you up; again farewell!"

Her companion did not speak, but turned coldly away, while Mrs. Belmont, with a heart lighter than it had been for many months, tripped down the steps. New resolutions had taken possession of her soul, and with them had entered a ray of cheering light. The door had been thrown ajar for the spirit of penitence, but how dark the long closed chamber appeared, how ghostly the spectral memories that crouched among its shadows! The "broken and contrite heart" had not as yet opened the windows to the glories of the noonday sun of righteousness; and the door was reclosed, and upon the outside the new resolves were laid with trembling hands. She was Mrs. Belmont again—the mistress of Rosedale, and nevermore would she stoop to fraud or ignominy! Her daughter would come to her and ask for the mother-love her disobedience had forfeited, and she would humbly^[318] grant it! Colonel Hamilton was not one to be ashamed of; and then the dark night at the seashore, the cry of the abducted Lily rolled its burden of remorse close where the new resolutions were lying, and she trembled as the engine whistled its frightful alarm—something was on the track! "O God! What if Thy anger should fall upon me, where O where shall the sinner appear?" burst from her lips as she covered her face with her hands.

"There is no danger," shouted the brakeman at last; "the track is clear." And with folded hands she rode on breathing freely once more.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NIGHT UPON THE BILLOWS.

How the circumstances of life throw us about! Now, upon the revolving wheel, we are raised high above our fellows, where, from our dizzy elevation, we look about us with a sense of giddiness lest we fall; then with sudden revolution we descend while those upon the low grounds are carried up. Change! Change!

Our little circle of actors in the present drama were on the "wheel," but not one experienced more disagreeable sensations in its turnings than did Mrs. Belmont, the once haughty mistress of Rosedale. Hers was not alone in the experience of external disagreeables; but in her soul, where the continual revolvings of the corresponding whirlings of good resolutions and evil passions, which the hand of avarice was turning. Poor soul; with only such a power to govern its weal or woe!

Mrs. Gaylord lingered about the maelstrom where her darling had disappeared from sight many weeks, loth to believe that she would not rise again to bless and cheer her loneliness. "She was so like me," she would repeat over and over again; "the same restless ambitions, the same longings after something her hand could never reach! And now she is gone! I could bear it if the beautiful casket, emptied of its treasure had been left for my^[320] stricken heart to cherish and lay away in its bed of flowers under the green grass; but to lose all but the memory of her uncertain fate! This is the darkest cloud of all. Then what will Willie, the poor struggling cripple, say? How shall I ever meet him."

The shadows deepened in the home of the St. Clair's, and none rejoiced more when the husband bore his weeping wife back to her Virginia life than did the sympathizing Mrs. Mason. "It was dreadful," she said to her mother, after the good-byes were over; "but as we could not help it became a trifle monotonous,—this petting and soothing."

"Well, as for me, I would give a pretty large sum to know the whole of that transaction," remarked Mr. St. Clair, one day as the whole matter was being talked over. "There is a wheel within a wheel or I am mistaken. These old eyes are not so very blind when they have their spectacles on."

"I do wish you would never again throw out one of your wild and foolish 'perhaps so's!'" exclaimed the wife pettishly. "I should not be surprised if your cousin should bring you before the courts for slander."

The husband threw up his broad hands high above his head while a merry peal of laughter rang through the apartment.

"Only to think, wife! Slander! I tell you there are chapters in that woman's life that she would not like to have me or any one else be fumbling over, and there is not much danger that she will ever turn the leaves for my especial benefit."

"You are too bad; the mother of Lillian Belmont ought to be above such insinuations, Mr. St. Clair!"^[321]

"That is a fact, but she is not, and there is where the too bad comes in;" and the merry laugh again resounded.

Mrs. Gaylord reached her home in safety. It was a fine old residence, standing back from the highway, nearly hidden from the passer by because of the large wide-spreading trees with which it was surrounded; yet the broadly-paved walks that branched off in every direction as they wound around among the cool shadows of the overhanging branches were delightfully inviting to the weary traveler who looked in upon them. The mistress of that pleasant retreat now, however, walked with languid step up the winding path to the house with a heavy heart. The darker shades of an overhanging gloom oppressed her. On the portico the servants were collected to give her welcome, and as she took the tawny hand of each in her own, said, "You too will miss your young mistress. You loved her, Jenny,—she will make no more turbans for you, Phebe—and poor little Pegs! who will fix his kite or teach him how to spin his top?"

"Whar is she Missus?" asked Phebe, with the great tears rolling down her ebony cheeks, and several other voices chimed in "Dar—dar—Missus, whar is she?"

"Dead! Swallowed up by the big sea, and we shall see her no more!" She passed on, for Mr. Gaylord had taken her arm and was leading her into the long drawing-room, where he bade her stop her prating and making a simpleton of herself.

"It might as well be she as any one," he continued, noticing the look of distress on the pale face; "Seldom could there be found a young lady^[322] of her attractions who would break fewer hearts by disappearing than would she. But I am sorry for you. There was a little more color in your face, and a slight return of the former sprightliness in your manner while she was with you. But she is gone, Mrs. Gaylord, and what is the use of throwing misery over every one who crosses your path because of it? If you must pine away the few attractions you have left out of your life, why, do it silently and alone."

Her tears ceased at the commencement of this little sympathetic(?) speech and she now stood before her husband cold and chilling. Servants came and went with little acts of attention and considerable bustle of ceremony, yet, with her arm resting upon the marble mantel, she moved not, for her thoughts had driven away her weariness. A visitor was announced and she turned to see that her husband had seated himself by the window with his paper, and was deep in the perplexing problems it had brought to him.

"War! War!" Its columns were full. Preparations were going on everywhere. Calls were made for every lover of his country and home to see to it that his powers, of whatever sort, were immediately put in working order. He yawned as he turned to the last page, and looked up as if supposing his lady was still present, and he had something to say to her, but he was alone. "Well," he said, between the snatches of a military air which he was whistling; "I must away. 'The bugle sounds to arms, to arms,' and Fred Gaylord can as well be spared from the loving embraces of his adorable spouse as any one. Heigho! 'The echos are ringing alarms, alarms.' Hello,^[323] my good fellow! Nero, come and greet your master," and the huge mastiff walked boldly in through the open window, and with many demonstrations of pleasure licked the hand that caressed him.

"Yes, Mrs. Gaylord," he said the next morning as they were sitting at the breakfast table, "in a week I shall go to Richmond!"

"To join the army?"

"Well—no! I cannot say as I have any particular desire to set up this six feet of flesh and bones as a target for designing men to shoot at! It wouldn't be comfortable, you know! Besides, I can do a better thing for my country. Mine is to plan, advise and superintend. There will be plenty of this work to do, and you will get along very well without me." He arose and sauntered out into the open air, whistling as he went "the girl I left behind me." The wife watched the manly figure until it disappeared among the trees.

"Not much nobility in the character of a coward," she thought, as she looked after him. "Our grandest and noblest men in the South, as well as in the North, will enter the field of battle and—yes, will die and be buried! Hearts will ache and homes will be saddened, and the great wheel of destiny will keep on turning just as if nothing unusual was happening! Lives are being continually thrown upon it, and as rapidly hurled by its flying motion into darkness—into forgetfulness! Where is it? Where do they go? Where is Lily? That soul so full of longings, of ambitious, of unbounded faiths, hopes and shadowy desires, real to itself but mysterious to the uninitiated? Surely such a being has not been cast away among^[324] the rubbish of past ages as worthless, to find in the darkness the end of all these? No! no! She was right! There is something in these compounds of humanity that are not easily satisfied and cannot readily be extinguished. My own wild, restless cravings tell me this! Why should this 'hungering and thirsting' be given me if there was nothing with which to satisfy it? I once foolishly imagined that wealth and position would do this, but I starve with it all! I have said in my heart, 'eat, drink, and be merry; get the brightest things out of life that are possible, for the end cometh.' O Lily, my child! How much I need you! The shadows were lifting—there was a faint light in the east, the glimmering of a new day; but the darkness has set in again, the night is not ended!" She was listlessly walking up and down the elegant parlors as these thoughts ran through her mind.

Weeks passed. Mr. Gaylord had long been away, swallowed up in the excitements and business of war, and she seldom heard from him; still she had no fears, for he was only "planning, engineering and advising!" This was safe business surely! The grand old house had been filled with friends and relatives who had fled from the immediate scenes of action to take refuge out of harm's way; still when the hot July days were come with their enervating oppressiveness Mrs. Gaylord thought of the quiet village inn at the north where she had first met her Lily, and her heart pined for its cooling shades once more. But the husband had said she must not attempt to go into the enemy's country, or she would be taken for a spy.^[325]

"However," she thought one day, "I will write to Mr. Bancroft and hear about Willie; this will do me a little good at least." She did write. The tumults of war increased. The reports of conflicts were heard everywhere! The dark wave was rolling up from the far south and threatening to sweep over the boundary lines east and west, scorching and destroying everything in its progress. Mrs. Gaylord watched its coming with a great fear stirring her whole being. What would become of them? Then there came an answer to her letter. How greedily she broke the seal; how her heart bounded as she unfolded the well-filled sheet!

"How glad I was to hear from you," it began. "I did not know but you had been lost in the terrible fire! How it rages! Where will it end? When the passions of men become aroused Justice and Mercy must fold their arms and wait. But, my dear Mrs. Gaylord, cruelties, wrong dealings, abominations are not confined to war or kept within the machinations of my own sex. You speak of your loss and loneliness—come to us. You will be happier here, and a great problem still unsolved requires your aid. Next week a friend of mine will go to Washington for a few days

only; now if you can get through Baltimore meet him there and he will conduct you safely to my home. I will see him to-day and write the particulars to-morrow. Willie is not with me just now, there being greater attractions elsewhere. All will be explained when you are with us. It is best that you should follow out my suggestions. I should have written you many weeks ago if I had not heard that you were not at home, and it[326] was very uncertain whether a letter would find you in these troublesome times."

"How strangely he writes," she thought, as the paper dropped from her hand. "A problem! He had heard I was not at home; who told him? Why am I needed to help solve the problem? There is a mystery in all this! It is not like him. I must—yes, I will go! Mr. Gaylord's brother's widow, who must remain here with her family, should do all that I could, and I must go!" How restlessly she tossed upon her pillow that night! The problem! The mystery! Mr. Gaylord might not like it; he had told her to remain where she was; but something within bade her go. Another letter came, as was expected. There was much advise, counsel and many directions, and then it said: "I will just add for your perusal a short preface to a most exciting story. It may be that the interest it will awaken will have more power to draw you than anything I can say by way of persuasion. You know that there is an assurance somewhere that 'the sea shall give up its dead,' and that we 'shall meet our loved ones,' etc. These are, without doubt, true, for we have many a foretaste of the good things to come even here. One to the point is fresh before me. More than two months ago Willie received a letter from over the ocean that the good ship Constitution had picked up from off the dark billows a floating waif alone in an open boat somewhere along the southern shore, and as they were bound for Liverpool had no alternative but to take their prize with them. They did so and it was then lying in a hospital very sick, and the greater part of the time delirious. The physicians, however, had prophesied[327] a speedy recovery when the crisis was passed, and as they had succeeded in learning the address of the one about whom she had talked almost incessantly, concluded to write to him. 'Be not alarmed' it went on to say, 'for it was not strange that such a night on the billows of a stormy sea should have upset a stronger set of nerves, or bewildered even a more massive brain.' But she would recover, and when strong enough would be brought back to Boston where her home was, as they had gathered from her talk. Still it was their desire to hear immediately if a young lady had been missing from those parts; a Miss 'Lily Gaylord', the name found on the clothing."

"My Lily!" almost shrieked the excited woman unable to read farther. "Preserved again! What a wonderful power is holding her! But how did she come on the sea? This is the problem—O, who can solve it?" Her burning eyes again fell upon the paper.

"And now she is with Willie in their old home. I was there a few days ago and found her very pale and thin. I told her I was going to insist that you should come north, when her dark eyes brightened and she said, 'O do!' Her story told Willie is a strange one; more wonderful than fiction. But you will come now, and so I will reserve the rest until your arrival."

Did she go? How laggard were the days that intervened between the receipt of this letter and the "next Thursday week" when she was to meet Mr. Bancroft's friend in Washington. Then she thought it all over. The strange incidents concerning the disappearance of her darling; the suspicions so abruptly spoken by Mr. St. Clair on[328] that sad evening! True, he was excited and might have said what he did not feel; but Mrs. Belmont's unsatisfactory explanations as to why she should be out in such a place, at such a time, with no other attendant than a cowardly servant, was all such a mystery! Why should that lady wish to injure the child? Had she not said on

several occasions that she "had taken a fancy to the dear girl?" Yes, several times! And this was nothing strange; everybody admired her! Certainly she had done nothing to the mistress of Rosedale to excite in her a desire to do her harm! It could not be! The more she thought it over, the more she recalled half-forgotten looks and words, the more was she perplexed.

"I will wait," she thought at last; "perhaps Lily can throw a little light upon the transaction. Whatever were the designs of Mrs. Belmont, Lily is safe! More than ever now will she believe that a mighty hand kept her above the dark billows! Twice has she ridden alone and unguided upon them, yet she did not sink! The picture in the old Bible in the library, which I have pondered so many times, seems to impress itself now upon my soul. Like Peter, Jesus must have walked beside her, upheld and guided the frail boat with its precious freight; and it may be—it may be He spoke to the angry deep 'peace, be still!' I wish I believed it all. How cheering it must be—such faith I mean—to the lone mariner on the dark billows of life to be cared for by one who can do these things! Hush the storms and command the waves and they obey Him! I think I should not toss about in my little boat as hopelessly, or shudder with such fear as I look out over the dark[329] waters that are rolling about me, if this faith were mine. O Lily! So like me, yet so far removed, with the great God of heaven for your father, and the Saviour for your friend and protector! I will know more of this! I am disappointed, hungry and thirsty. The waters are deep; the waves dash upon my frail bark!"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SHADOWS AS THEY FLY.

Mrs. Gaylord arrived safely in Boston, after a very wearisome journey and was met by Mr. Bancroft with many demonstrations of delight.

"It will please Willie so much," he said, after it was well over, by way of apology. "That gentle little cripple of yours, Mrs. Gaylord," he continued, "has taken a long hitch into my affections, and it does me good to gratify his whims."

"They are together, then?"

"Yes, out on the farm. I was there last week and told them you were coming, although I was not positive in the matter as I would like to have been; but I guessed it! You know that is our Yankee privilege."

No amount of persuasion could induce the lady to remain in the city for a rest; she must go at once! "What a sad time poor Lily must have had of it. I am so anxious to hear all about it!"

"Your curiosity will not gain any great corpulency by what she can tell you, I imagine," he laughed. "She seems very reticent when touching the supposed reasons for her ride, and it is my opinion that there was more in the tender solicitude of that precious friend she found down south than was discernable to the naked eye!"[332]

"Was there ever an open transgression, or an imaginary evil perpetrated that a woman was not at the bottom of it?" Mrs. Bancroft made this little speech in the form of an inquiry with a very smiling face, and a mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes. "There is my good husband, for

instance, who declared this very morning that if you did not come, it would be because I did not more positively insist! Just as though you did not know how much I loved you years ago, and, although a woman, love you still!"

"But she has come, wife," interposed the laughing husband, "and, no doubt, is tired and hungry. You will wait until morning before proceeding farther?" he queried, turning to the visitor.

"I shall be obliged to, I suppose, for, if I remember correctly, there is but one more train in that direction to-night, and that is at five, while it is nearly four now."

The following morning, on the first train going west was Mrs. Gaylord, with her dusky-browed companion, who seldom was apart from her mistress. Now they were going to the little village for the third time, where both had spent so many pleasant days. "We will take dinner there," the lady had said, "and then I will go for a drive and find Lily."

Tiny had said nothing, but her eyes were open as well as those of her mistress; and now a smile came and lingered around the well-formed mouth.

Mrs. Gaylord saw it.

"How do you imagine Miss Lily came out on the ocean that dark night, Tiny? There is that at times in your face which leads me to think you know something about it." [333]

"O no, Missus; Tiny don't know nothin'; she 'spect tho', dat de good Lord didn't take her dar."

"But He took her off, Tiny?"

"Yes, Missus, He duz that, but He neber got nobody to carry her dar."

"Did any one do that?"

"Don't know, but I've see Missus Belmont talkin' to a white trash more'n once, and I 'spects somthin'."

"Who were they, Tiny?"

"Couldn't tell; 'twas drefful dark down on secon' street, but I know'd her. I went wid Cassa down to see Pliny, what was sick, and she was dar by de carriage shop talkin'."

Perplexities thickened. If she had done this, why was it done? There must have been a reason for such a terrible act!

The whistle blew, and the train stopped at the junction. Carriages were waiting, and into one stepped Mrs. Gaylord, followed by her servant.

"Ah! Glad to see you at Kirkham again."

The lady turned quickly. "O, it is you, Frank. How warm you are here. Drive on, there is a cool breath waiting for me under the maples."

With the sensation of unburdening, Mrs. Gaylord went out before dinner into the pleasant grove in the rear of the hotel, where she found the cool breath waiting. Here, at least, the war could not reach her! The sound of strife, of anger or oppression could not search her out! The first great

battle had been fought, and there was mourning as well as exultation in the land, while the blood of patriots was at boiling heat. Was it this that oppressed her? Had she grieved at the result, or had her Southern tendencies made it joy? She^[334] asked herself this question more than once; and as she sat under the shadows of the whispering trees, concluded that, let the results be what they would, she loved the cool, unimpassioned Northerners, with their independence and self-sustaining powers. She would wait. She had found peace in days gone by as she looked calmly out over the waste of waters whither she was floating, and felt no hard throbbings of the heart where love was dying! Would this peace come again? Not until she had seen Lily, and the mysterious problem solved should she look for it. She did not like this tangling up of broken threads; indeed, she did not want them to break at all; but, since they must, why could they not dangle free from each other?

Soon after dinner, and while the sun was still high, the carriage came around for her.

"Going to see the cripple, Willie Evans?" interrogated the driver from the box, with all the northern familiarity. "His sister is back again, and a hard time she's had of it; so they say;" he continued, for the lady had not answered. She spoke now.

"She was with me, you remember, at the hotel."

"Ah! yes, ma'am, I remember! There is something strange about her adventure, but I dare say it will in time be all explained."

She had not liked the way the simple-minded man gave his information. What if, after all, gossip, should burden her shoulders with the strange rumors. She had not thought of this! How would she be received at the cottage? Would^[335] Willie blame her? But Lily had told all! She certainly would relieve her from censure.

The carriage stopped at the gate and Mrs. Hopkins appeared in the doorway.

"Are the young people at home?" inquired the lady without moving from her seat.

"They have gone for a short walk to the lake, but will be back soon," was the reply. "Mrs. Gaylord, I believe? They will be glad to see you! You had better come in and I will send for them."

"I will go," said the driver; and Mrs. Gaylord stepped from her carriage and entered the little parlor.

"You will find that the girl is much changed," remarked Mrs. Hopkins, handing the lady a chair. "She is very thin and pale. She has been seriously ill, and I do not wonder! It *was* dreadful! Her being out all night in that terrible storm; and in an open boat all alone! I tell her that she had better stay where her *friends* are now, if it *is* in the lower walks of life! She has some very foolish notions that, in my opinion, she would be much better without." Mrs. Hopkins had taken a seat close by the window, and seemingly was communing with herself rather than entertaining her visitor. Mrs. Gaylord allowed her to proceed without interruption. "She is poor, homeless and friendless, and the sooner she makes up her mind to settle down to these facts and go to work, the happier she will be."

"I think you are a little mistaken about her poverty, friendships or home, for to my certain knowledge she has all. At any rate she can have them by the acceptance."^[336]

"It seems that she did accept, and you see how it has turned out. She comes back without clothes or health and ready to seek shelter in the home she once so foolishly left. Still," she continued, as she espied a flush of indignation sweeping over the face of her listener, "I have much to thank you for in regard to my poor brother. He is very happy in being able to earn his board and provide for his own necessities. It was kind in you to bestow such happiness on a poor cripple. We had never thought it possible that he could ever be anything but a burden." The lady moved nervously. "Of course we were willing to take care of him, but it's so much pleasanter for one to take care of himself. Mr. Bancroft has seemingly taken a great liking to him. He was out here last week and wanted he should hurry through with his vacation as he was lonely, so he said. I thought the change would be bad for him, but he has grown quite fleshy and is looking well." The voice ceased, for suddenly she had awakened to the consciousness that she was talking all alone.

Mrs. Gaylord was busy with her thoughts. This then was the Fanny of whom Lily had told her. What wonder that her sensitive nature had shrank from her! Such exhibitions of a selfish spirit! It was not strange the atmosphere of such a home had chilled and frozen her warm, tender affections. But it was over. She should not remain a day longer where such storms of frost and snow must continually pelt her! She was indignant. "Glad to get back to the home she had left" without friends or clothing! She looked up and saw a pair of stern eyes fixed upon her.^[337]

"I beg your pardon, I was wandering with my thoughts just then." "And I was waiting for them to come back," was the response. "Of course you will let the girl remain now where she rightfully belongs? She can help me and pay her way if she feels so disposed, and it's time that she should. If she is let alone I have no doubt she will make quite a woman. She wanted to see you and I had no objections; but you had better not trouble yourself farther about her. Don't you think so?"

"I can answer your question better at nightfall," Mrs. Gaylord replied, ironically. "I shall take them both with me to the hotel if they will go, and after talking the matter over can conclude with greater wisdom."

"Of course they will! Some people are very willing to seek for aid when helpless and in trouble, but have no idea of returning the favors received when an opportunity is offered for them to do so!"

The little party were coming up the garden walk and Mrs. Gaylord arose to meet them. With a bound and a cry of pleasure Lily sprang into the open arms ready to receive her.

"O Lily, Lily, my darling!" exclaimed the sweet voice, while the lips that spoke these words were kissing brow and cheek passionately. Willie was hitching himself over the green grass towards them. "You are changed! How very sick you must have been!" and she held the weeping girl off at arm's length that she might look at her. "Get yourself ready, as the carriage must be back to the hotel in three hours and it is nearly two already." She stepped forward and clasped the cripple's extended hand. "It makes me more^[338] happy than I can tell to meet you both again. You will go with us? I so pine for one of our old talks duplicated. Frank, help Willie to the carriage." And she turned to find that Lily had disappeared, and in her place stood the veritable Mrs. Hopkins.

"I do not want you to think," she said, meekly, "that I am not willing that you should be her friend, but I do think that if you are, you will advise her to remain in her present home, where she seems to have been placed, and not attempt to be what she is not or ever can be!"

Lily's appearance put an end to further conversation, and without a moment's delay the horses were turned towards the village.

"You see I have changed my plumage," Lily said with a smile. "I returned to Boston with a very small wardrobe, only what had been provided for me at the hospital by some kind visitors, and Willie out of his little accumulations insisted upon this French lawn, which I keep for my 'dress-up.' It is very pretty, is it not?"

"Yes, but it seems to me that you have not 'picked up' as much as you ought in three months. You are looking much thinner than I had thought of finding you!"

"It is such a mystery! I cannot sleep! That voice in the darkness under the trees that called me so feebly and with such perfect indifference! This haunts me whenever I close my eyes. The whole scene; the masked face, the rolling billows, the sound of the huge waves as they dashed against the rocks; all, all terrify and distract me! How can the flesh ever creep back upon my bones or the color to my cheek or lips? O that terrible[339] night! Its horrors even as I recall them well nigh curdle my blood!"

"Poor child!" But Willie interrupted them.

"It is only two years, or a little more, since we rode together over this road. Dear old Rover; he must have one drive to the village before he returns to his city life. I do not think he likes it as well as his master, Mrs. Gaylord," he continued, with an air of pleasantry.

"We understand you, Willie," Lily laughed, wholly recalled from her dark remembrances. "Two years, and very eventful ones too; but Rover must have his pleasure now as well as we."

The horses trotted briskly forward, and very little more was said until the trio were cosily seated in the little upper parlor of the inn.

"My child, I conclude, from one little remark you have made, that Mrs. Belmont, in your opinion, knew something of the sad affair before the hour in which you were carried away."

"Yes, I do believe it!"

"Why?"

"You would not have asked had you noticed her while we were sitting on the sofa, the first time of our meeting at the Washburn's, when she quizzed me about my early life,—my parentage, and my fanciful name of 'Lily Pearl,' which I took occasion to tell her after my suspicions were aroused! Mrs. Gaylord, she knows something of my history. I feel it; I cannot be mistaken!"

"Why did you not ask her about it?"

"I did. When she came to my room the next day while I was dressing for dinner, and in her caressing way patted my neck and spoke of its whiteness and beauty, at the same time inadvertently,[340] as she would evidently have me think, bared my shoulders, and, as she did so,

gave a little shriek. As I looked up into her face I saw it was deadly pale! 'What is it?' I asked, as calmly as possible. 'Do those purple spots remind you of anything?' 'Remind me? What do you mean, child?' 'Just what I said. Do they remind you of anything in the past? Mrs. Belmont, you know something about me or you would not appear so strangely. Tell me, will you? Who am I? and where are my parents?' I was looking her directly in the eye and she trembled under my gaze. 'You are mistaken, my dear,' she replied blandly, 'I have no knowledge of you whatever! How could I? I never heard of you till last night, and certainly never looked into your face; a very pretty one, however, and I hope you will not spoil it by allowing anger or unjust suspicion to creep into your heart, for they always leave an impress upon the countenance.' She was turning to leave the room when I stopped her. 'This is all very well, still I am not convinced that you are ignorant of my early life! Why did these unusual spots upon my shoulder startle you, as the mentioning of my name, Lily Pearl, did last night? Why do you gaze at me so fixedly while at the table, and shrink with such pallor when I return the look? Tell me, Mrs. Belmont, who am I?' 'Satan's own, I believe,' she said furiously, as she rushed from the room.

"Her manner changed after. She was kind and conciliating; her attentions nattering to one like myself. I feared her, yet she fascinated me! I strove to break away from her enchantments, but her power over my silly heart was wholly unaccounted^[341] for. I had read somewhere of the serpent who could charm its victim to destroy it; and I felt that I was that victim! I could not tell, for I did not understand it myself. It would have been impossible to explain. And then, her manner on that night! I feared to take that ride, but had no power to refuse. Willie says that the Father was permitting all this and holding my opposition in check for some great purpose yet unforeseen, and, as I look back upon it, wonder if it is so."

"Did you not get some idea from the men who had you in charge?"

"No, they said but little. They had bound my hands and threw me into the boat, supposing I had fainted. They spoke about the impossibility of getting to the ship in such a sea; and expressed a little sympathy for my situation as nearly as I could understand; but said nothing about their reasons for doing what they had. I had succeeded in getting my hands loose, and, without any premeditation, pushed away from their power as they stepped on the rocks to fasten the boat. Here I think was where the Father took the matter into His own hands. I was severed from all earthly connections; had broken all human ties, and was alone with God upon the waters! As the first wave lifted my boat high upon its foaming crest I cried out at the top of my voice, 'Lord, save or I perish!' Then the billow rolled from under me and a sweet peace came into my soul. Then I remembered the little upper chamber at the cottage, when one night I found that the angry billows of life's ocean were dashing themselves around me, and heard Willie's prayer. 'Keep her safe, O my Father, when the troubles of this world^[342] fall upon her! Help her to bear them, and give her strength to battle every storm!' Then I knew I should not be drowned—I should be kept safely.

"All night the winds howled, and the sea roared, and I was safe on the deep. But it was cold and I was thinly dressed. I do not know at what time the mantle of unconsciousness was thrown over me, but it was in the early morn that the 'Constitution' picked me up. I was very ill, and unconscious on ship-board and in the hospital, and when sufficiently restored, they asked me 'who was Willie and where could they find him.' I told them. His name broke the fetters that had bound me so long. I was better, and almost two months ago they sent me to him. Now tell me; what does it all mean?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHANGING CLOUDS.

Reader, did you ever stand and watch the waving crimson curtains hanging in the western sky on some calm summer eve while they were trying to shut out the glorious sunset from view? As you wondered at their changing beauties, did you remember that the objects of so much gorgeous display were only cold, damp, gray clouds, unsightly in themselves, without attraction, and that it was only the reflection of a hidden power upon which you were gazing with so much rapture? So it is in our lives, and a chill, sombre day we would have of it did not some power behind the throne cast a few golden rays upon the clouds of gray.

"The problem cannot be solved!" thought Mrs. Gaylord, as she settled down in her old life, with Lily as her companion, after the fashion of former days. Lily was no longer without friends, home or clothing, as the extra large trunk in the store-room with those of Mrs. Gaylord's amply proved.

Mrs. Hopkins did not fail to express her indignation in very characteristic style when the conclusion was fully reached that the "girl" would return to her former life and associations. "The foolish thing!" she exclaimed. "One more ride, I imagine, will finish the whole matter. I don't see why she cannot be satisfied with well enough.[344] She'll find out her mistake when it's too late. One thing I am decided upon. She mustn't come here again when thrown off by those who pretend to be her friends. I won't have anything more to do with her."

All this was said to Willie that evening after his return from the village. "She might have stayed here and worked to pay her way as she ought to do. She's no better than I am, and should be made to keep where she belongs. But that silly woman likes her pretty face and enjoys her reading, and so will dress her up and spoil her for the sake of gratifying her own wishes for a little time, and by and by will send her back, I suppose, for me to wait upon. But she'll find herself mistaken. I won't do it!"

"It seems to me, Sister, that you are making yourself unnecessarily unhappy," replied Willie very mildly, when Fanny had stopped for a moment to get her breath. "I do not think that 'Phebe' will ever trouble you again. She shall never know of this conversation, however, for I believe when you think it calmly over you will be sorry. It does not seem to have been any fault of Mrs. Gaylord's that she had her unpleasant ride, and I cannot think her foolish in the choice she has made."

Mr. Hopkins coming in put an end to the conversation. He inquired kindly if "Phebe" had concluded to remain at the hotel?

"Mrs. Gaylord claims her on the old contract, I believe," replied Willie.

"Sensible to the last," he supplemented. And Fanny went on with her work.[345]

All this time clouds were shifting in other portions of our historical firmament, and bright rays from behind the curtain were falling elsewhere on damp, gray lives. Mrs. Belmont had reached Philadelphia, and was not very agreeably or graciously received, though her relative knew nothing of her residence in Washington, or of the public life she had been leading. Lillian had

been careful to throw upon her mother's actions regarding her the brightest colors possible; still enough had been known of the incidents of the last few years to cast a shadow over the present reception, and the lady felt its chilliness.

Anna Pierson, too, was watching the summer sky with its chill, gray clouds, and wondering why the misty folds sometimes crimsoned with a far-off beauty. Her dead had been buried, and frequent news of the absent brother told of safety. As the days flew by, there came reports of exchange of prisoners, of furloughs and release from hospital treatment and restraints. These, it must be, were the bright reflections that gilded her western sky as she carefully watched it. Ellen St. Clair's letters were frequent, and usually contained very cheering reports. "George was getting better, could sit up a little, and was as impatient and peevish as a naughty child." Still the October haze would paint the leaves before the exiles could be expected at the widow's cottage.

"It is terribly dreary here," Ellen wrote one day while the September rains were falling; "and I have petitioned for a removal to other quarters, and next week George is to be taken to Washington, where I shall be permitted to follow. He has fully recanted his Southern faith, and very[346] marked honors are being showered on him. It is somewhat grateful to my feelings to be the sister of so noted a personage at this time. Can you realize it? I have stood in the presence of the chief magistrate himself. Yes, it is true. In one of his visits at the hospitals yesterday he was officially escorted to our rooms by a little negro about two feet high, and I—well, I did almost fall in love with him. No one must ever call him ugly in my presence. I think him decidedly good-looking. When he said at parting, 'Miss St. Clair, take extra good care of your brother—and yourself,' the work was done; I am his friend for ever more!"

George St. Clair bore his short transfer remarkably well, and upon arriving in the city was placed in the ward of convalescents, where his spirits soon revived, notwithstanding the hard shots that were so often thrown with unerring aim at his well-established prejudices. Here were a few highly educated and popular men, some of high rank in the army, and our soldier found himself in very congenial society.

Then there came another letter to the widow's cottage, saying: "I am most ignobly discharged. 'Do not need a nurse any more,' etc., etc. So you will greet your disconsolate daughter immediately after a little sight-seeing."

It was true. All that was now required was patience while the old strength slowly returned, and Toby was fully capable of attending to his master's necessities. The second morning after the new arrival dawned cold and rainy. The poor torn back fretted in such an atmosphere and was very painful. Not feeling able to join the others in[347] the morning meal, George St. Clair returned to his bed, and was lying moodily watching his companions, when a lady entered, and walked directly up to a noble-looking officer with whom he had been much pleased the day before, but whose name he had not learned, as all addressed him as "Colonel." There was something strangely familiar about that walk and movement of the head and shoulders, and, as he had nothing better to do, gazed at her, wishing all the time that she would turn a little, that he might have a view of her face, but she was busily engaged, and seemed in no hurry to gratify our hero. All apparently had met her before, for each received a word of greeting, as he judged, although too far away to hear more than the murmuring of voices. Then the Colonel monopolized her attention, and after a moments talk both turned abruptly in the direction where he was reclining.

"Then he has been telling her of me!"

They moved forward. "Coming to see the 'Rebel,' no doubt. Who can she be?" That walk! That form! They neared him. A veil had partially covered her face, but now it was thrown back as she sprang forward with a cry of surprise and joy. "George St. Clair! My brother!"

With an impulse unusual to the young lady of Rosedale, she clasped her arms about his neck and kissed his forehead with a sisterly demonstration.

"I did not know,—I had not heard that you were here! How glad I am to meet you."

"Lillian! I never was so astonished! You in such a place as this! The delicate, frail, 'Lily Bell?' Let me take your hand; It cannot be!"[348]

She had stepped back from him as he spoke, and now a low rippling laugh floated away from her parted lips.

"Well, well! am I of no account?" exclaimed her companion, joining in the laugh. "This may be very interesting to the parties immediately concerned, but to look mutely on is another thing."

Lillian shook her finger at him menacingly.

"Yes, George, you remember I told you of my husband. I have found him; Colonel Hamilton! Two brave soldiers who have bled for their country's weal. You will be brothers? Let me perform the ceremony of uniting hands,—the hearts will be sure to come together."

"Surprises thicken! Why did you not tell me during our long chat last evening, that you were the thief who robbed me of my coveted 'Lily Bell?' All this, and yet the world moves on! The war is developing and unraveling! What will come next?"

"Not to be known as there are no headings to the chapters!" Then there was a long talk, and many little items of news imparted that brought the deepening color to more than one cheek.

"It would, without doubt, be a little unpleasant for me to return to my Southern home just at present," said St. Clair, when the conversation lagged. "And I am told from headquarters that I shall not be able for active service for months yet; so I propose to go farther north where my parents are, and, perhaps, burrow for the winter. It will be pretty cold for Confederate blood, but it is about the best I can do."[349]

"A capital idea! Get acquainted with us low fellows,—I think you will like us when you know us better."

"Have you seen Ellen?" He had turned to Lillian now.

"Ellen? Is she here?"

"Out sight-seeing somewhere. She is to return to her temporary home in a day or two."

All this time, Mrs. Hamilton had not spoken of her mother,—not inquired for her. She had met and recognized her; but where was she now? For weeks she had watched for the familiar face; had looked everywhere for the flutter of the gray silk; and thus far it had been in vain. "Where was she? Would she come no more?" A great disappointment had found its way into the happy

heart, where love had for so many years been weeping, but where all tears were now wiped away in a blissful reunion. Lillian loved her mother. She had been petted and fondled by her through all her childhood's days; but the memory of the bitter curse would creep in among her joys, dragging after it the cold, dark shadows that for a time would exclude the warmth.

Mrs. Hamilton called upon Ellen St. Clair at her lodgings, where new interests were brought out, and many little feminine secrets unveiled, which tangled themselves together in a very perplexing sort of way. The story of Lily Gaylord's disappearance, and her father's "unjust censure of Mrs. Belmont" was duly discussed and commented upon.

"An adopted daughter, you said, of the lady?" queried Lillian.[350]

"Yes, and George said from the first that she resembled you in many ways. Her eyes certainly were as large and dreamy. 'Beautiful,' as Grace would say, 'as those of my Lily Bell.' It was a stormy night on the sea, and, as every one declared, no small boat could keep up any length of time, and as nothing could be heard from her, it was concluded she must be lost," Ellen went on to say.

"Dreadful! A young girl of——?"

"Of sixteen, I believe."

Lillian started. "Sixteen! How strange!—and my mother was with her—and unattended!"

"You seem excited; well we all were shocked! It was so inexplicable. Such a mystery! But it was soon forgotten in the greater interests of the war. You know one is not missed when so many are being lost."

It was Ellen who had said this, but her visitor sat motionless, her large eyes dilated as though striving to penetrate some dark uncertainty.

"I cannot but think how strange it is for you to be here—and with a *husband*! Why did you never tell us?"

"It was only one of my secrets, dear Ellen," was the hesitating reply. "But I am detaining you. We are a very busy people in Washington, and you are to leave here soon?"

"In three days."

Ellen went as she intended. It was a long, tiresome journey to take alone, but her heart had become brave. There was a pleasant reunion at the widow's home on the evening of her arrival. George was better, and the hearts of the parents beat with a steady pulsation once more. Bertha[351] and the children were well, as late letters from the dear old home had assured them, and now Ellen had safely returned.

"George will write a few words every day and mail it once a week," was the glad response to the inquiry as to how they were to hear from him. "And in a month, the physician says, he will probably be able to travel a short distance each day, and will get to his chair at our table before it is very cold. He has ordered me to engage rooms for us all at the hotel for the winter, but I hate hotels, and it is so cozy here!"

"Anna and I would be very lonely without you now," interposed the widow, calmly. "Our rooms are small, but we have a goodly number of them."

"And I will call it 'Maple Grove Inn' and write that I have secured a suite of rooms ample for us all! Bravo! And I want to learn to make pies and cakes and put my own hands into the biscuits, for I am a Yankee girl from henceforth! No more black fingers in my bread. Dear old Katy," she said, after a moment's pause. "How good everything tasted that her poor old ebony hands made! If I could find such a noble looking northerner as Lillian has for her husband he wouldn't have to ask me more than once to be his wife!"

"Lillian's husband, my child?" interrogated both father and mother in a breath.

"Certainly; but I have not told you. One cannot say everything in an hour!" And then the story was reproduced with the details George had added, having known it for months, yes almost a year and never told it, not forgetting her abstracted manner as the disappearance of Lily Gaylord was rehearsed. "One might have imagined to look at^[352] her that the girl was a near kin. She asked me about her general appearance, and when I said that some thought there was a very striking resemblance between her and Mrs. Gaylord's adopted daughter you ought to have seen the look!"

"You are quite imaginative, my dear," remarked Mrs. St. Clair warmly. "It was the shock, her mother being with Lily at the time that gave her the look you speak of. I do not wonder, for there was room at least for censure!"

"That's a fact, wife! I should like to know where the mistress of Rosedale is keeping herself? Bertha writes that she disappeared soon after leaving the city, and Charles has never heard from her since. Didn't meet her in Washington I suppose?"

"No, Father," and a hearty laugh followed. When quiet was restored Ellen asked: "Where is Charles, Father?"

"Skulking around without doubt for fear of being drafted, and the negroes have it all their own way at Rosedale now, I believe."

That night as the mother and daughter were left alone, the former interrupted a prolonged silence by the abrupt question: "Anna, my child, what about this George St. Clair? Has a secret crept into your confiding heart that you would keep hidden from the careful, watchful eye of your parent? Tell me, what about this rebel colonel?"

A long silence followed. At last, "I was waiting, Mother," she said, "for my heart to be sure of its first great lesson before imparting it to you. But first let me tell you he is true, loyal, to the old flag under which my brother fought and died.^[353] It was the circumstances of his life that has placed him where he was, and not the convictions of his better judgment."

The mother watched the beaming face. "And you can excuse him?"

"Yes, Mother, my heart pleads for him! I cannot deny it; I do love George St. Clair! My brother has been slain upon the altar of sacrifice, but his hand has not the stain of his blood upon it!" There were tears in the mild blue eyes and the mother saw them.

"Does he know all this?"

"All, Mother! This was the storm that rolled about me when in Alexandria. The waves dashed high, but it cannot be wrong; I do love George St. Clair!"

"Do you realize the great difference in your social positions? You the daughter of a poor widow—he the heir of large possessions and a devotee to aristocracy. O my daughter, I fear for your future happiness!" The dear face showed the inward struggle of the mother's heart, and the hand upon which her head was languidly resting trembled.

"Wait until you see him," pleaded the daughter; "he is good and noble!"

"My basket is getting full of bitter fruit in the commencement of this terrible war; what will it be when the harvest is wholly gathered?"

"Mother, have you forgotten that 'all things shall work together for good to those who trust God?' Can you not trust now as surely as when you laid your two sons where the fire might consume them?" She was standing by the side of [354] that mother now, and an arm had stolen softly about her neck.

"I will trust Him!" came from the compressed lips, and drawing her daughter upon her knee as in the years gone by she looked into her flushed face. "Whatever God wills my selfish heart will not pronounce unkind!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DARKNESS THICKENS.

"Pass those letters over to me, Mr. Cheevers," suggested the wife, as the gentlemen addressed drew several from his pocket while waiting for his supper. "One from New Orleans—that is good—one from Washington! Lillian! It has been some time since we have had such a pleasure," continued the lady more calmly, for she had not intended to let Mrs. Belmont know of her correspondence with her daughter, but her glad surprise on this occasion had betrayed the secret. The husband was peering over the top of his paper at the mother as the exclamation fell on her ear, and saw the sudden start and pallor of her face as she endeavored to appear uninterested. Mrs. Cheevers had opened the welcome missive and was reading. "How strange," she murmured as she turned the page. Mrs. Belmont stirred uneasily in her chair. "*Well, I declare!*"

"A good many exclamation points;" this from the husband, carelessly.

"Lillian seems very happy with her husband and in her new vocation as nurse. How little we ever imagined, Charlotte, that your daughter would make such a noble woman! It takes a good many hard winds to bring out the strength of the 'sapling,' but it will do it!" The letter [356] was finished and Mrs. Cheevers sat motionless with it lying upon her lap.

"No bad news, I hope?" interrogated Mrs. Belmont with some trepidation.

"No. I was trying, however, to guess it out! You did not tell us, Charlotte, that you had been in Washington; why did you not call upon your daughter? She writes that she saw you and has been looking everywhere and cannot find you, and has come to the conclusion that you are not in the city, and then adds 'she can hardly think of going back to Rosedale at present, as traveling in that

direction would be very unpleasant with the whole army of the Potomac to encounter; and I have thought perhaps she would visit you. If she does, detain her if possible until my return to Philadelphia. Pearl is recovering, and before cold weather will probably go back to his duties. The realization of that coming good-bye envelopes me with its terrible presentiments. How can I ever permit him to go from my sight again! You will say I am foolish and Uncle would scold me if he could, for I propose going with him; not as a soldier but as assistant in the hospitals, which will spring up in the trail of our advancing army. But we will talk this over, when on his furlough we visit for a few days his mother and my dear uncle and aunt.' Now, why did you not like an affectionate mother go to see Lillian and get an introduction to your son-in-law?"

"You have explained the reason. I did not desire to meet her husband, and having learned that she was with him was compelled to leave the city without going to her as I would have wished. The time may come when my 'prejudices,' as you call^[357] them, can be overcome, but as yet my whole soul recoils from the contact!"

Mr. Cheevers laid down his paper and laughed ironically. "It seems to me that Irene is unusually slow. I must get back to the store." He walked across the floor impatiently.

"I will go and see what is the matter and let Sylvia's letter go until after tea." The bell soon rang, and while the husband was satisfying his appetite with the evening bounties the wife ran over Sylvia's letter.

"All well—but in a flutter of fearful forebodings," was the report as she proceeded. "Grace is dreadfully worried about Lillian," she added when the missive was finished. "I think the mails are not very regular, for I sent a full report of her doings and experiences a month ago."

"Write again, wife. All who love Lillian are anxious about her of course. It must be dreadful to them to have her up here among her enemies! This is the strangest war on record! Who ever read of the families of the belligerents rushing into the arms of their bitter foes for protection and safety? Here is Mrs. Belmont, for instance, who is shrinking and shivering at the very thought of the contaminations of her son-in-law, but who settles down as cozily as may be in the very midst of those whom she would be glad to see annihilated." He laughed heartily as he arose from the table and left the house.

Their guest was irritated, excited and alarmed! Had her daughter said more than had been imparted? There was something in the manner of both husband and wife that had made her feel this was so. But what was it? O, if she could only^[358] get that letter! If her eyes could devour its contents! She saw it go into the ample pocket of the lady's dress and her mind was made up; she would read it if in any way possible! She was coming, that was sure, and he would be with her. Could she meet them? How was it to be avoided? She had told him without doubt; but what if she had not? What if after all Lillian was anxious to bury the past—what if she did not know? "It was an error that I did not speak to her as she stood beside the carriage that afternoon; but how could I have explained? O the miseries of such a life. O the wretchedness of wrong-doing! While she is beloved, petted and sought after, I am suspected and growled at by every churlish dog who feels inclined to show his teeth menacingly! O if there was a place on the broad earth where such as I could find rest and concealment, thither would I go! But that letter I must have! If, as I suspect, a secret is divulged or a hint regarding my reasons for being in Washington, then I will not meet them, even if to avoid it I must hide myself beneath the muddy waters of the Schuylkill.

No! no! Witness his exultations? Never!" It was a firm conclusion, but the haughty mistress of Rosedale never faltered when a resolve was fully taken.

The next morning when Mrs. Cheevers was superintending the kitchen, Mrs. Belmont might have been seen standing before the door of that lady's wardrobe, with a look of cynical scorn upon her still handsome features as her keen eyes were running over the page of the coveted letter she was holding in her hand. "Ah! I thought so. Could not tell what could have been my mission to^[359] Washington, but feared it was for no good, and that justice might overtake me. Kind, certainly! Yes, truly! The look on my face did 'reveal much,'" and she turned the page. "Here was where the 'exclamation points' came in. 'Revealed much, and my prayer is'—bosh!—'that she may be wise enough to run no risks. I have learned that she passed herself off as an English lady who had left the South on account of her anti-war proclivities, and was admitted to the most select circles on this account. If she is with you, or shall come, detain her until'—O yes, she could hear this. But why not the rest? The truth is clear. I am suspected! What if that splendid colonel of hers should take it into his noble head to pay off a few of the old scores?" A step was heard in the lower hall, and trusting the letter into the lower pocket, from whence it had been taken, she glided through an opposite door, and returned to her own room.

"This is no place for me," she thought, as, seating herself by the window, she prepared to look at the whole matter as it now appeared. "I am not wanted; but where can I go? Not to Rosedale? That is utterly impossible. Not to Charleston? There I shall be branded as a coward and disloyal to the trust imposed in me. Where can I go?" She sat a long time apparently watching the pedestrians who were leisurely walking past the house, and wondered if there was another in that vast city more wretched, more forlorn than was she. What a contrast to the years that were gone! "And it has all come about by the silliness of that girl. Her impudent and^[360] foolish marriage has covered me with shame and confusion." Ah, woman, not that!

"I'll do it!" she said at last. "How stupid in me not to have thought of that before! It will be dreary and desolate, but better so than to remain here. Then the check for that last paltry five hundred dollars must be cashed. A meager sum for the mistress of Rosedale to go out into the world with, but it will do." She arose from her seat and crossed over to the mirror. "Not the same face that was there—let me see—yes, seventeen years ago. Then those lines were not at the corners of the eyes, nor about the mouth; then there was no silver in these dark locks, for no such transgressions scorched my soul." She sank down upon a chair close by, and buried her face in her jeweled hands, and for the first time for many months tears came to moisten the hard ground where the roots of womanly affection were buried.

"My child! O, my child!" she murmured at last, as her long taper fingers were clasping themselves tightly together. "I have wronged you. It was cruel, fiendish, to take your babe from you; but doubly so—wretch that I am!—to plot her ruin by sending her off to a foreign port, where I thought she could never return. What a curse has fallen upon me! I did not intend all that was done. Those terrible black stains cannot be upon my soul."

The autumnal winds came and blew gently over the great city, scattering upon the tree-tops and velvety carpets of its many parks and lawns their tracery of change. The birds gathered themselves together among the branches to finish their arrangements for the long journey. Yet Mrs.^[361] Belmont lingered in her pleasant quarters, loth to exchange them for less comfortable

ones. Then letters of inquiry, letters of solicitation, had been written, and answers must be waited for—and so she stayed.

All this time the two colonels were slowly but positively improving. George St. Clair might endure the jar and fatigue of travel, and Pearl Hamilton his former position at the head of his regiment, and word was sent to their respective destinations to this effect.

"In a week Pearl and Lillian will be here," was the report brought by Mrs. Cheevers on returning one day from a short round of calls, and her air was a trifle exultant. "We must do them honor, Mr. Cheevers. A colonel who has suffered and bled for our good, and to maintain the dignity of a free government, deserves all the glory an appreciative people can bestow."

The husband straightened himself back in his chair, and indulged in a most mirthful "encore." "Bravo, wife! The war is making personal developments as well. Who ever imagined there was so much of the truly eloquent in the bosom of my sweet little half? And such patriotism!"

"Pshaw! All of that fine speech, I tell you, came from the brain where such evolutions of respect for the brave boys are expected to be in action. We must give honor where honor is due."

"True as you live, wife; and now what is to be done?"

"Perhaps Charlotte can suggest, for if our fraternal strife has not awakened as much *patriotism* in her heart as in yours, in the present case her *interest* should be greater."^[362]

The lady thus appealed to was listening with more interest than her companions were aware of, but the queries that were perplexing her were not how she could bestow honors upon the worthy, but how she, the unworthy, could escape dishonor! "I cannot stay longer," she thought; "I must away!" At being thus appealed to, however, she replied blandly; "I have waited weeks already that I might bestow my congratulations, but, as they have delayed coming so long, have made other arrangements that will be impossible to postpone. I have been loitering that letters from home might reach me, and cannot understand why Charles does not write. In a day or two, at the farthest, I shall be compelled to leave for my winter quarters."

"Leave here!" exclaimed Mrs. Cheevers, with surprise.

"Certainly. You did not suppose I was to impose myself on my friends as a settled fact, did you?" She smiled, but it was only as a feeble ray struggling across the chill, damp cloud, where the winter's snows were gathering.

"But it will look strangely, and I beg your pardon, one might think a trifle suspicious; it may be a fear lest you should meet them. I do not say that I think so, but such things might be said!"

"A new development, my dear! Is it prescience or imagination that is now whirling in your prolific brain?"

"Do not jest, Hiram; really there is a seriousness in all this. Why could you not have been a good staid old Quaker, like your father, so that^[363] you could have been sensible when circumstances seemed to demand it?"

"Hardly, according to nature, wife, to be old, like my honored sire, as our birthdays did not come in the same year."

This little humorous parley gave their guest ample time to recover from her shock of indignation and alarm. How was this to end? Would her departure excite suspicion? But it was known here, without doubt,—a part, if not the whole truth—for letters had been received from Washington into which she had not been permitted to have a peep. Lillian knew where her mother had taken refuge, and, probably, was expecting to meet her.

"What shall I do?" darted up through her accumulating perplexities, and burst from her quivering lips.

"Do? Why stay where you are, and welcome your child as a mother should, greet her husband cordially and sensibly. It must be done, and what have you to fear? Are you a criminal fleeing from justice and dare not come in contact with honest people? You need not look at me so, certainly if you abscond on the very eve of their arrival these are the only conclusions that can be adduced. Is it not so husband?"

"Face the music, Charlotte; face the music! If your native zeal has carried you outside the track, switch on again, and go ahead. But here I am wasting my precious time listening to two silly women, and on an empty stomach at that! Charlotte, why did you not bring along one of your ebony faithfuls? I am getting tired of waiting three times a day for my meals." [364]

"Irene is slow, but I ought to have attended to my duties better. The fact is, I am getting out of house-keeping and gone into the business of minding other people's affairs," and the good lady walked out of the room.

"Mrs. Cheevers is right on this subject; you cannot leave here at this time without drawing censure and, it may be, suspicion down upon yourself. I would not do it."

Supper was announced, and Mrs. Belmont, trembling with emotion, as her pride went on battling with fear and indignation, seated herself at the table, but not to eat. There was a vein of proffered wisdom in the advice given that irritated her. "Can I not judge for myself? Am I not supposed to know more about my own business than others."

Mr. Cheevers rallied her upon such a loss of appetite and the saving it would be to his pocket, a pleasantry in which the lady endeavored to join, but the *repartee* died on her lips, and, excusing herself, she went without farther delay to her own room.

"That woman, wife, has her own reasons for desiring to escape doing honor to Colonel Hamilton and lady, that we are not advised of. As for me, I begin to pity her! She looks as though she had lost her hold on earth and her hope of heaven!"

"How can you, Hiram."

"It is true. Perhaps Lillian ought to have written to her mother, and yet, as she declared, what could she say? It is a muddle, my good wife, sure enough, still we must keep her here [365] until they come. That is the only clear thing I can get out of it," and he left the table.

In the room above, a tall, stately form was standing by the window, her dark eyes wandering with a listless gaze out over the gray waters of the Schuylkill, where the evening shades were slowly creeping, while within her soul the conflicting elements of warring tumults were raging. "O, wretched woman that I am!" she repeated, "What power can deliver me from myself! Great

God! If Thou didst ever pity, pity now! Are there not stains on my soul that He will never blot out? Stains of—murder! O misery! 'The wicked shall not go unpunished,'—I have read it; it is true! The God I have offended has said it! What if the curtain that hides the last seventeen years from the world should be torn away!" She paced the floor as the night stole in and covered her with its darkness. O, the gloom! O, the forebodings of a sin-cursed soul.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LIGHT THROUGH THE RIFTED CLOUD.

"She's gone, as true as you live! The carriage was at the door for herself and baggage before I knew a word about it."

With these exclamations, Mrs. Cheevers met her husband the day after the events of our last chapter. He had come to dinner with the cheering news that there was to be an ovation given to Colonel Hamilton at the Girard House on his arrival, but found his wife too much excited to appreciate the honors thus to be conferred on her pet.

"That looks squally. Perhaps she has good reasons for skulking, but it does not look to me like her original shrewdness. It would have been more natural to see her stand by and fight it out. But let her go; there is more room for the new-comers."

The matter being thus disposed of, quiet was again wooed to the peaceful home of the good uncle and aunt, who had nothing to do now but to anticipate coming pleasures. Colonel St. Clair was to remain with them also for a short rest, before finishing his journey up the Hudson.

"Lillian has told me so much about him that he will not seem like a stranger." [368]

"Lillian's lovers are our friends, my good wife; so he will come in for a share of attention."

The hour came when a carriage containing the happy trio rolled up to the door of Mrs. Cheevers' very inviting home on Race street, where Mrs. Cheevers unceremoniously rushed out with open arms to greet them. The host was not far behind. When the first joyous greetings had partially subsided, he took Colonel St. Clair under his kind protection, and helped him gently to an easy chair in the warm, cheerful parlor.

"You will excuse me," called out Colonel Hamilton, as he stepped back into the carriage; "there is a little woman down on Twentieth street who wants a kiss from her soldier boy. I'll be back in time for that roast beef!" And the carriage turned the corner and was out of sight.

"Well, that is cool! But, wife, we are not so smart as we take ourselves to be. Why did we not have that mother who wants to be kissed up here, so that it could all be done at once? It is terrible to have such things dragging."

"I did ask her and insisted, but she said 'No' every time. 'Pearl will come right here,' she declared, 'and it is in his own home where I want to give him welcome.'"

"Noble woman!" interposed St. Clair from his chair by the grate.

"You say she is gone?" asked Mrs. Hamilton in her aunt's dressing room, where she had been escorted by the hostess herself.

"We tried hard to have her remain, but no amount of persuasion could accomplish it. She is dreadfully troubled about something. I attempted to draw her out, but you know how difficult such^[369] a thing would be. And, having watched her manner and face, I do believe that something weighs heavily on her mind."

"She need not have flown from me. My mother's reputation is sacred to her daughter. She should have known this. And you have no idea where she has gone?"

"Not in the least. She said she had been waiting for letters before going to her winter quarters, and was surprised that she received nothing from Charles."

"It is too bad! But, Auntie, I have much I want to pour into your dear heart, for somehow I feel that in stirring up its pure waters, I may step in and, perhaps, be healed a little!" and she kissed the smiling face. "What should I do without you? But I fear the gentlemen though will think we have deserted them."

There was so much to be said; so much calling to be done, and such a large circle of friends to receive, that it was not until the third day, when the dinner was being given at the Girard in honor of the wounded soldier (to which Colonel St. Clair had been officially invited), that Mrs. Cheevers and Lillian found an opportunity for the "stirring of the waters."

"Do not let me frighten you, Auntie; and may the dear Father keep me from injustice and wrong! How shall I tell you? There is no use in trying to smooth it over; I do believe that up to six months ago my child lived!"

"Lillian!"

"Yes, I do believe it! George St. Clair, and the whole family saw her! She was just sixteen, and had the same eyes and ways that I have!^[370] It was remarked by all, and my mother, at times, betrayed an unusual degree of interest in her."

"Where was this?"

"In Savannah. She was the adopted daughter of a Mrs. Gaylord, who was visiting friends in that city, and farther down in the country. I did want to see my mother so much! A dark suspicion oppresses me!"

"Lillian!"

"I cannot help it; and you will not blame me when I have told you all! My mother took that child into a carriage, with only one servant, a dastardly coward, and drove one evening down the river, in sight of the beach; then, getting her to alight, that (as she said), a better view of the sea might be obtained, the child was kidnapped in the darkness and borne away; and with every effort that could be made, no trace has ever been found of her! O, Auntie, *that was my child!* Will God permit such a deed to remain uncovered? Will not his anger search it out?"

"But, my dear Lillian, you must have greater proof than this before you so grievously accuse another! There is some mistake; she *could* not have done such a deed! Why not write to Mrs. Gaylord and learn where she found the child, and all that she knows about her?"

"I did, Auntie, but was answered by her husband, who said that his wife had very unexpectedly taken it into her head to go north while he was away, and could not say when she would return, etc. Now where that 'north' is, cannot be ascertained, as he was to immediately return to his post, in the army, I suppose."

"Have you told Pearl?"[371]

"No, I cannot. If Mother had remained here, it may be that she could have cleared away the cloud, but how can I breathe this most humiliating suspicion into his ear? He knows of her transaction in regard to our separation, and was magnanimous enough to bury it; but it would be agony to tell him more. He does not know of that heart-breaking curse, that would be almost unendurable, were it not for the great joy that has come to me. But, Auntie; what do you think? Was Lily Gaylord my child? My Lily-Pearl?" Her large eyes were fixed with a burning gaze on the troubled face before her.

"Your child, Lillian? I do not wonder at your earnestness! yet I cannot tell you; but confide in Pearl, he will know better how to counsel."

"I cannot! This work I must do myself! But one thing is certain; my heart shall be satisfied! If alive she is mine; if dead I must know it! This poisonous canker-worm has been for years gnawing at my very soul! My convictions have been, and still are, that there was a grievous wrong done me when I was told that she had been transplanted to a purer clime! It was not death that stole her from me!"

Where was the subject of all this anxiety and solicitude on this calm, hazy October day? In Boston; as happy and peaceful as a young girl of sixteen ever desired to be.

Mrs. Gaylord had received letters from her husband saying that he was glad she had taken it into her silly head to go north, and it was his opinion she might better remain until the immediate danger that was threatening Western Virginia had[372] passed. His brother's widow, with her children, could take care of "Birch Wood." Acting upon these suggestions she had returned to Boston and hired a suite of rooms, and, taking Willie with them, was ensconced amid all desired comforts and luxuries. Tiny was entrusted with extraordinary responsibilities and her yellow face grew brighter when enstalled as mistress of the kitchen, while Lily superintended the whole establishment. Willie was exuberant and Mrs. Gaylord peaceful. Rover had at all times his full share of attention, and his bed by the kitchen stove was soft and warm.

Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft often called, with their sunny faces, during the long winter months, but Mrs. Gaylord seldom left her warm rooms.

"Here we will stay until the war is over," said that lady one evening as they gathered around the table preparatory to an hour of reading and listening. The wind roared threateningly up from the

"Bay" and the snow beat outside against the windows, but within that comfortable home reigned peace and love. Lily was again by the great sea, and, when she sat at her chamber window and looked over the dark waters and watched the rolling waves as they dashed upon the piers in the harbor, the old days came back to her; the dreams of her childhood; the longings of her restless heart while she thought of the beautiful lady who had picked her up from the billows; of the pearls deep down in the waters, where she had grown, and called her "Lily Pearl." Should she ever know how she had come by that name? She was "Lily Gaylord" now; the Phebe of other days had been put aside among the disagreeables of the past; except with Willie, who declared that she^[373] must ever be his own precious Phebe, or the brightness would be all taken out of the sunny memories; and she had answered "call me what you will, my brother, only let me live in your heart and thoughts:" and so the days went on.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STORM ABOUT THE WIDOW'S COTTAGE.

It was a damp and chilly morning when George St. Clair left the home of the Cheevers. A shadow of pain had settled down upon the handsome face of the heroic officer, and as Pearl Hamilton saw it he exclaimed with all the fervor of the brotherly love which had grown up between them: "You shall not go alone, even to New York, for you look as disconsolate as a rejected lover; and what if your father should miss you in that terrific hub-bub? I can get back to-night, so please excuse me to my mother at dinner, Lillian;" and snatching his hat and coat from the rack he took the arm of his companion and went with him down the marble steps.

"Please, George," called out Lillian from the door; "do not let Pearl get lost by the way. My heart tells me to throw the old shoe of good luck after you, with the wish that your visit at the North may be as productive of joy as was mine nearly eighteen years ago, without any of its shadows!" It was a bright face that now beamed from the carriage, and as St. Clair waved his hand to the ladies it rolled rapidly away.

"I am glad after all that he was not obliged to go alone," remarked Mrs. Cheevers as they turned to enter the house. "I am fearful his poor back^[376] will never be strong again! In my opinion his days of fighting are over."

"I wish those days were ended for all," said Lillian, thoughtfully. "The papers bring us sad records of late. So many precious lives lost; so many loving hearts desolated! I liked Dr. Wadsworth's sermon yesterday morning from the text 'show thyself a man,' but I could but think that David meant in his living rather than in his dying! It may be noble in one to lay down his life for the preservation of his country's honor, but love is as surely bereft after all!"

They were seated now by the warm grate where the red coals were piled up in a cheerful glow, and while the aunt took some work from the basket on the table her companion gazed pensively into them. At last turning quickly around, while a smile lighted up her face she remarked: "I am dizzy! I am reminded so often of our little trick of 'whirling' in childhood, until, unable to stand we would drop down on the green grass and wait for the sensation of giddiness to pass off. But what is to be done, Auntie, when the whirling never ceases?"

"Fall down upon the grass my child and wait, but be sure that in the falling you gain the power to wait!"

"True, Aunt; and yet how like Peter we are prone to look about us while walking over the waves, until our faith gives way and we begin to sink!"

"And what did Peter do? Sit down on the first billow he met and declare 'he was dizzy' and perplexed?"

Lillian laughed. "Not much like Peter am I after all?"^[377]

While this conversation was going on in the little parlor the two colonels were crossing the Delaware, and were soon in the cars rolling rapidly towards the great metropolis.

"But, Colonel Hamilton, you must confess that it was not pleasant while receiving the sympathies and kindnesses of the people, to remember I was wounded in the army that would, if they could, annihilate yours."

"But they cannot!"

"That does not take away my chagrin! Here I am in the midst of those whom I once hoped, it may be, to conquer or slay, and from their hands receiving the 'coals of fire' that are scorching my heart instead of my head. It is this that makes me wish to bury myself away from it all."

"But, my dear fellow; you are not the only one who ever changed his convictions! Just make yourself comfortable! See how rapidly we are getting along! Here is Burlington. I wish there were a boat going up the river as soon as you arrive in the city, so that you could lie down the rest of the way."

"I am getting so 'yankeeized' that I could never wait for the slow motion of a steamer. I must take the lightning express."

"And be at your destination before tea-time?"

"So Ellen has written me."

"Well, take good care of your heart. This mixing up of fractions makes very serious troubles sometimes."

"But in the final union of whole numbers there is bliss! Why not work out the sum and hand over the product in your advice?" A merry laugh^[378] followed this query, while the long train whirled on.

There was a happy reunion in the widow's cottage when Mr. St. Clair returned with his son to occupy the easy chair that had been especially procured for him. The mother had not seen him since the time when in his rebel uniform he had bid her good-bye in the far-away home, and her eyes were swimming with tears as she looked upon his changed face.

"They did not tell me you were so thin and pale," she said as she kissed him tenderly.

"But I am very weary now; you have no idea what a night's rest will do for my good looks." Still the mother's heart beat with a low, sad throbbing.

Anna was placid and reserved. Her greetings were cordial, while none save the maternal eye peered beneath the external calm.

"Well this is cozy," he remarked, as the two young ladies drew his chair close to the table. "Still it is a little mortifying to my masculine dignity—this being waited upon by ladies instead of slaves!"

"It is the way with us up here," replied the sister; "and all you can possibly do is to submit with as much grace as you can muster for the purpose. Where is Toby?" she continued, as though missing him for the first time.

"Taking good care of his liberty. I have not seen him since he concluded to use his privileges as a free man."

The days sped rapidly by. The cool winds came sweeping up from the broad Hudson, while the frosts painted the trees with gaudy tints, blighting the flowers and searing the green grass.[379]

"Are we not imposing upon good nature?" the son asked one morning, as, leaning on the arm of his father, they walked out among the fallen leaves that were carpeting the smoothly shorn lawn. "It seems to me we must be burdensome. Why do we not go to our rooms at the hotel?"

"Are you not more comfortable here? Mrs. Pierson is so kind, and we have all become so fully domesticated at a home fireside that it would be a sad change to take up our quarters at the public inn."

"But Ellen wrote—"

"Ah, yes—'that she had secured rooms at Maple Grove,' which, after all, meant here under these maple trees. But if you desire it, my son—"

"I am not the only one to be considered. It seems that the mother and daughter have altogether too much work to do, with only one servant in the kitchen, and she a white girl."

The father laughed. "You have no idea how easily they perform their labor. Even the servant sings as cheerfully as though she was mistress of all, and indeed it would be hard to tell who fills that important position in this home. But I will do just as you and Ellen shall decide."

They had reached the door, and were entering as the last sentence was being finished.

"Decide what?" interrogated Ellen.

"About those rooms at the hotel;" laughed the father.

"They will remain *in statu quo* as long as they are paid for, will they not? As for me, I am in no hurry to leave my present quarters. My diploma is not yet secured in bread and pie making, and it would be unmanly in you to be the means of crushing my ambition." [380]

"I think it my duty to nip in the bud any attempt at conspiracy. So while you all remain here in this pleasant sitting room, I will go into the parlor with my easy chair. Will you, my sister, invite Miss Anna to join me there? Unless your influence has diluted her frankness, she will reveal the whole matter. At any rate, this must be settled."

"A capital suggestion! Anna shall be judge, jury and all, and we poor subjects will cheerfully abide by her decision." And Ellen darted away after the young lady in question.

"For shame, to put me in such a dilemma!" exclaimed Anna, as she placed the flakey crust she was preparing on the pie tin; but the crimson wave that rolled over neck, cheek and brow did not escape the notice of her companion.

"O, you need not appear so much shocked at the thought of meeting him, for he will not make love to you. Never fear! The little foot of Lillian Belmont crushed all the romance out of his heart a long time ago. So, away; I can finish that pie while Rhoda is making the pudding."

Anna obeyed without a word, and we will let her enter alone that quiet, pretty parlor where the wounded soldier was waiting.

"Two hours as I live!" exclaimed Ellen, as the clock on the mantel struck twelve.

"It takes time to settle long accounts," replied the mother, quaintly.

"He is determined to go, I reckon;" interposed the father, cheerily; but Mrs. Pierson was silent.

"Dinner is all ready, and I am just as hungry! Can't I go and see how the matter stands?" This question was addressed to the widow, who was^[381] sitting by the window, looking out on the seared and fading grass.

There was a sad expression about the mouth, and a tremor in the voice not usually there, as she answered: "Yes, dear; Rhoda does not like to wait without a cause."

Amid laughing and jesting, the easy chair was drawn out, still containing its occupant, while Anna disappeared through an opposite door, and was not seen until the family had gathered around the well-filled table.

"Well, how is it, my boy?" queried Mr. St. Clair. "How about Maple Grove Inn? Are we to leave such delicacies as these for others untried?"

"Anna is chairman of that committee, and is to hand over the report," replied George.

There was an expression on the face of the young lady thus appealed to that caused Ellen St. Clair to look quickly towards her brother, who met her wondering gaze with a comical smile very significant in itself, and made the sister exclaim: "I should think both of you are 'chairmen,' if one was to judge from the amount of knowledge that seems lurking in your eyes. Out with it! What is the report?"

"Patience is one of the cardinal virtues, my dear," suggested the father, gravely. "Such an extended consultation requires much thought in the summing up."

"I conclude by Miss Anna's silence that the pleasing office of 'reporter' is conferred upon her unworthy servant; therefore listen to the 'summing up;'" and laying down his fork, with folded arms, George St. Clair leaned back in his easy^[382] chair. "The question propounded, with its prelude, was something after this sort: I said, My dear girl, when I was well and strong I gave into your love and tender watchful care my two honored parents and one pretty little sister, and most faithfully have you regarded my trust; and now a fourth comes creeping and hobbling into

your paradise of peace and comfort, and although he has nothing to recommend him, would pray to be admitted, not to your care, but to your heart and enduring love. Will you as cheerfully grant my petition in this, as in the former instance? And her reply, after brushing away a few of the cobwebs of the past, was 'I will, with the permission of my mother, who has a right to be consulted upon all such articles of transfer.'"

"I do declare!" burst from the lips of the sister. "The great subject of remaining as honorary members of this most hospitable family, I believe, was not broached by the committee."

"As to myself," interposed the father, "I am very naturally inclined, after placing in the hands of our hostess a sufficient sum for every expense, including the perplexities such an increase of family would cause, to remain in our present quarters until further developments."

"Very likely!" interposed the mother with a beaming face.

Anna had left her seat at the head of the table at the very commencement of this little speech, and the hostess sat with folded hands pale and trembling as one in a troubled dream. Mr. and Mrs. St. Clair looked at each other with surprise written all over their good-natured faces, but the sister was lost in amazement. She had not once^[383] thought such a union possible, and was not ready to give it sanction.

"Mrs. Pierson, tell me frankly, do you wish that the bullet which so ignobly tore my back had finished its work, so that the present summing up would have been avoided? It would not, however, have saved your daughter's heart, for she loved me before all that."

The widow looked calmly into the face of the speaker as she answered tremulously: "My daughter's happiness is my highest ambition. Not so much as to the comforts of this life as to the assurances of the life to come. Wealth or honorable position socially have not been included in my aspirations for her. Congenial companionship and a true heart are the highest blessings of life I could wish." Tears came into her eyes and she arose from the table to hide them.

"I am not going to let my dinner spoil at any rate!" exclaimed Mr. St. Clair, with a composing laugh: "This roast lamb is capital."

"And you would like some coffee;" suggested Anna, appearing at her post, while Mrs. Pierson returned to her seat at the table.

"Now that is sensible. Let us appoint an hour for congratulations and proceed with present duties unmolested. George, my boy, replenish the stomach if you would restore the back. For my part I think this a most capital arrangement. With the old homestead, 'West Lawn' and 'Rosedale,' which I shall be obliged to take into my possession, will yield us all what bread and butter we shall require—not as good as this perhaps, but it will do. By the way, I would like to know where Mrs. Belmont is."^[384]

"Gone back to Rosedale!" suggested Mrs. St. Clair with emphasis.

"Not a bit of it! If she could indulge in such an unwomanly sneak as to fly from the presence of her daughter, she would never risk her neck down among the bullets that are whizzing so near her home. No—no!"

He rattled on as a merry accompaniment to the monotonous sounds of knife and fork; but the responses were few and subdued. A hush had fallen upon more than one heart in that little circle around the well-filled board, yet to none was it dark or gloomy. There were sunbeams streaming through bright golden tints lighting them up, but Ellen St. Clair did not raise her eyes. She loved Anna, but had not thought of her as the bride of her peerless brother. "And what would Bertha say?" It was so unexpected!

So intent were they with their own thoughts that no notice had been given to the dark cloud that had suddenly risen up from the south, spreading itself over the sky, until a fearful gust of wind dashed against the windows and made all start to their feet in alarm.

"A regular southern hurricane," remarked Mrs. St. Clair. "See how those trees bend and what a shower of bright leaves are in the air."

The rain dashed against the panes, while the gale blew the clouds at a rapid speed northward, stripping the branches of their gaudy dress and strewing the faded grass with a carpet of gay colors. George St. Clair watched it with mingled emotions. It was noonday, yet the darkness was oppressive. He saw the dense cloud sweep over the sun, leaving in its trail the hazy blue of an[385] autumn sky. He listened to the fitful wail of the angry blast and thought of the tornado that was at that moment devastating the beautiful fields and groves of his sunny land, and the spirit of rebellion arose in his heart. "What was the need of this noonday storm? Why must war rifle the land of its beauty and crimson the earth with the shed blood of thousands?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PROUD SPIRIT BROKEN.

Only a week and Colonel Hamilton was ordered back to Washington. The right wing of the army was to swing round over West Virginia, to intercept, if possible, the progressive movements of General Lee's forces that were threatening a northern aggression; and every officer able for action was ordered to report at headquarters. Lillian would not remain behind. How could she fold her hands and wait? She must work; her mind must be employed or the dizzy whirl would overpower her. Besides, she had a mission, of which all others, unless it was her Aunt Cheevers, were ignorant. The plan of operation had been secretly marked out by herself, and she must go.

"I can never let that Mason and Dixon line divide us again," was her closing remark after listening to a long list of reasons why she should remain in her comfortable surroundings amid friends and luxuries.

The fond husband could not refuse, and together they entered the National Capital, and were greeted cordially by sympathizers and army officials. As, however, we are not writing the history of the rebellion, but only narrating incidents gathered during its progress, we will not trace the march of Colonel Hamilton's corps, but will meet him again[388] when the warm days return to deck the blood-stained land with beauty and breathe freshness once more into the trampled vegetation.

There had been skirmishes along the line of march, fightings, repulses and victories; and Lillian had not been permitted to fold her hands. There were the sick to be attended to, and wounded to

be dressed; while the 'cup of cold water' and the 'oil and wine' were needed everywhere: Whether friend or foe; Confederate or Unionist, it made no difference, in each she discovered a brother, and withheld no comfort or ministrations in her power.

"You seem young to be in the army," she said one day to a beardless youth who had been severely wounded by a sharpshooter and was placed under her care.

"Eighteen, ma'am," was the laconic reply.

"Will you tell me your name?" she asked, while tenderly bathing the pale face and combing the rich brown hair from a full rounded forehead.

"Rufus Gaylord."

She started.

"Gaylord!"

How her thoughts flew! What a sweep over they took in that intervening moment of silence!

"Is your father's name Hudson Gaylord?"

"No; he is my uncle. Do you know him? I thought you were a Northerner!"

"I know him only by reputation. Where is he?"

"Down in Richmond, *talking* about arming the niggers, I reckon;" was his answer, while a sneer curled his lip. "Beechwood is only a few miles from here and I want to be taken back^[389] to it as soon as I can ride so far, as Mother does not know where I am."

Here was an opening to the cloud; should she enter it? How she trembled at the thought.

"Is your aunt at Beechwood?" she found breath to inquire at last.

"No, she is in Boston, and Uncle Hud says will stay there until the army leaves Virginia. I don't reckon she cares how long she stays though, for she has her girl back again, every one thought was drowned, and——"

"Her adopted daughter! did you say?"

"Well, y-e-s! But what do you know about her? I'll be hanged if I shouldn't think you were her sister; I never saw eyes more alike. She is splendid, and I am glad she has come to life again;" and in spite of a deep wound in the shoulder, and the presence of a bullet somewhere in the chest, his cheek flushed with boyish admiration as he talked of his foster cousin, and Lillian did not fail to discover the cause of the deepening blush.

"Are you sure of what you have been saying?"

"Sure that Aunt Nell is in Boston, and that she has Lily with her; but not quite sure as to you being her sister." In spite of her emotion, Mrs. Hamilton smiled at the ingenuity of this remark. Her resolution was taken. She would return to Washington, and, as soon as possible, go to Boston, and find this girl who bore such a striking resemblance to herself. She arose to answer a

call and found that her trembling limbs refused to do her bidding. As she reseated herself the boy said kindly.[390]

"I reckon you are not feeling very well. I would rest a bit, for it must be dreadful taking care of such a lot!"

True to her purpose, within a week she had communicated with Colonel Hamilton and obtained a leave of absence, and was on her way to Philadelphia. A little breathing spell was necessary; she would stop and tell auntie all about it!

It was night when she reached the city, and, taking a carriage, she was soon in Race street. Stopping at the corner, she had a fancy to go alone to look in upon the peaceful home-scene, if perchance the curtain was left up at the side window. Was auntie thinking of her? She would give her a pleasant surprise.

How little we know what is to fill the next moment that sweeps through our eventful lives! The curtain was left up, as she had imagined, and sitting by the table in the center of the room were two ladies, instead of the one she had expected to find alone. The gas shone directly upon the face of Mrs. Cheevers, but the head of the other was turned away. Still there was no mistaking that imperious posture and stateliness of form, or the braids of jetty hair. It was her mother! They were talking, but she could not distinguish a word. What caused that guilty mother to move so uneasily in her chair, and turn towards the spot where her daughter stood trembling in the shadows? Had conscience touched a note of warning?

"I must enter," thought Lillian, and passing around to the front door, rang the bell. Mrs. Cheevers answered it in person. "Do not speak, Auntie; it is I," she said, hurriedly, as the door[391] opened. "My mother is in there; I saw her through the window. How shall I meet her?"

"Promptly and boldly, my child. Come right in."

She led the way, while her visitor followed trembling in every limb. "What has brought you back at this time?" she went on cheerfully to ask. "You said nothing about it in your last letter." Mrs. Belmont arose as they approached, and stood pale and haggard before her injured child.

"My mother!" Lillian exclaimed, with outstretched arms. "How I have wanted to meet you! Why did you flee from me?"

"You wanted to see me? Lillian, is that true?"

"It is true, Mother. Why do you look so sternly? Has your daughter committed the unpardonable sin because she felt disposed to forsake all others, if need be, and cleave to her husband?"

"Well, do you understand it? See where I now am! Look at the shame, the disgrace, the poverty, you have brought upon me! I am a wanderer without home or country, a pauper in a strange land, and you have done it. Once I would have died for you; but what have you sacrificed for me?" She turned slowly and reseated herself by the table.

"This is my mother! Cold, stern and unloving!" And sinking down upon the sofa her pent-up feelings found vent in tears.

"It is my opinion, Charlotte," said Mrs. Cheevers, calmly, "that the day will come when you will repent the injustice of this hour. If all you have said is true in regard to yourself, how^[392] can you afford to throw away so wantonly a daughter's proffered affection? If she can overlook the wrongs of her mother, that mother ought to clasp her tightly in the arms of love."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Cheevers? What have I done to her that should call forth such a remark from a third party?"

"O, you need not take the trouble to tell me to mind my own business; for whatever affects my brother's wife or his child is my affair; and I repeat, it is your duty to lay aside that stately indignation, and if Lillian will extend the hand of filial love, it is yours to clasp it."

Mr. Cheevers coming home from the store, turned the current of conversation into another channel.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, as he recognized the bowed figure on the sofa. "Mrs. Hamilton, as I live! Just put down that little white hand and kiss your old uncle. Just as glad to see you as though you were my own daughter. How is Pearl? Now, look here, Lillian," he continued, as he perceived the quivering lips attempting to answer; "none of that toward me! Anybody who draws the moisture out of those beautiful eyes while I am around must answer for the offence. There isn't another in this great city to-night who has more reason to laugh and be glad than have you, so be about it! Let that statue of dignity mump it out if she is determined to do so, but the wife of Colonel Hamilton has no good reason for tears."

"Hiram!" interposed the wife, and she shook her head menacingly at him.^[393]

"It is all very well; but what brought you to us so unexpectedly?"

"A little business, Uncle," Lillian replied, finding voice to speak. "I am going farther north, perhaps to Boston, and shall return here when my object is accomplished."

Mrs. Belmont turned hastily in her chair, and glared at the speaker with dilated eye balls.

"To Boston!" cried Mr. Cheevers. "Well, now if I were a woman I would ask 'What under the sun are you going there for?'"

"But as you are a gentleman you will wait patiently until I can tell you all."

"Just so. Did you come on the eight train?"

"Yes."

"Have you thought, wife, of food and rest?"

"Stupid as ever! I will go immediately."

Mrs. Belmont soon followed the lady out of the room. An hour afterward, while sitting at the table, where a bountiful lunch had been prepared, Mrs. Cheevers told Lillian that her mother had retired to her room feeling very unwell.

"Probably!" retorted her husband, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"That is not fair Hiram; she has been sick ever since she returned; and I think she was fearful of an approaching illness or she would not have come here. I went with her to-day to see Dr. Kehn about her head, and it was his opinion that there was some trouble with the brain that might prove serious, and you know that you have spoken of the wild look in her eyes."

"And have not wondered at it, wife; but you are looking well, Lillian, field life agrees with you.[394]"

"Tired though, and have come to Uncle Hiram's for a little rest."

"That's right, my child. I only wish you could have brought Pearl along."

There was a long talk in an upper room that night not far from the guest-chamber to which Mrs. Belmont had retired; for Lillian had desired to tell her aunt all about it, and the good lady listened and wondered.

"Boston is a great city, my child, and what if you could not find Mrs. Gaylord?"

"Her husband mentioned in his letter the name of a Mr. Bancroft, merchant I believe, and through him I thought to learn all I desired. At any rate I must try to find this girl! It is not because I am told that her eyes are like mine, as there is nothing remarkable in this; many have large dark optics," and she laughed, "but because something continually goads me with the conviction that she is my child."

"And have you not told Pearl?"

"No, I could not bear to trouble him as my poor heart is agitated; and it would be an additional grief to have him treat the matter with incredulity. He too must wait for the unfolding."

"But your mother? How will she ever account for the young lady's disappearance? How can either of you forgive what she has done if it is proven that Lily Gaylord is your child?"

Lillian started to her feet, while Mrs. Cheevers looked wildly towards the door. A low, wailing cry as if a heart was being crushed had reached them from the outside, and their cheeks blanched as they listened. For a moment the two listened to their heart's throbbings as the stillness of[395] death settled down about them; then a sound as of one falling broke the silence. Lillian rushed to the door in time to clasp the inanimate form of her mother before the poor head struck the floor upon which she was kneeling. It was true! *She had been listening!* The upper part of the door did not close tightly, and it was to this opening that her ear had been placed until the brain reeled and she sank upon her knees.

"O my mother!" almost shrieked the distracted daughter as she attempted to raise her.

Mr. Cheevers heard the cry and came rushing up the stairs, and the wretched woman was soon carried to her bed, where, in a short time, the family physician was in attendance. For many weeks the proud, erring Mrs. Belmont lay tossing upon her bed in wild delirium, and Lillian stood by and listened to her ravings.

"I did not do it! Look—there is no blood on my hands! It was *she!* It was she! Let me look again; yes—the same purple spots; Lillian! Lillian! Why won't you come to me? I did not do it! It was

the sea—the wicked, cruel sea! O my curse! It has fallen back upon my poor head! It is burning up my brain! O God! But he won't hear! The fires—*the fires!*"

In vain did the untiring watcher breathe into her ears the words of sympathy and forgiveness, but the whirling brain caught them not. The tenderest of hands bathed the burning brow and administered to her every necessity. It was a long, a fearful struggle between life and death; but when the spring days were all past, and the warm summer sun shone down upon the fresh young grass in the public squares, Mrs. Belmont^[396] lay with folded hands and worn-out frame in quiet helplessness upon the bed, where for so many weeks she had tossed in frantic delirium. The poor clogged brain had been relieved of its heavy load and the burdened conscience quieted, and now the reaction had come and Lillian again prayed and waited!

"If she would but speak to me or show some signs of recognition," Lillian had said one day to her aunt, as they stood looking at the pale, wan face upon the pillow. "It is so hard to see her lying there day after day so still and passive, taking all that is given her without a word or gesture! Terrible fears at times take possession of me—what if she never recovers her reason! The doctor has hinted such a possibility if I am not mistaken, and I dare not ask him if my suspicions are correct." The quivering lids were slowly raised for one moment from over the large eyes, where a most pitiful pleading look was hidden, and the longing glance fastened itself on the troubled face beside her.

"Mother, dear Mother, do you know me? Speak just one word to your poor Lillian;" and she kissed tenderly the firmly set lips. Again the lids slowly fell and the dark orbs were shut in with their unfathomed mysteries.

"This is dreadful!" and with tears streaming down her face the aunt turned and walked from the room.

[397]

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UNFOLDINGS AND REVELATIONS.

Weeks passed away and Mrs. Belmont was able to sit for hours in her easy chair, but the once active, energetic and massive intellect was weak and inefficient as that of a child. The large eyes would follow the flitting forms about her with a weird wistful look, yet she seldom spoke, and when she did, the words revealed the sad truth that the powers that had long sat enthroned in the realm of reason ruled no more.

"I must go," Lillian said to her aunt one day, as they drew the invalid chair close to the window where a cool breeze from the Schuylkill could fan her pale face, and, as the words fell on the ears of Mrs. Belmont a quick flush overspread it. The daughter noticed the change with joy and a strange wondering. "Mrs. Jackson can do all that is needed to be done now," she continued,

without removing her gaze from the placid features. "I will not be absent more than a week at most, and Pearl, you know, writes that if he can obtain leave for a few days will be here by my return."

"Pearl?"

"Yes, Mother; would you like to see him?"

There was a struggling among the buried memories which were not dead but sleeping, for the eyes gleamed with a new light, and the face^[398] resumed its look of intelligence. It was only for a moment, however, and then the former inertness returned, as she repeated, "Pearl!"

"He loves you, Mother; shall I read what he wrote last?" There was no response, and taking the letter from her pocket, she read slowly and distinctly. "She is our mother, Lillian, and, no matter what she has done, it is the duty of her children to forgive, and never refer to the past. I am anxious to meet her for her daughter's sake. My heart opens wide to take in her love and bury the whole hateful past. Whisper my name to her gently, familiarize her brain with associations concerning me."

"He is coming to see you, Mother, to love you; are you glad?"

"Forgive? Did he say forgive?"

"He certainly did, and he is true to his word. Shall I tell him to come?" The large eyes fixed intently on the beaming face before her, as if endeavoring to pierce the shadows.

After a moment's silence the mother slowly answered "Tell him come," and settled back in her chair wearied and exhausted.

Lillian was exuberant. "She is better," was her conclusion as she adjusted the pillows and brushed back the thin hair from the white temples. The heavy braids were gone, and the queenly bearing lost in helpless weakness.

It was finally concluded that Mrs. Hamilton should leave her mother in the care of the efficient nurse who had been in attendance during her long sickness, and, without speaking to her upon the subject, proceed on her journey to Boston, to return as soon as possible. Therefore^[399] on the following morning she started on her exciting mission. What a threefold cord was drawing her! The mother, to whose helplessness her filial love was clinging; the idolized husband for whom her heart was pining; and now the living tendrils of a buried affection had sprung up, and were twining themselves with an unseen power around the vibrating cord that bound her life to earthly loves and earthly hopes. The mother-love had awakened with its pleadings and would not be hushed. A little more than a year ago, and the brittle thread that held her was feeble, and the fibres frail; now other strands had been added, and as the car rolled over the space that separated her from the consummation of her long-cherished hopes she thanked God for the tender hand that had led her. The great joy, however, that would sweep over her soul, as she recalled the reasons of her present mission, was not without its gloomy apprehensions. What if, after all, Mrs. Gaylord's adopted daughter was not her Lily? How was she to be sure? and then the mother's ravings, her wild confessions; her cries of innocence; certainly these must have come from the hidden consciousness of an appalling truth! She sat by the open window and watched the receding fields, the trees and villages, as the train sped through them, with a sensation of alarm,

for she realized that every puff of the tireless engine brought her nearer and nearer to the acme of her hopes or to disappointment.

How her limbs trembled when, on reaching Boston, she entered a carriage and gave orders to be driven to the Parker House! In Boston at[400] last! In this boiling cauldron of living souls should she find her child? What a thought! What a hope! She must rest. Sleep alone could give her strength of body for the trying ordeal. She partook of a hasty lunch and retired to her room. What if Mrs. Gaylord had left the city. It had been so long since the boy had told her she was here. Here was a new agony! She had not thought of that; and ringing the bell asked for a directory.

Bowing, the servant turned to bring it.

"Stay, perhaps you can tell me how far it is to Mr. Bancroft's store."

"Peter Bancroft, ma'am?"

"I do not know."

"He is just one block away, ma'am: Shall we send your card?"

"Yes." She had not known before what were her wishes, and she wrote her address opposite her name and requested an interview. In a half hour the servant returned.

"Mr. Bancroft is in the parlor, ma'am, and will meet you there. Will you be kind enough to come immediately as his business is pressing?"

Lillian arose quickly and followed the servant.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you, but I am anxious to find a Mrs. Hudson Gaylord. Are you the Mr. Bancroft with whom she is acquainted?"

"O, yes, if you are her friend I rejoice to meet you;" and he extended his hand.

"I am not acquainted with her, but would like to learn if she has a young lady whom she claims as an adopted daughter?"[401]

"Lily? Certainly! But they are not in the city." She started and he hurried to say: "She is only an hour's ride away. You can get to her before ten in the morning. There is a little hotel out in Kirkham where she has a fancy to spend her summers rather than at a fashionable watering place, and I believe it was in that vicinity where she found her two proteges. If I can assist you in any way I shall be happy to do so." He arose to depart. Lillian extended her hand; with many thanks and exchanging good-nights they separated, the merchant to forget perhaps the trifling incident in the press of business, the other to her lonely room and rest.

"Yes—I am glad," she thought as she closed and bolted the door; "she—my child—is not here and her mother has an hour's ride to get to her!" Peacefully she rested on the threshold of a new experience. Her heart throbbed wildly with hope and fear as it peered through at the coming possibilities, with new loves clamoring to be fed and old ones struggling for precedence, and yet she slept! The morning came and looked in through the narrow aperture of the closed shutters, but she did not wake. The gong sent its warning echoes up through the broad halls but she slept

on. Eight o'clock and a loud knocking upon the door awoke her, and bounding from her bed she answered the summons.

"A gentleman in the parlor, ma'am, and wishes to see Mrs. Hamilton."

"In just one moment!" and she hurriedly made herself ready to meet her visitor.

"The train would leave for Kirkham in a half hour, and Mr. Bancroft would be happy to see her safely upon it." This was the word he sent her.[402]

"Mrs. Hamilton is grateful and will be ready after a hasty cup of coffee."

So soon! The time had come but how strong she was! Not a tremor shook her frame; not an emotion quickened her pulse! Mr. Bancroft assisting her to a seat in the carriage, entered and took one beside her.

"We shall not be late? I slept so soundly. Really I forgot to wake this morning, and must thank you for reminding me of it."

Mrs. Hamilton laughed and Mr. Bancroft looked into the beaming eyes and thought "how like Lily Gaylord's they are!"

"You spoke last evening of two protegees?"

"Yes, a brother of the young lady—and a cripple."

"A brother, did you say?" and the heart of his listener gave a great bound of pain. The carriage suddenly wheeled up at the station, and "all aboard for the West" was shouted.

"This way Mrs. Hamilton," and her escort handed her into the car, and wishing her success waved his adieus as the train moved on.

"Her brother! Then she is not my child! Have I been led thus far only to find the fruit that allured me with its golden brightness nothing but ashes? Can it be?" With fearful apprehensions the hour flew by; the junction was reached at last.

It was a short ride to the hotel, and as she entered the spruce-looking village inn sensation of suffocation caused her to throw back her veil that she might breathe more freely.

"Is Mrs. Gaylord in?" she asked of a sweet-faced little woman who appeared.[403]

"They have gone for their morning ride, but will be back in a half hour at most."

"I will take a room and wait their coming," was Lillian's response, and the hostess was ready to conduct her thither. It was a pleasant chamber overlooking the maple grove where the "lady from the south" had found so many cool breaths, and which now presented its most winning aspect to her who was gazing with anxious agitation into its shades. They had gone! In half an hour! Could she wait? And yet how she dreaded its passing! But the wings of time never cease their rapid motion, and before she had bathed her face or removed her bonnet a rap upon the door announced that her hour had come. Mrs. Gaylord was ready to receive her visitor.

"Will you ask her to grant me the favor to come to my room?"

This request was made with trembling voice, and the hostess wonderingly went with her message. Then a step was heard along the hall and the door again opened, and the same gentle voice to which she had twice listened announced "Mrs. Gaylord."

Lillian arose and the two ladies stood face to face with a world of hidden mysteries between them. Mrs. Gaylord extended her hand, and Lillian smiled as the door closed behind the retreating figure of the curious landlady.

"You are surprised at this intrusion from a stranger, but you will neither wonder or blame when you have listened to my story, and as it is a long one let us sit by the window."

Mrs. Gaylord affably obeyed.[404]

"Have you a young lady with you; an adopted daughter, I believe?"

"Yes." The lady moved uneasily in her chair.

"Will you tell me what you know about her history?"

"She can do this better than I. Shall I call her?"

"No, no! I want to talk with you; but first answer this one question: Has she a brother?"

"A foster-brother as she calls the noble cripple, who is now with her in our private parlor."

A gleam of joy darted into her beautiful eyes at this clearing away of the shadows, and she proceeded.

"Another question; by what name was she called before you bestowed your own upon her?"

Her listener laughed. "In her years of babyhood she gloried in the appellation of 'Phebe Blunt,' and in six years or thereabouts this was changed to 'Phebe Evans;' at fourteen it was again changed to 'Lily Gaylord,' the one to which she will now answer."

"Why Lily?"

"Because of a little fanciful dream of her early childhood. She was born near the sea, and lived in a fisherman's cabin, but somehow learned that somebody had called her 'Lily Pearl,' and from this she drew the conclusion that a beautiful lady had picked her up off the waves where the pearls had thrown her."

The speaker looked up to behold the face of her listener as ashy pale as though the hand of death had chilled it with its icy touch, while the pallid lips were vainly endeavoring to speak; and, darting from her chair, Mrs. Gaylord exclaimed with[405] alarm. "What is the matter with you? Are you dying?"

"No, no!" she answered feebly, as the reaction came and the blood rushed back to face and brow. "Not dying, but entering a double life. Mrs. Gaylord, your adopted daughter is my child! My Lily Pearl! Oh, how can I explain! How prove to you or her my assertion! How my heart has hungered and starved for the love my baby awoke in it! Seventeen years have I endured this thirsting which cruel hands imposed upon me. O, for strength to bear the change!" And she raised her clasped hands supplicatingly, while her companion looked on wonderingly.

"Let me explain," she added, and went on to tell as well as she could, without reflecting blame on the weak, helpless one far away, the story of her wrongs and years of suspicion.

"Is Mrs. Belmont, of Rosedale, your mother?" was the abrupt question that startled the narrator, and caused her folded hands to tremble under the soft pressure those of her interrogator placed on them.

"Yes; she is my mother, and is now in Philadelphia, a wreck of what she was when with you in Savannah."

"The mystery is explained, the problem solved! Lily, my Lily, is your child! I might have known such a blessing could not be retained by me. I am selfish, and, although I pity you, would rejoice at your continued thirst if the sweetest luxury my heart has ever known could have been spared to me. You have a husband to adore, a mother to forgive, a God your soul worships, while I am starving, with none of these things to satisfy my[406] undying cravings. Is there no pity in your woman's heart for such as I?"

"Certainly. You have a husband, wealth and position. More than this, God waits for you. How then can you be so desolate?"

"Ask your daughter by and by why she never ceased to pine for the 'beautiful lady' that picked her up from off the sea where the pearls had thrown her? Did the bright picture that cast its glittering rays only on the surface of her unsatisfied heart feed or nourish the cravings of her growing love? Can such cold star-beams warm the frozen fountain? Do the fleshly ties of life unite the aspiring soul with its higher destinies? Love is the strong cord that draws us heavenward. Can woman with her immortality be happy when its drawings are all earthward? But I am troubling you with my individual perplexities when I ought to be lifting yours. I cannot, however, tell you how much anguish and desolation your story has thrown into my prospective future. I was lonely and sad, and she came to fill the void. I am childless, and her presence has satisfied my heart's longings. But it is over now. Come with me while with my own hand I tear the brightness out of my life. Come!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GOLDEN CLASP RELINKED.

Lillian Hamilton followed her guide with unsteady step along the hall toward the little front parlor where her heart was to take up the broken link which had been for so many years severed in the chain of her eventful life; and her thoughts stood still with a mingled sensation of awe and fear, as her shrinking feet bore her forward to the relinking.

The door opened, and opposite on a sofa sat two young people, evidently in close conversation. Lillian stepped back.

"Make omens, go make omens,' Crazy Dimis once said, you remember." It was Willie who was speaking, but Mrs. Gaylord interrupted him.

"Omens will make themselves sometimes without our help, my boy. Lily, dear Lily, the hour has come for you to gather them." Mrs. Hamilton stepped forward into the room. "Here is a lady, my

child, who wants to see you," and she motioned Willie to come to her as she darted back into the hall. Without a moment's hesitation, the boy dropped from his seat and sped across the floor after his usual manner, for the old timidity had left him during his years in Boston; but the tearful eyes of the visitor were upon him.[408]

When the door closed Lily said, "Did I understand that you wanted to see me?" She had risen from the sofa, and now stood before the new-comer, her large, dreamy eyes full of wonder and amazement.

"Lily Pearl!" fell from the quivering lips in a low minor strain, as the mother bird cries for its lost. "Lily Pearl! My Lily! My baby!" and the pleading arms were outstretched. With a shriek of excitement and joy the young girl sprang forward, and the head was once more pillowed on on the breast where so many years ago in infancy it had rested for a few short moments.

"My mother! It is, it must be, my mother!" Tears such as seldom moisten woman's eyes fell in a baptismal shower on the beautiful face that lay so lovingly over the wildly throbbing heart, where the sweet flowers of God's purest affections had blossomed, faded, died. The minutes flew past on airy wings, and still the mother and daughter remained clasped in each other's arms, and heart pulsated against heart, and life mingled itself with life, until parent and child were bound together, never to be rudely torn asunder until the icy hand of death should break the welded link. Raising the head tenderly, she looked into the lovely face long and lovingly. "Pearl's noble brow and expressive mouth," she said at last. "But they were right; you have your mother's eyes, my darling. May they never weep such hopeless tears as have mine."

"Who is 'Pearl,' Mother? And who am I?" The dreamy eyes had put away their beams of ecstasy, and the old wondering light had come back as she asked these questions, "Who am I? And who is Pearl?"

"You shall know all, *everything*, my child; but my heart is too full of its present joy to relish the thought of bringing up the hateful past for one moment. But you must know. 'Pearl' is my husband and your father, and a truer or nobler man never lived. We were married before I was as old as you, my darling, while a school girl in Philadelphia, but my mother, who was proud and aspiring, looked with disfavor upon our union, for he was the son of a poor widow. And coming on from her southern home she compelled me by her resistless power to go with her, leaving the idol of my young heart behind—forever as she intended, but it has proved otherwise. In 'Cliff House,' by the sea, you were born; and as I clasped you to my heart, overflowing with maternal love, I said, 'She shall be called Lily-Pearl (*our* names combined), and then they took you from me, and days after, when reason and consciousness returned, I was told that my beautiful Lily had been 'transplanted to a purer clime,' and my soul was desolate. We traveled in Europe, and every pleasure that could be gleaned from social life and the pleasures of sight-seeing were thrown into my years, yet my heart was unsatisfied. I loved Pearl Hamilton; the little life that had sprung from our union had grievously torn my own in the severing, and nothing could heal the wound. Added to this was the continuous suspicion that a bitter wrong had been done me. The more I thought it over and reviewed the attending circumstances, the more did this suspicion fasten itself upon my soul. I accused my mother of treachery, attempted to draw[410] from her some explanations regarding certain things, but her superior power always succeeded in silencing my wailing cry, and time rolled on. It was by accident that I heard of a Mrs. Gaylord's adopted daughter. George St. Clair, whom my mother had insisted upon my accepting as her son-

in-law, joined the army about the time that I left my home under a mother's curse. With an aunt in New Orleans I found refuge. Here I conceived the idea of drowning my long-endured sorrows in the engrossing cares of the hospitals. Almost a year ago, while nursing my husband, who had been badly wounded, George St. Clair was brought in, who also had been laid aside from duty by a fearful wound. From his sister, who had come to nurse him, I heard the sad story of your disappearance and probable loss."

Lily had slipped from her mother's knee, and, sitting at her feet, was gazing intently into the dear face, as the dear voice ceased. "Tell me, O, tell me!" she exclaimed, pushing back her dark hair with the old childhood's gesture: "Is Mrs. Belmont your mother, and my—"

"Yes, darling; but notwithstanding all, you shall see and will forgive her! Think, my dear, how strangely we have been led together! Had it not been for that terrible experience I might never have heard of Mrs. Gaylord's adopted daughter, or the resemblance between us. Then how strange was it that, in my first burst of bliss, with feeble hands, not knowing what I did, I should have fastened to your fluttering, struggling life the cord that was to draw us together after so many years of separation! I had called you 'Lily-Pearl,' and the strange appellation could not be[411] lost! Sixteen years afterward, the end of this unbroken cord was again put into my hands, and with a continuous yearning it has brought us together. Old Vina was right! 'De Lord will take care ob His childerns, neber fear!' I know you have many questions to ask and there is much to be told you, but, darling, Mrs. Gaylord and your friend will desire to come back to their room and we must not exclude them. First tell me, how is it that he is called your brother? How did you come here when you were left somewhere on the Maryland shore?"

"Because of my love for the sea and my desire to get out upon the waves 'where the pearls had thrown me, and my beautiful mother had picked me up.' When lying in my trundle bed one night I heard my foster parents talking about 'the five hundred dollars' that had been paid them, and laughed as one said, 'I guess her mother would not think her much of a 'Lily-Pearl' could she see her now.' Lily-Pearl! I asked Maria about it, and she told me that my beautiful mother had cast me off and hers had taken me in, and I ought to love her. But the pretty story grew in my little heart until it became a part of it, and I lived and loved the sea for its sake. I was a pearl, and had grown down where the pearls grew and the waves talked to me about it, and one day as I was wandering on the beach I sprang into a boat and floated out on the billows where I had so longed to go. I was happy, and sang and played with the bright sunbeams on the waters until the night came and a storm arose; and O how the billows roared and the winds howled! My beautiful dream of happiness was gone, and I sank down into the[412] wet, dirty boat, for the rain to pelt and the salt waves to dash over me. I do not know when it was, but Willie's father found me. On board his ship we came to Boston. Upon its arrival he took me to his home, only a little way from here, where I was to be a companion to his crippled boy, who has been the dearest brother to me ever since. He is four years older than I. His mother before she died gave him to me and told me never to leave him, but his sister Fanny did not like my being there for her to support, and so I went away. Mr. Ernest, the pastor of the church yonder, told Mrs. Gaylord about me, and I came here to read to her; here you have found me. But, Mother, I can never forget or forsake him. It was he who taught me to seek knowledge and read good books and love God; all I am he put it into my heart to be."

"My dear child, your mother would have you cherish tenderly these early tokens of love. But call your friends, darling, and let us talk together of what must be. It is hard after all I have

experienced to compel my hand to sever a single earthly tie; but what can be done to lighten the blow shall not be withheld."

It took days to clear away the mysteries and shadows and dig thorns out of the path where so many feet were to walk unitedly, although not together at all times under the sunshine and the clouds; but at last the work was done and Mrs. Hamilton was to return to Philadelphia alone, as she had come. Here she was to meet her husband and break to him the joyful tidings that the dead was alive and the lost found. Here also she was to make ready for her daughter's reception as soon as the cold winds of autumn should sweep down^[413] from the north, and Mrs. Gaylord desired to return to her southern home.

"I shall have no wish to remain here alone," was her plaintive conclusion when the results were being finally talked over. "No more music lessons or German from poor Mrs. Rouche, Lily, and another heart will grieve at your going."

"Better so than to have any one sorrow at my coming," and Lily's happy face beamed with joy. "You will remain a few days longer?" she pleaded, breaking a short silence, and the wistful eyes seconded the petition.

"Until after the sabbath," was Mrs. Hamilton's quiet response. "Somehow I have a fancy to go to that little church yonder; it reminds me so much of one I attended in the suburbs of a Scottish village. And then too, darling, I have been thinking I must have your full length photograph to show your father on my return, for it will be hard to make him believe my story without this pretty face to corroborate it." And she patted the full-rounded cheek fondly. "If Mrs. Gaylord will favor me with hers I will be very glad to be its possessor."

"Do you not want Willie's?" The mother smiled.

"Are you so jealous for your friend? Certainly I do want his just as I saw it yesterday when coming up to the door of the hotel—carriage, Rover and all. It was a beautiful picture, and I have no desire that it should fade from my memory. But we are to ride to his home after dinner, I believe. Will the sister give me welcome? I must thank her for the part she has taken in the preservation of my child!"^[414]

Mrs. Hopkins met them at the gate, for she had become pleased with the frequent visits of her stylish acquaintance at the hotel, notwithstanding her indignation at the interference in regard to her wishes as to "Phebe's" remaining "where she could make herself useful;" but that was passed, and to-day she was smiling and genial. When the carriage stopped Lily called out: "Where is Willie?"

"Down by the pond, I suppose; he went out immediately after dinner."

"Go with me, Mother, will you? It is lovely, and I want you to see the spot where I have spent so many hours listening to the waves as they came around the sand-bar."

Mrs. Hamilton consented, and the ladies alighted while Lily was saying, "Fanny, my mother has come to thank you for all your kindness and care of her child for so many years. Mrs. Colonel Hamilton—my mother!"

This introduction was given hurriedly and with a tremulous voice. The lady extended her hand to the astonished Fanny, who took it in her own without a word. Her eyes turned to the face of Mrs. Gaylord, who answered the inquiring look.

"Did Willie not tell you? It is true the drifting waif has found a home and loving friends who have long mourned for her, and her days of orphanage are over."

There were tears in Fanny's eyes, and Lily, wishing to turn the current of thought, said playfully, "It was by this gate that my little bare feet entered alone to reconnoitre in advance of my guide, to hand over the information that I did not like to[415] scour knives or wash potatoes, and I 'wouldn't do it either!'"

"You were very good to take in my poor child and give her shelter so long, while my heart was breaking to find her. I have a great debt of gratitude to pay, and if I can cancel the obligations due for any expense she may have been to you or yours, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to do so."

Mrs. Hopkins found her voice now, and with great distinctness informed the lady that there was no debt to pay, either of gratitude or money. "Willie told me that 'Phebe' had found a friend, and I was glad, but did not know that a mother had come to take her away from us forever." Here she broke down, and, turning, hid her face in her hands.

"Not forever, my dear Mrs. Hopkins, for while we both shall live the friends of these dark days shall not be forgotten or forsaken."

Lily had placed an arm about the weeping woman, as she whispered "Fanny, you do not know how much I love you. I have given you any amount of trouble, have been selfish and indolent, oftentimes grieving you with my bad temper and willful ways. Will you forgive me?"

She did not speak, but an arm gently stole around the neck of the suppliant, while the ladies looked on with moistened eyes.

Then Lily said, "Under the white marble yonder lies Fanny's mother and my friend. She loved us both, and if she were here now her soft, blue eyes would brighten with my great joy." She had turned toward her mother as she said this, and her own beautiful orbs glistened as she talked.[416]

Fanny bent her head, and for the first time in all the years kissed the glowing face of the poor "little Phebe." "You are the one to forgive," she said, bluntly. "I have been cold and harsh, but it was not because I did not want you. The years have been lonely ones with you away, and I could not be reconciled to your leaving us after once more being thrown back into my home; and you are going to return no more."

"No, Fanny; we will ever be sisters, and you must come to me. Besides, we will have time to talk this over, for I am to remain through the summer with Mrs. Gaylord, and will visit you many times. My dear mother, let us go to the lake for Willie while Mrs. Gaylord rests herself in the cool parlor." And the two walked together down through the garden to the meadow brook, thence under the pines, where the carpet of fragrant leaves lay soft and smooth, until reaching the summit of the gentle slope, Lily espied the object of her search stretched out upon the green grass under the old oak tree, where he had often watched her fragile form in the little open boat as she gleefully pulled the long-stemmed lily from the clear waters, where the 'pearls were

holding it fast,' until she was hidden from his view by the thick cloud of scalding tears that had welled up from his desolate heart. Lily remembered it all now, as she stood for a moment and looked at him.

"You do not know how sorry I am for him," she said, turning her eyes full upon her companion. "He will be very lonely without me."

"My child, tell me truly, do you love Willie Evans?"

[417]

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHANGES AND REVOLUTIONS.

Pearl Hamilton, at nineteen, had been a clerk in a flourishing mercantile house, nobly supporting a widowed mother on his limited salary; but at thirty-six, by dint of industry and "good luck" as his fellows called his success, he was the owner of an elegant home on Broad street, which his conservative parent refused positively to occupy. Besides this he had a good business and an income adequate to his every desire. When the call was made for seventy-five thousand men to maintain the dignity of a free people he hastened to enroll his name. "Why not?" he inquired of his weeping mother, who protested against the separation; "I leave only you to mourn me if I find a soldier's grave, and what can this short existence do for me but to crown it with duties well done? There are not many who would have fewer ties to break or a less number of hearts to make wretched." He went, and in the first great battle was taken from the ranks helpless as we have seen.

Mrs. Hamilton returned to her friends in Philadelphia buoyant and happy. Still it was sad for her to look upon the wreck of a once proud intellect, and when the mother's eyes turned upon her with their greetings she was glad that it had been in her heart to smooth over the parent's transgressions.[418] But how would Pearl feel? How could she reconcile him to all that had been? Would he forgive when the whole truth was revealed? These thoughts troubled her, and when at last he arrived in the city on an unlimited leave, and she looked into his fine manly face, her heart rebuked her for the distrust she had experienced. Mrs. Cheevers had been told the whole story of the finding and waiting, and the uncle had many times vented his indignation at "the foolish idea of leaving her so near the water, where she might at any time be compelled through inclination or force of arms to take another ride not quite so successful in its ending," but Lillian had said: "I could not bring her here dear uncle just at this time, for fear the struggling intellect would again totter. Then Pearl—how *could* I present her to him? It is better as it is, for I want my husband's advice regarding the future."

"Woman's propensity! Delightful independence when the current is all the right way! But I tell you, Lillian, I want to see that girl! The same independent looking little queen that her mother

used to be! And this boy—he has a fine head, and without doubt is a smart young fellow;" and he handed back the photographs at which he had been gazing.

"Mrs. Gaylord has such a pensive expression on her face that one might imagine her the possessor of some secret sorrow," remarked the wife, thoughtfully. "Her eyes and compressed lips."

"Not sad perhaps, Auntie, but disappointed! As nearly as I could understand by the long conversations we had together she belongs to that class of mature women who in early years dressed^[419] up their future in spotless white, with very bright adornings, and because they found it wearing a most common, practical garb, turned away from its proffers of good to grieve and grow discontented. Mrs. Gaylord has a truly poetical mind, whose creations are pure and ideal. She thought love was a holy aspiration unmingled with earthly blemishes, but has awakened to the realization of her mistake, therefore cannot be reconciled to the practical side of life. Her last words at parting unsealed the book of her history. 'Good-bye!' she said: 'If a heart that is feasting can pity a hungry, starving one then think of me!'"

"Poor soul; I am sorry for her!" remarked Mrs. Cheevers sympathetically.

"Because of the bond of sympathy twisted out of a similar experience, I suppose," laughed the husband as he arose to leave the room. "By the way, I imagine that Colonel Hamilton will be here to-day, wife; shall I send up something nice from the market?"

"Not before to-morrow morning, Uncle; he writes he will take the night train from Washington to save time!"

"Horrors! He is as slow as molasses in winter;" and the front door gave an expressive bang as it closed behind him.

Colonel Hamilton arrived in due time, however, and was received with open arms. "Tell her I have come, Lillian," he said, before proceeding to the invalid's room. "I am in a hurry to meet her. The shock may be too great if I go unannounced."

Lillian obeyed and sprang with light step up the stairway and entered her mother's room. She^[420] was sitting by the window while Mrs. Jackson was putting the finishing touches to her toilet, for, weak as were her faculties, pride had not become inactive. Her dress must be perfect and her adornings ample as in other days.

"How nicely you are looking this beautiful morning," said the daughter, adjusting the rich lace at the throat. "All ready for company I see—whom shall I invite?"

The large eyes looked steadily into the beaming face for a moment, then as they turned languidly away said, hesitatingly: "Charles."

"You want to see your boy, don't you Mother? Well you shall if he can be found! He was at Uncle Stanley's the last I heard of him. We will look him up by and by." A smile darted quickly over the pale face.

"Is there no one else you would like to see? What if Pearl should come; shall I bring him to you?" Again the eyes darted a keen glance into the inquiring face. "You will love him; he is so good and forgiving!"

"Forgive? No! no! Pearl,—Can he forgive?" And the tears came into her eyes.

"He will forgive! It is all over now, and we are very happy. Let me bring him to you, and from his own lips you shall hear it. May I?"

"No! no! I was wicked, cruel! He cannot, no, he cannot!" And the stately head dropped wearily upon her hand, while the elbow rested on the arm of her easy chair.

"How nice that dainty cap, with its bright ribbons, makes you look. He will be proud of our mother, and it will make me so happy!"

"You happy?"[421]

"Yes, Mother; your Lillian; may I go for him?"

There was a long pause, for the poor brain was struggling with itself, as one battles with sleep when the morning dawns. The answer came at last.

"Yes, go get—Pearl. I am ready!"

Lillian smoothed the soft dark hair, petted her sunken cheek with her white hand, and, as she kissed the broad forehead, remarked playfully, "You are as pretty as a young girl waiting for her lover."

She encountered her husband just outside the door. "Come in," she said, "Mother is waiting to see you;" and, for the first time Pearl Hamilton stood in the presence of Mrs. Belmont.

With a quick step he approached her chair, and kneeling at her feet, said gently, "Mother, bless your son, it was I who disappointed you, I who tempted you to do wrong; will you forgive me? There have been dark clouds, but they are gone now; put your hand on my head and call me Pearl, this will make us happy."

She did not move or raise her hand, but sat motionless as a marble statue, with her gaze riveted on the upturned face.

Lillian took the thin hand and laid it tenderly on the bowed head as she whispered, "forgive him, Mother."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, drawing it quickly back. "Forgive? I did not know! See! there is no blood on my hand; look!" and she held it up before the wondering suppliant, who turned his inquiring eyes towards his trembling wife.[422]

"I did not do it!" she continued; "'twas the sea—the wicked sea! Forgive? O God! But He will not hear me! I did not do it!" and the head sank back upon its resting place.

"I ought not to have come; how her mind wanders!" whispered Colonel Hamilton, rising.

"Mother, listen to me," said Lillian, taking the hand which lay so motionless on the rich dress, "I know there is no blood there, for the sea was not wicked, and the little boat was taken care of by the precious One, who will hear when you call. There is much for you to know that will make you happy; but first let us brush the cobwebs out of the present. Old Vina would say, 'Bress de

Lord for what ye now hab,' and you have not made me happy yet by receiving and loving my husband. Open your arms, Mother, to your son, for he is waiting."

She raised her head, and with outstretched arms said, plaintively, "My son, my son!"

The strong arms of love and forgiveness were thrown about her, and, weary as a child, she laid her head upon his shoulder and remained motionless as a sleeping infant. He would not disturb her and the moments went slowly by.

"Put me on the bed," she said at last; "the sea!—O the sea!"

The arms that were folding her so gently, lifted her in their strong grasp, laying her gently on the bed, where, turning her face to the wall, she lay motionless.

"I think you may better leave her now," remarked Mrs. Jackson, coming in at the heavy tread. "She needs rest and a little sleep will refresh her." [423]

"I did not expect to find her as she is," remarked Colonel Hamilton, as they seated themselves in the parlor below. "What did she mean about the 'sea,' and the 'blood on her hands,' Lillian? I noticed you understood it all."

"Yes, Pearl, I do understand! You are to know as well as I. But how can I tell you! O, my husband, there is much yet to be forgiven! Is your heart large enough for the demands to be made upon it?"

"You startle me, Lillian! Do not make me fear for the sanity of my darling wife! What can there be that will draw harder upon my powers of forgiveness than what I have already experienced? Do not fill those beautiful eyes with such a strange look. I am Pearl Hamilton, who has become familiar with injustice and wrongs; and if there are more to confront, know then that they cannot daunt or alarm me! I wait, Lillian, what is it?"

She looked at him a moment in surprise and admiration. "And this noblest type of man is my husband!" she said, earnestly. "I will tell you about my trip to Boston."

"Not now; I can wait for that. What about the sea?"

"We must go around a little to get there, so permit me to lead as I choose."

With an air of martyrdom he folded his arms over the golden bands of his military coat and prepared to suffer.

"You have never once inquired as to my business. A careful officer should be more interested in the affairs of those under his command."

"Well, imagine my interest wide awake, and hurry on to the sea." [424]

"I will not trifle with you, Pearl. I went in search of a young girl in whose history I had become nervously interested. George and Ellen St. Clair told me about her; and in Virginia a young soldier, who was brought to the hospital, added some information that awakened an uncontrollable desire in my heart to see her. I went to Boston for that purpose."

"Woman's curiosity!" he laughed. "Did you find her?"

"I did."

"What was she like?"

"I have her picture. Shall I show it to you?"

"Yes, if it will hasten you to the sea."

Lillian arose, and taking from the table the three photographs, returned to the sofa. "This is a Mrs. Gaylord, who has the girl in her care—a southern lady of great wealth, I believe."

"Gaylord? Let me see. There was a rebel scout of that name brought before me just as I left, and I ordered him kept in the guard-house until my return."

"Hudson Gaylord?"

"That was it, as sure as you live. Hudson Gaylord! A fine-looking fellow, but caught in a pretty bad trap, I am thinking."

"Pearl, he is this lady's husband. You must do all you can for him. Promise me this."

"Why? I see no reason for interfering with justice because you have in your possession a photograph of his wife. But go on."

"This, Pearl, is the picture of the young lady in whom I was so much interested." She held it up before him.[425]

He started back in surprise. "Who is she?" he gasped. "I should say it was yours, dress and all, just as I saw you first in this very house. Who is she?"

"Look at that brow and the *hauteur* of the compressed lips. They are not mine."

"But the eyes and the queenly bearing, the slender form and white dress—. Taken as a whole, there could scarcely be a better representation of yourself when fourteen."

"Believe me, my husband, for what I am going to tell you is true. That picture is our child!"

"Lillian, are you mad?" And he started to his feet and stood gazing at her. "Our child! You told me she was dead. And how can this be?"

"She is ours! Our Lily-Pearl! She did not die, but was taken from me and given to the wife of a fisherman who was to care for her for a paltry sum; but God interfered and has twice saved her from the sea and many dangers, and she is now called the adopted daughter of this Mrs. Gaylord, for whose husband I have been pleading."

"Lillian, are you awake? Or am I dreaming? Tell me again. Is this our child?"

"Our Lily-Pearl! Worthy the name she bears, and as true and noble as your child must be. Can you forgive? There is a long story for you to listen to, but it was to hide her wrongs that the wicked sea now haunts our mother's weakened brain. The blood upon her hands is the mark conscience has placed there, but how thankful am I that no such crime blackens her soul."

He was walking the floor with rapid steps, and apparently not listening, for he held in his hand the picture that was entrancing him.[426]

Lillian said no more, but waited. At last he stopped before her and asked huskily, "Why did you not bring her to me? This is cruel! You have feasted your eyes on her beauty, heard her sweet voice speak words of love that have satisfied your heart, and now is this Mrs. Gaylord to retain her and rob me? I believe I am angry with you, my precious wife."

"No, no, Pearl; she is coming to us just as soon as we are ready to receive her. I could not well burden them farther here, and so I waited to consult you. Mrs. Gaylord is very sad about giving her up, but she is ours; and Lily is anxious to meet her father."

"Then I shall go for her. If there is no room in Philadelphia for the daughter of Pearl Hamilton, then I will take her to Washington with me. Get yourself ready, for to-morrow we start for Boston. I will see this child, our daughter."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE HAZY MISTS ARE LIFTING.

Colonel and Mrs. Hamilton arrived in Boston in due time. There had been long talks by the way, much questioning and wondering, but true to the dictates of a noble, generous soul, he had said, "Notwithstanding all, I will forgive."

When the train left the station for Kirkham on the following morning, many eyes were turned on the glittering colonel who, with his wife, entered the car and took a seat near the door.

"Let us go farther on;" requested Lillian, as he stepped back for her to enter. "There is a seat yonder."

"Yes, but twelve steps farther away from her;" and he laughed at the absurdities of his own heart.

"Do you know," she said at last, "there is a greater conflict before you than any in which you have engaged during the war? Mrs. Gaylord is no enemy, yet I believe you will be hardly able to resist her pleadings."

"Shall I remove my regimental straps now, or wait to lay my sword at her feet?"

"You may wait, but be assured it must be done! You can laugh now but you will pity her. Lily is fresh, sweet and pure, and has nestled close under the drooping wings of her pining love, and[428] a wound must be made in the severing. Can you do this?"

"Little novice! Do you ask a soldier such a question as that?"

There was a serious look on his face, notwithstanding his careless words, but his heart was buoyant! It was his child that was so soon to rest her beautiful head so near it! His own darling who was to drive away the last of its desolation, and how could he intrude into its bright chambers, so full of sunshine, the sombre shadow of another's grief? He pitied her, and would use his influence to liberate her husband and send him out of harm's way. What more could he do for her? "She will ever have a claim on my sympathies, and every kindness I can bestow to ease

her aching heart shall be cheerfully given; but Lillian, the wound must be made;" he said, after a long silence. "Our daughter, my dear, was taken by Mrs. Gaylord for the purpose of administering to this drooping love you are speaking of, and if by her gentleness, sweetness and purity, she has succeeded in awakening the sleepy bird, it is her glory, not her debt. But when you talk about the cripple, that is quite another thing. My warlike propensities beat a retreat immediately before the power of that battalion. They were children together; and it was only love and kindness in its purest guise that has united them, and to wound such a heart is a little hard."

Mrs. Hamilton sat a long time thinking of the prostrate form beneath the old oak tree as it first met her gaze. It was all over—the shady resorts were to be vacated forever; the path by the meadow brook would be trodden by other feet,[429] while the little pond with all its enchantments was to be cast among the fond memories of the past. Lillian's heart grew sad as these gloomy prospects came to her. She was aroused at length by the call, "Kirkham—next station," and turned to behold her husband looking intently at her.

"As fine as a panorama, my dear," he said with a merry twinkle in his eye. "Your face has had all the changes of the 'dissolving views,' and I have been permitted to look at them without paying the usual quarter."

"A trifle dishonest, though, for a gentleman," was the playful retort; then added, seriously: "When two weeks ago I alone neared this station every nerve quivered with excitement! I was nearing my child—crossing the gulf of treachery that had so long separated me from happiness! My limbs trembled and nerves quivered! Instead of all this you are as calm and expectant as on the eve of meeting an old friend."

"Why not, little wife? You see the banks of this terrible gulf were lowered a little, when, nearly two years ago, my Lillian came over to meet me!"

"Here we are," interrupted the happy wife, rising from her seat; "gulf or no gulf we are coming together!"

The coachman bowed obsequiously as the two emerged from the car.

"Is Mrs. Gaylord still at the hotel?" inquired the lady.

"She is ma'am." And he closed the door and drove away. Not a word was spoken during the short ride, for an oppressive lull such as sometimes precedes a storm had settled down over the hearts of each, and it did not lift until the carriage stopped.[430]

Mrs. Gaylord came into the parlor to greet the visitors with a hesitating step. She was alone! After the introductions Mrs. Hamilton asked for Lily. "Her father is so impatient to meet her," was the supplementary remark.

"She is spending the day with Willie, for the purpose, no doubt, of giving me a foretaste of what is to be."

"How far away," asked the colonel impatiently.

"Over two miles, yet she insisted upon walking there, as he had come for her before breakfast."

"I will speak for the carriage;" and he left the room hurriedly.

"My shadows which were almost impenetrable are nevertheless thickening," remarked Mrs. Gaylord when alone with Mrs. Hamilton. "News has just reached me that takes the light out of the borders of my clouds!"

"From the war?"

"Yes. Mr. Gaylord, it seems, has been taken prisoner while in citizen's dress, when out on a scouting expedition, and it is quite uncertain what will become of him. So many ties severed without time given for the healing, empties life too rapidly for the pulse to maintain its steady motion."

"It may be I can steady it a little! Your husband is in the hands of the regiment of which Colonel Hamilton has command, and he will use his powers to secure his liberty."

"Do you know this?"

"He has told me. Mr. Gaylord was brought in just as he was leaving for Washington. The debt of gratitude we owe would, if nothing else, have this influence."^[431]

"We are ready," called Colonel Hamilton from the hall, and Lillian taking the hand of Mrs. Gaylord said, soothingly:

"Cheer up, my dear friend, there is sunshine enough for us all if we will only secure it, and we will attempt to woo a little of it when all together once more;" and then went out to join her husband who was impatiently waiting.

"A true little country miss to take such a walk," he remarked as they rolled on towards the farm.

"She is used to it," interposed the coachman with true "Yankee" freedom; "she has gone over this road lots of times when she wasn't the young lady she is to-day! You are her father I suppose?"

Lillian laughed. "I have not introduced you, Frank. This is my husband, and I suppose you learned that Lily was my daughter when I was here before."

"Yes ma'am; and I'm glad! But I needn't 'a' been told that for one would know it to look at you."

"But a little more doubt about the father?" and Colonel Hamilton brought his hand down firmly on the shoulder of the Yankee questioner, while a merry peal of laughter rang out on the summer air.

"Wal—no; but there's the house—and the wheat is ripe enough this minute to harvest!"

"I will go to the door," said Lillian as they came to a halt at the gate; "Mrs. Hopkins, without doubt, is very busy with her dinner, and we will not disturb her by waiting for a reception." She stepped down while speaking and walked^[432] briskly towards the house. Before reaching it, however, the door flew open and Lily darted into the outstretched arms of her mother.

"I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "Come—Willie is sick and it may be you can help him!"

"But, my dear, just wait for one moment; your father wants to see you!"

In her excitement she had not thought of the carriage, or the reasons for the unexpected visit, or anything but that the companion of many years had been lying insensible on the bed where the departed one had bid them both farewell so long ago! But the words startled her, and she raised her head from its sweet rest on the dear shoulder to discover a tall military officer standing before them. All the dreams of her maturer years, winged as they had been with glowing aspirations of "what might be." She had so longed to be something besides "little Phebe," to have wings and fly away up among the clouds; to be a bird on the highest tree on the summit of the mountain; and now what was she?

"My daughter! My Lily!" and as he looked at the wondering face his arms were outstretched for the sweet love his great heart was longing for. Without a word the fairy form sprang into them and a pair of clinging arms were placed about his neck. Long and silent was the embrace for the heart was content.

"Darling, can you love your father? I am not as good-looking as the one you so much resemble, but will I do?"

The large eyes gleamed, and looking intently at him, said: "I think you will!"^[433]

He caught her again in his arms and covered her beaming face with kisses.

"There, darling; now let us go to Willie, for I confess that my warmed heart is reaching out for him also."

"O thank you! You will love him I know!" and she preceded her parents into the house. Mrs. Hopkins came forward to greet her visitors with traces of tears still on her cheeks.

"He is better now, and the doctor says it is only overexertion in the hot sun and perhaps a little worry with it," and she led the way to his room.

"I am so glad," Lily was saying with her arms about his neck as they entered. "We will not go out again until it is cooler!"

"But—" He saw Mrs. Hamilton and reached out his hand.

"Here is my husband, Willie, who has learned your worth before seeing you."

"A dull scholar I should be certainly if I had not."

"And you find me only a poor cripple who is obliged to creep through the dust just like any other worm!" He tried to smile but it proved a failure.

"No, my boy; not through the 'dust' just now, but into my heart, where, thank God, there is plenty of room for you!"

The physician, who had stepped out as they entered now returned, and walking up to the bed said, kindly: "You are all right now, Willie, but you must be a little careful of yourself for a few days and keep in the shade." And then he went away.^[434]

"You will stay to dinner?" pleaded Mrs. Hopkins; "I have nothing very nice to give you."

"Shall we, darling?" This to his daughter.

The beautiful eyes added their plea, and the carriage was ordered back to the hotel to return for them at five.

While sitting in the parlor Lily told her father of the mother's gift in the years gone by, adding: "He is my brother—I can never forsake him;" and the answer had been: "He shall not be forsaken. I am too grateful for what I have received willingly to sever a single thread that binds you to the friends of your past."

Mrs. Hopkins was standing in the door when these words were spoken, but turned away with a pain in her heart and a strange pallor on her usually flushed face.

That evening there was a long consultation in the little upper parlor of the village inn, and Mrs. Gaylord had repeated the plea: "You will let her remain with me until the summer heat is over? I cannot return home now if I would, and it would be insufferable here without her! As soon as the maple leaves shall crimson and the birds go where I cannot follow, I will come with her to Philadelphia and stand between you no more. It will take the intervening weeks to prepare my heart to endure the separation. Certainly you cannot refuse me this!" And the whole matter was given to the daughter for a decision. She whispered it at last in the ear of her doting father, as she hung about his neck while he petted and caressed her: "For Willie's sake, until he is stronger and able to return to Boston I will remain."^[435]

"Pretty hard, my darling, but as there is no appeal the subject is of course closed."

"But there is another of whom I have not told you, whose heart will rejoice at this decision," Lily remarked playfully.

"Not a lover I hope," interposed the father.

"Yes—a true lover! One who has helped me in many a trying hour, and whose advice it has always been safe to follow. You need not draw down that military mustache so threateningly, for this 'lover' is no other than 'Crazy Dimis,' who is even now free from the restraints of the 'county house' and is roaming about somewhere. She appeared to us yesterday out of the honeysuckle swamp, and with her usual earnestness exclaimed, as she pointed her long bony finger at me, 'Little fool, kiss and cry, kiss and cry, don't I know? Life is full of 'em; go, love is waiting—get it;

Eyes must weep—and eyes must hunger, Love must sleep and life must wonder;

don't I know?' And with a loud laugh she darted into the thick shades and life was left to 'wonder.' There is a good deal of common sense in her gibberings, and when three years ago she told me to 'go and make omens' I obeyed, and came to Mrs. Gaylord, whose hands were full of cheering 'omens.'"

One week after the northern visit Colonel Hamilton received very decided orders from headquarters to return immediately to his regiment. "Lee must be intercepted."

"You must do it all alone, Lillian," was the quick remark when the telegram was read. "Howe & Brother will furnish all in the upholstery line that will be desired, and be sure that^[436] our home is made fitting the reception of our daughter."

How full the succeeding days were to the hopeful wife and mother! "She will be here at the first tinging of the maple trees." This she had said to her aunt. "Only a little more than two months in which to make all ready."

"Such a dainty bit of precious girlhood must not be allowed to step on the common ingrain that covers your old uncle's floors, I take it." This was a little improvised indignation as the good old uncle listened to the plannings and recountings of the luxuries that were to surround her in the home to be prepared. "But the fisherman's cot shouldn't be forgotten, Lillian, and so sometimes you will let her come to us?"

"What a wicked, naughty uncle you are!" Lillian exclaimed, while she smothered all further ebullitions of assumed anger by placing a little white hand over his mouth. "There! Now to punish you for those words I shall be at the store at five for you to go with me and look over the premises!"

"Want to blacken my fingers with the guilt of spoiling her do you? Well, well! A full half hour lost in palavering; good-bye," and the jovial uncle went out from his home leaving it full of sunshine.

October dawned bright and beautiful. The hazy mist that brooded over the city was tinted with hues of purple and gold as they became tangled with the many colored leaves that fell through the cool shadows in the public squares, and in a week Lily-Pearl Hamilton would arrive! One cloud only was shadowing the path of Mrs. Hamilton,^[437] and that the absence and dangers of him to whom her heart had clung through all the gloomy days; but in a few months his "three years" would close and then—how happy they would all be!

"If Pearl can succeed in getting Old Auntie and Lizzy safely here, as he assured me he could do," she had said, "my cup will be full to overflowing!"

"How will your mother bear all this?" queried Mrs. Cheevers.

"With no serious result I imagine. The doctor told me the other day that she was not susceptible of a very severe shock, her brain having become so inactive that no injury would probably come to it through excitement."

Suddenly recollecting that Pearl's mother was to meet her at the new home at ten she hastened away.

"Everything was *perfect* in the new home," was Mrs. Hamilton's conclusion, as with Lillian she walked from room to room. "Not massive and oppressive with a superabundance of heavy carvings and marble, but bright and cheerful in its display of luxury and beauty. Your taste is good, my daughter, and I think Pearl will commend it."

While at the tea-table that night a letter was brought in for Lillian. "From George," she said, breaking the seal. "A long one for an invalid certainly," and she unfolded the well-filled sheet and began its perusal. Finishing the first page she laid it upon her lap and folded her hand over it.

"Well," she said at length; then perceiving that her uncle and aunt were gazing quizzingly at^[438] her; "wonders are multiplying!" and she recommenced its perusal.

"Do stop her, wife, and make her tell what it is that brings such a queer look into her face! If I were a woman; but pshaw!" The wife laughed.

"In just one moment, Uncle," and Lillian turned the page. "He is nearly well, and—yes—he will accept my invitation to be here in Christmas week with his bride!"

"Hurrah! Another southern aristocrat mixing up with northern plebeianism I reckon! What's that quotation, wife? 'To be seen is to be loved?'"

"No, no! You are talking about vice! 'To be hated needs only to be seen.' But *this* is a wife!"

"O, well I never could remember poetry. George to be married! All right! I will give him welcome to his miseries! But who is the fair one?"

"The daughter of the widow with whom they are staying; one fully worthy to bear the honored name of St. Clair. So he writes."

"The same old silly story; but I am glad of it! Let me see—when is that 'Lily-Pearl' to get here? I cannot wait much longer!"

"And you will not be obliged to do so. I shall expect her now on every train, for there was something in her letter that appeared like surprising. She said 'a week at the farthest, but I am so impatient to get close to my mother once more that I fear I cannot wait much longer for Mrs. Gaylord to smooth down her ruffles.'"

She did wait, however, but the day came when the carriage containing the long lost daughter with her escort and servant stopped before the^[439] door of Mrs. Hamilton's temporary home and alighted. What a rush of emotion came into the heart of the young girl when she remembered that beneath that roof was the one who had been the cause of all her desolations and roamings! But they were over now, and with a light tread she darted up the marble steps and rang the bell.

"By surprise after all," she remarked, turning to Mrs. Gaylord, who was following. The door flew open and with an exclamation of joy she sprang into her mother's embrace.

"The train is not due for five minutes," Lillian said at last, finding breath to speak. "I was just coming to the door to watch down the street as I have done for many days."

But why attempt to picture the scenes of bliss that followed? All hearts in the broad circle of love save one opened wide to receive its new accessions. Mrs. Cheevers could never tire of eulogizing her pretty ways and simplicity of manners, while the husband reiterated fully twice each day that even his pet, Lillian, never came up to her daughter in good looks or winning ways.

Still Mrs. Belmont utterly refused to see her grandchild. In vain did Lillian assure her that the past had been severed forever, and Lily only waited to tell her this, but her answering wail of agony was truly pitiful to hear.

"No—no!" she would say, "I cannot, O, I cannot! Keep her away! Keep her away! O God! But he will not hear? Don't let her come, Lillian my child. I did it! So cruel! So wicked!" With streaming eyes Lillian would pet and caress her mother with most earnest solicitude.^[440]

Day after day passed with no better results. She would not see Lily, neither would she be taken to the beautiful home on Broad street. "Let me die here," she would plead, when told of the pretty room that had been fitted up for her—so nearly like the one at Rosedale. But she shrank at the very recital and settled down in her easy chair like a weary child who desires to be let alone.

"What shall I do!" This from Mrs. Hamilton, one morning coming into the presence of her daughter, after one more fruitless attempt. "She will never consent to leave here, and I cannot go without her. Neither do I like to use compulsion."

"Why not wait for Father? Perhaps he can persuade her."

"For two months, darling?"

"If no better thing can be done."

The mother smiled. "Perhaps you are correct. This may be best. I think we will wait."

CHAPTER XL.

AUNT VINA IN THE NEW HOME.

The weeks succeeding the incidents of our last chapter sped rapidly by. Winter came with its chilling winds, rifling the waving branches of their many colors, leaving them bare and unsightly; while it spread now and then over the seared lawns a pure white covering of snow, to hide for a time its sad work; and upon all this Mrs. Belmont looked with dreamy listlessness from her window. What was beauty, death, or change to her now, shut out as she was from the past, and in fear of the future? When kind hearts attempted to gain her consent to have the monotony of life broken she would plead: "No, no, let me stay here! It is cold, I cannot go! Lillian, my child, don't let her come! She will look at me with her large eyes, so much like my baby's! It would kill me!"

What was Mrs. Hamilton to do? The elegant home on Broad street was waiting, and Christmas week approaching. She could not leave her mother to be a burden to others, and Lily said, "perhaps Father can persuade her;" and so they lingered for his coming.

"Unless some imperative duties shall arise to prevent I will run home for a Christmas dinner," he had written.[442]

The opening of the holidays came at last, as all bright places in life come and flit past, and Colonel Hamilton returned on leave to his home with buoyant spirits, for he did not come alone. Aunt, Vina, with her broad, good-natured face, followed the gaily dressed officer from the carriage, and close behind her walked Lizzie and little Bobby. "For Miss Lillian, I've couldn't leave him," was the earnest exclamation preceding the greeting.

"No more could you Lizzie, and we could never have gotten along without little Bobby," and Mrs. Hamilton caught the diminutive mulatto of ten in her arms and kissed his plump yellow cheek.

Never was a mother more heartily welcomed by her child than was 'old Aunt Vina,' by her pet of former years. "Bress de Lord, honey! I thought dese old arms wouldn't neber hold my sweet darlin' no more!" she exclaimed, as tears coursed rapidly over her cheeks. "But de Missus, honey? Old Vina's eyes ache to look on her once more; de poor dear! Massa says she's dreffle bad, but de Lord knows what's bes'!"

"Why did you not tell me about this?" asked Lillian of her husband as soon as the dear old arms had liberated her sufficiently to permit her to do so. "It would have helped in the waiting if I had had the opportunity of anticipating a little?"

"I was not sure of succeeding in my project myself until three days ago," he answered, between the repeated caresses he was lavishing on his beautiful daughter.

"She's just like her mudder," interposed Aunt Vina; "and dis old heart's got her fast!"[443]

"Let it hold her, Vina, and permit her young life to draw as much good from its hidden treasures as my darling wife has received," and Colonel Hamilton placed the hand of his child in the old negress's grasp. "Let your motherly love widen sufficiently to make room for both of my treasures, will you?"

"Dat I will, and place enough for de missus too!" Here a hearty laugh all around, in which Mr. and Mrs. Cheevers joined in merrily.

The day after to-morrow would be Christmas, and a small party was expected in the new home. How much there was to be done before that time! "The first thing of all," said Lillian, emphatically, "is to get Mother to Broad street! We have everything in readiness—a cook and maid of all work secured."

"And nobody wants 'em," chimed in Lizzie. "Reckon Vina an' me knows all dat!"

"Yes, and after our little fete is over you two shall be fully enstalled as advisory committee in our quiet domain, while Bobby can wait on the door and learn to be a man. I suppose you know that you are no longer slaves, and, unless I am very good to you, some day you may take into your kind old heads to leave me."

"Neber, Missus!" chimed in two voices at the same time.

Dinner was now ready for the hungry travelers, but Mrs. Hamilton could not eat. "I will go to Mother," she said, "for she will hear the voices and perhaps recognize them."

Mrs. Belmont was alone, for Mrs. Jackson had been dismissed upon the arrival of the daughter into the household; and Mrs. Gaylord had immediately[444] gone to visit a relative in another part of the city with a promise to return to them for a few weeks after all were settled. Lillian opened the door of the chamber with some trepidation. As she did so two large eyes were fastened upon her with a speechless wonder lighting up their slumbering fires.

"I came to eat dinner with you, Mother," the daughter said cheerily, coming to her side. "Not tasted it? I am in good time then. It will spoil if you allow it to get cold. This chicken pie is not the way Aunt Vina used to get it up, is it? But I like it quite as well. Let us try it."

"Has she come?"

"Who, Mother?"

"Vina."

"Yes, and Lizzie, with little Bobby."

"And he?"

"Who?"

"Charles."

"No, Mother, but he is at Rosedale, well and hopeful. You know some one is needed there to take care of the place and servants. But Pearl is below stairs and will be here to see you after dinner."

The good things on the small table, however, remained untouched, for the once proud mistress of Rosedale was silently watching the curtain, that had fallen around her world, slowly move one side, as the panorama of the past came laggardly to view. Lillian watched the changing expression on the thin face with interest, unwilling to interrupt the ebbing emotions she was sure were casting their flitting shadows upon it. Not until the sound of feet coming along the[445] hall, and then halting before the door, was a word spoken. "Mother; Pearl has come," and, without permission, Lillian arose and opened the door.

"Just as I left you;" he exclaimed, cheerfully, stepping to the side of the invalid's chair. "Surely you have not been sitting here all the time?"

She did not move or look at him.

"It is too bad to stay in this one room so long, and to-day we will have a change. In an hour, Lillian, there will be a carriage at the door, and we will take Mother to another room, where she will not be obliged to look upon the same wall of brick and stone always."

She started, and her gaze rested on the manly face so near her own.

"Not a word," he responded, playfully, placing his hand over her mouth, "I am going to show you one of the brightest rainbows that has ever spanned your blue sky of life. All the brighter, dear Mother, for the dark clouds behind it. You are looking much better than when I went away; and that scarlet shawl gives quite a healthy glow to your cheeks. How happy we shall be! In a few months my army life will come to an end; then I will throw up my commission and be one among you, and let Rosedale go to its rightful owner,—we can be happier without it."

"Charles?" said the feeble voice.

"Shall be where his mother can enjoy him. In an hour, remember, we will go. Wrap warmly, for it is cold outside;" and, without another word, Colonel Hamilton left the room.[446]

"Now, Mother, you must eat something, for you will want strength for your ride."

She obeyed, and, without speaking, did good justice to the ample meal. The firm will of a strong controlling mind had conquered, and Mrs. Belmont submitted to every suggestion without an opposing gesture.

The servants, immediately after dinner, were taken to their new quarters, with Lily as their mistress, and then the Colonel returned in the carriage for his wife and mother. He found her warmly cloaked and shawled, but every nerve trembled as one shivering with ague. Not apparently noticing it, he said, merrily, "How the boys in blue would envy me," and he placed his arm around the shrinking form to aid the timid feet down the long flight of stairs. "To be a lady's gallant is a luxury not often indulged in by us poor soldiers. The air is delicious out of doors; it will give you new life and strength. There now, you are all right, safe on terra firma!" And slowly he led her on.

Mechanically she moved through the hall to the outer door, down the marble steps, and was lifted into the carriage with many a lively sally from Lillian, who followed full of wonder. As carefully as she assisted out again on arriving at her destination; and entering the splendid drawing-room looked wildly about her.

"Right here, Mother, in this easy chair;" and her tender escort seated her near the register.

"Jus' you let me do dis;" calmly said Vina, coming up to her once stately mistress, and she began removing her wrappings. "Dar's no use ob dese old hands forgettin' how. And Missus,[447] I'se mighty glad de good Lord sent 'way down to Georgy after this ere gal, 'cause He knowed dar was no one like old Vina could do for de missus."

All the time the faithful hands were at work, while the brightening eyes of the invalid were scanning the kindly face of the old slave.

When all wraps were removed and passed to Lizzy to take from the room, she took her thin white hand in her dusky palm, and, kneeling by the chair, said plaintively; "Bress de Lord! Let ebery body bress Him, for He is good! O Missus! Vina's heart is big, 'cause it's so glad! Bress de Lord!"

The other white hand was lifted slowly and placed on the bowed head of the negress as the pale lips muttered, "Bless the Lord! Pray, pray!"

"Glory!" and the old servant sprang to her feet.

"De angels will clap dar hands wid joy! Missus is goin' to de mansions by-and-by!"

A quiet glow of peace stole into the restless eyes, as Mrs. Belmont listened, and settling down in her easy chair, she really looked like the picture of contentment, as the Colonel asserted, entering as Vina went out.

Mr. and Mrs. Cheevers were to take a quiet tea with them, and, as the uncle declared, "would bring along the horse-shoe, as there would be no good luck without it." And soon all were seated in the drawing-room in pleasant conversation, to which Mrs. Belmont apparently gave no heed. An hour passed, when the careful mistress, who was, indeed, troubled about many things, took the arm of her husband and went into the parlor opposite.[448]

"She is so tranquil; how can we disturb her?" was the first ejaculation.

"We will not disturb her my dear."

"But what about Lily?"

"What about her? Why she's the sweetest darling—"

"No, no! How shall we bring them together?"

"In the most natural way possible. When tea is ready I will escort her out to the table and introduce our daughter. She is a child and will submit to be governed and led. But where is Lily? I have not seen her for a long time."

"Gone to her room with a letter from Willie, I imagine, as her cheeks put on an unusual glow when a small package was placed in her hand by the carrier."

"What makes you say that, Lillian? Do you suppose that the heart of our child is in any way entangled with that boy's love?"

"I do not know."

The subject of this conversation came tripping down the broad staircase, and with a buoyant step entered the room where her father and mother were standing by the window.

"See what Willie has sent me for Christmas!" she exclaimed, holding up a finger adorned by a ring set with precious stones.

"An engagement ring my darling?"

"O no! We never thought of such a thing. He is my brother, that is all!" The sweet face could but crimson as she looked into that of her father.

"I believe you, darling; and as a brother he will be loved by us all."

"Is it not beautiful?"[449]

"It has cost him many a day of hard work, without doubt," was the reply, while the mother was carefully examining the costly gift. "Poor Willie! He writes that he is not very well."

"He misses his companion of so many years, and the bestowing of this gift has brightened up his loneliness more than anything else could have done." This from the mother thoughtfully.

The bell announcing tea was heard in the hall, and the colonel, bidding his daughter see that all was ready, went to the drawing-room for the invalid. It was as he had said. Placing his arm tenderly about her shrinking form he led her into the dining-room where she met her granddaughter with only a slight quivering of the hand that was clinging so closely to the arm supporting her.

Lily kissed the pale cheek as she said: "I will take her to the seat where Aunt Vina says she must sit." During this the peaceful glow did not fade from her eyes, or the expression of resignation from her face.

"You are a magician as well as a prophet," whispered Lillian, returning to the head of the table.

They were happy now. The rainbow was spanning the dark clouds, and its cheering colors were reflected in every face.

"Charles," feebly whispered Mrs. Belmont.

"Yes, and Mrs. Gaylord, who ought also to be here," remarked the colonel, "for I have good news of her husband. He will be liberated and sent north in a very short time." How bright the sky can be after the clouds are driven out of it!

[450]

CHAPTER XLI.

"GOOD BYE."

Gentle reader, would you like to follow the friends whom you have met in this simple narrative still farther in the histories of their eventful lives? Has your acquaintance thus far been a pleasant one? This is not all. Every thoughtful mind will draw from the characters of history or romance such lessons of hope and faith as cheer the heart in sorrow or beneath the depressions of despondency something that will guide when the soul is perplexed or shrinking. Sad indeed would the writer of this story be, if in the delineations of the history of our little heroine no lonely wayfarer should be comforted, or no friendless waif taught to look up for the hand that safely leads. God is kind and watchful towards his children, assuring them that they are "better than many sparrows," and therefore cannot fall to the ground without his notice; but is also just to punish and chasten those who oppose his little ones.

Have these truths been set impressively before you? If so we will raise the curtain yet a little higher and glance for one moment into the lives and homes of the few in whom you are interested, after the terrible war is over and peace again settles down like a holy benediction over our beautiful land.[451]

Colonel Hamilton could not be spared from the important position he had occupied from the commencement of the struggle, and although his visits home were frequent, the elegant house on Broad street wore an air of desolation as the shadows of realities and uncertainties crept into it. The reports of victories and defeats brought terror and dismay into every heart, for loved ones were in jeopardy and mourning was in the land.

One day there came a letter from the absent husband that thickened the veil of apprehension and spread a new gloom over the hearts of those who read it. "We must expect bad news my dear wife," it went on to say; "and although I would shield my cherished ones from war's disasters I cannot do it. Reports were brought in last night by our scouts that Rosedale was in ashes and your brother, in a desperate hand to hand encounter with some of the boys in blue, received a wound from which he died before reaching the hospital camp. I was hoping to be able to shield him, and for our mother's sake send him north. But now he is beyond our reach."

"My poor, poor brother!" cried Mrs. Hamilton, as the letter dropped from her hands. "I had placed so much hope on his coming! What can I tell Mother? She is so much better, and was asking only this morning when Charles would be here?"

"We cannot break the new sad news to her," replied the daughter; "let us wait for Father. Somehow he is able to do everything without difficulty."

Lillian smiled in spite of her tears. "Yes, darling, we will wait." But it could not be. The[452] hungry heart of the mother was enduring the agony of famishing, and her cries for her only son were truly pitiful.

"Let the consequences be what they may I cannot longer endure her appeals; she must know the truth," she said to Lily one morning some weeks after. "Mother—Pearl cannot send him to you—how gladly he would do it if he could; but it is too late!"

"Too late?"

"Yes, Mother; the war you know. It has destroyed Rosedale, scattered the servants and—"

"Charles?"

"Charles has fallen into the ruin."

"Charles? Will he not come?"

"Never Mother; he is dead! And we are alone!"

"Dead! Dead! And he will not come! Gone! All, all gone!" and the white fingers linked themselves together, twisting and untwisting with a slow nervous motion as they lay upon her lap, while her large eyes never moved their gaze from the face before her.

"Dead! Dead!" she murmured.

"Pearl will be here by and by, and he will love you and be as true a son as my brother would have been. Let us wait and watch for him now."

"Dead! Dead! My boy—my Charles!" From this one subject nothing could divert her thoughts. The sad, mournful wail bubbled up from her stricken heart as naturally as her breath issued from her lungs, moaning and breathing; yet not a tear moistened the burning eyeballs, until one morning while Vina was arranging her dress for the day and telling her how "de poor heart broke[453] when little Shady went out and neber more come back," the unseen hand laid a finger upon the main-spring of human life and it stopped. Mrs. Belmont, the ambitious mistress of Rosedale was also dead! The flickering light of a once massive brain was blown out; the prison door opened, and the pent-up soul was gone! Now indeed were the shadows deepened! The emblems of mourning were upon the door and reflected their sombre shade's over everything within.

Colonel Hamilton could not leave his regiment, as they were engaged in active duty; and so the daughter laid her away in Woodland cemetery under the cool shadows, as the setting sun was scattering its last rays upon the sparkling waters at the base of the hill. As the birds were chanting their good-night songs the solemn cortege turned away—back to life with all of its coming and stirring events, yet with heavy hearts.

"Yes, darling, we will leave Aunt Vina sole mistress of all and go to Kirkham for a few weeks at least," Mrs. Hamilton said a few mornings after, in answer to her daughter's plea.

"Willie is so anxious to tell me something and ask me about it. It has been a whole year since my visit, and two since our separation, he writes. I am so glad you have consented."

Few preparations were needed, and in a week Willie and "Phebe" were once more sitting together in the little parlor, where as a diminutive waif she had entered more than twelve years before, alone and unattended. What power of prescience could have pictured the changes? What vicissitudes and pleasures; what a mixing up of joys and sorrows, of snarls and hair-breadth escapes[454] there had been crowded into the rolling years.

"I guess I may better read the letter, for I can never tell you what is in it," said Willie, taking the well-worn missive from his pocket. "No, you may have that pleasure, while I will watch your face, reading as well as you."

"How you puzzle me, Willie. I have a good mind to run away alone to read it; you have made me nervous!"

"Not a step shall you go." But her quick eyes were following the page down at a rapid rate, and did not listen.

"O Willie!" she exclaimed as she turned the paper and went on. "Do you believe it? Can it be true?"

"He says so!"

"And he knows. 'I have written Mr. Palmer,' he says, 'and am informed that there will be no difficulty in the operation, but it will require considerable practice on your part to be able to walk firmly as he does.' I know that he has two cork feet or legs, as one day while behind him on Chestnut street a friend pointed him out with the expression, 'who would imagine that his walkers were artificial?' But those poor little feet! O Willie, there is no joy without its gloomy side!"

But Willie did walk; never without his cane, but his creeping days came to an end, and a thankful heart blessed God for its unexpected bliss. Social life now has no horrors for his sensitive nature, and he mingled freely with the refined and intelligent who frequented the parlors of the honored colonel and his lovely family.[455]

Reader, are you curious to see him? If so look for him in one of the largest clothing stores in the city of Philadelphia. Not as clerk or seamster as in former days, but as half owner and proprietor. Be good, pure and noble if you would succeed in reaching the eminence ambition points out to you. "Carve out your niche and place yourself in it," was the advice of a true philosopher to his son, and will answer for the young of all ages. Look up, and if too weak to climb, the hand above you will lend its willing aid.

The war came to a close at last, and Mr. St. Clair with his wife and daughter returned to their southern home. Mrs. Mason received them joyfully, but declared that she could "never, *never* forgive George for his silly freak of connecting himself with such plebeianism! My daughter's governess! He may better remain where such follies are tolerated!" But the parents only laughed, and the sister remained silent.

Rosedale would be rebuilt, not in as magnificent style as before, for its owner's long stay in the north had taught him many lessons.

"It may be I shall not care to occupy it," the son had remarked at the parting; "but my sweet sister will make a noble mistress for it."

And so it proved. George St. Clair became a northern man in deed as well as in feelings. He proved a successful tradesman and government officer in New York city in company with Elmore Pierson, who had been spared to his mother.

A happy family gathered in the home circle, blessed with fresh young blossoms of human life who were to adorn the world and bring comfort into the declining years of those whose feet were^[456] going downward. It is but a short journey between the two great rival cities, and the friends bound together by so many vicissitudes kept up a pleasant intimacy, often reviving past memories by tales of pleasant scenes or strange coincidences that would otherwise fade from sight in the moving panorama of human existence.

"We will have that Christmas dinner we were to have had three years ago," exclaimed Colonel Hamilton a week before the world-famed day. "A regular house warming! Let me see! Can we not get Willie's sister here with her family, and not let the dear boy know anything about it until then? Gaylord and his wife have gone back to their home, and I suppose he would not come with any amount of coaxing! He has grown so sour and ugly during the last six years that I pity that feeble little wife of his! O my letter! I have not even told you what has set me in such a commotion! Just like one of my freaks of forgetfulness!"

"I was wondering," laughed Mrs. Hamilton, for he was skipping around the room with the joyousness of a little boy, while searching in his pockets for the letter that was to make the revelations.

"Where is the thing? Well I declare, if it is not down to the office on the desk, as true as the world! If Willie gets hold of it! But no matter."

"Do, tell me, Pearl! I am glad you have doffed your regimentals. How you would look in a Colonel's uniform at this moment!"

"Honor and glory must pass away, but the St. Clair's will not pass away; they are coming and may be here to-day, Mrs. Mason and all!"

"And remain till after the holidays?"^[457]

"Longer, my dear! Christmas dinner, however, is the main subject under consideration. Let me see; Vina is getting pretty old for such an occasion, and if she will keep little Charlie safe in the nursery, it is about all we ought to ask of her. Lizzie is good in her place, and little Bobby is a treasure; but we must have another cook. What makes you look so solemn, my dear wife?"

"O, no—only——."

"Well—only what?"

"Is that Major Belknap to be here?"

"Do you not like him, Lillian? He was one of the bravest and noblest officers in the whole regiment."

"It is not that. But how can I ever spare my darling child?"

"This will have to be done some day; and I know of no one to whom I could more easily transfer our daughter's happiness. It is evident that her heart is not wholly her own, and it would not look well: for you or me to interfere with any arrangement of this kind," he laughed. The sunshine of the husband's cheerfulness fell into the chilly places of the mother's fears, warming them into brightness.

The Christmas festivities were a secured success.

George St. Clair came down from New York, to be clasped in the arms of his devoted mother; and receive the hearty hug from the dear old father, and loving embrace from one sister, and the cold salutations of the second. "If this does not take away my breath," he exclaimed, drawing his hesitating wife towards the stately Mrs. Mason, while disengaging herself from the demonstrative greetings of others.[458]

"Sister," he said, "this is my wife, who has generously consented to add an additional lustre to the St. Clair escutcheon, and, without doubt, would as kindly place you on her list of friends!"

Anna extended her hand, which Mrs. Mason took with a stiff bow of recognition.

This did not escape the quick eye of Colonel Hamilton. "A trifle freezy for so warm a room," he whispered, sotto voce, as he turned to meet Willie, who was approaching, leaning on the arm of his foster-sister.

"This way, my boy. A Merry Christmas," and he opened the door into the family sitting-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins, with their own small Willie, were waiting his coming.

He drew back. "Am I dreaming! Fanny, my sister! Is this really you?" A tear found its way to the calm blue eyes, whose fountain had been closed for many a happy month by the blessings that had been piled upon it.

"We are all here, my brother! You would not come to us, so we came to you! If Mother could see—and know!"

Her voice choked and she turned to the window.

What a happy circle gathered around that bountifully-loaded table on that Christmas day! Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and lovers! While the host stood with uplifted hands, asking the Lord to bless and draw all hearts together, an "Amen" found its way out of every answering soul; and the feast went on.

Here we leave them, gentle reader,—bid them all good bye, with a wish and a prayer for their future happiness and success.

THE END