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A WAITING HEART.

BY LOUISA CAPSADEL.

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CHAPTER I.

"To teach thee that grief hath her needful part,
Midst the hidden things of the human heart."

"HELP! help!" a woman's voice called out imploringly as a carriage dashed down a narrow street.

But on the carriage went, over curb-stones, around a corner, and at last over a pile of bricks in front of an unfinished building.

In a moment the occupants were thrown on the gravel before them, and from the woman's head there trickled a stream of blood.

There was the usual excitement, and a rough crowd, such as would naturally be drawn from such a locality, which came with loud exclamations of pity and surprise, but none seemed disposed to offer help.

"What is the matter?" asked Dr. Brainard, driving up and addressing some of the spectators who had gathered around.

"There has been a runaway, and I guess the woman is killed," said a man carelessly.

"Hold my horse, and let me see," said he, tossing him the reins and making his way through the crowd.

"My God! it is Mrs. Benoir," said he, gazing on the fair features of the lady on the ground before him.

"Some one bring me my buggy immediately," he cried. "There, lift her carefully."

"What shall we do with the driver?" asked a by-stander.

The doctor turned and looked a moment at the red, bloated face of the drunken coachman, and said:

"It would serve him right to leave him where he is—he is not much hurt, I think—but carry him in there," pointing to a small grocery near by, "and call Dr. Irvin to attend him. Now, my man, drive as quickly as possible to No. 30 —— Avenue."

A shriek from the servant that opened the door, put the house in commotion, and the other servants gathered around with terror-stricken faces, as the apparently lifeless form was carried up the steps.

"Is she dead?" asked one.

"No, but she is seriously hurt. Send for Mr. Benoir immediately, and for Cora, too, if she is not at home."

The words had scarcely left his lips when a pale, slight girl, of perhaps fifteen, appeared at the door and asked, in surprise:

"What is the matter, Dr. Brainard?" then darting to his side, cried, "She is not dead! oh, tell me she is not dead."

"No, Cora," said he, looking pityingly at the pallid face that was upturned so imploringly, "but I dare not tell you she will live."

She let go of the doctor's hand, and followed them into the room, then stationed herself by the bed on which they had laid her mother, and said:

"This is my place; now I am ready to do anything you wish."

"Hold this bandage," said Dr. Brainard, quietly.

He bound up her head, gave her a potion, and then sat down to await the result.

Mr. Benoir came in affrighted, went to the bedside and

looked at his wife, then at the doctor, to see if his countenance would give him any ray of hope, but it did not, and he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

Hour after hour passed by, but still no change in the sufferer.

She lay in an unconscious state, her pulse giving sign that there was life, and nothing more.

"Doctor," said Mr. Benoir, at last, "I cannot stand this; something must be done."

"Nothing more can be done," said he, "but I will send for Dr. Lamond."

A messenger was sent. Dr. Lamond came, looked at Mrs. Benoir, and then the two men went out to hold a consultation.

The little bronze clock on the mantel was just on the stroke of twelve when they again entered the room.

Dr. Lamond came forward, felt her pulse, pushed gently back the long, dark hair, laid his hand on her head, then folded his hands and watched her.

"Will she live, doctor?" asked her husband, tremulously.

He did not reply.

As her husband uttered these words, Mrs. Benoir, for the first time, unclosed her eyes, looked up at the group around her, then gave a little shiver, as if her feet had already touched the cold waters of death.

"Doctor, she will live! See, she is conscious!" said Mr. Benoir, bending over her.

She looked up at her husband, and said, faintly:

"No, Hugh, I cannot live; I am dying now; ere the morning dawns I shall be at rest."

A low groan broke from her husband's lips, and Cora, who until now had been calm, sobbed aloud.

"Hugh," said she, laying her hand tenderly on his bowed head, "you must not grieve so. I could wish to live for your and Cora's sake but God knows best. My

poor child," said she, as Cora took her hand, "it is hard to leave you. You must be a father and a mother both to her, Hugh, and in the days to come you will not forget me, will you, my husband?"

"Never, never, my darling wife!" said he, taking her head in his arms, while a great sob choked his manly voice.

"You are exciting your wife, Mr. Benoir," said Dr. Brainard.

"No, doctor, nothing can excite me now, and you will not deny me this last, sweet privilege," said she, pleadingly.

The kind old doctor bowed his head, and motioning to Dr. Lamond, they both went out and closed the door, and the three were left together for the last time.

When the doctor returned, Cora lay on the bed, crying piteously, the father with his head bowed in his hands, but the spirit of the mother had passed beyond.

* * * * * * *

The room was shrouded in oppressive gloom, the pall of darkness hung over the whole place.

In the middle of the room, on a marble table, rested the casket in which lay the dead, robed for her last home.

Death did not seem to have touched her, for she lay there like one asleep, her head turned gently aside, and the soft brown hair was parted carelessly over her brow, while her hand clasped a rosebud on her breast.

It was nearing the time for the funeral, and Cora stole into the room to take a last look at her mother. "Oh, my mother!" she cried, as she kissed the lips that evermore would be mute, "how can I ever live without you!"

Then feeling her utter loneliness, she threw herself into a chair, and hiding her face in the curtains of the window, wept long and softly to herself.

Some one entered the room. She looked up and saw it was Dr. Brainard.

He did not notice her, but stood with folded arms looking at the still, cold form before him. With tears coursing down his cheeks, he stooped and kissed the pale brow, tenderly, reverently, then went out and closed the door.

A hot flush mounted to Cora's brow, but it died away as quickly as it came.

"They were children together," she reasoned, "and he has been our physician for years. Who knows but he may have loved her, and even if he did not; they have been friends long enough for me not to be angry at this little act of love and respect, given for the last time."

"Cora," said a servant entering the room, "could you not persuade your father to eat something? He has not tasted food since your mother died."

"I will try," said Cora, and going out to the kitchen, she took the waiter of dainty food the cook had prepared and went into the library where her father was.

"Father," she said, softly. "I have brought you a cup of coffee."

He shook his head.

"Come, father, drink it, you will be sick if you do not. You are feverish now," said she, laying her hand on his brow.

He motioned it away.

"Father," said she, putting down the cup, "is it not enough for me to be left without a mother? Do you want to die and leave me, too? Who would care for me when you were gone?"

"Cora, I would do anything to please you, but the very thought of food makes me sick."

"But only try to drink a little coffee, you are so weak."

He took the cup from her hand, tasted it, and then put it down, saying:

"Go! urge me no more, for I cannot."

She kissed her father, and taking the untasted food, left the room.

* * * * * * *

"The Lord gave, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord," said the gray-haired minister as the clods fell with a dull sound into the grave, hiding the loved face forever from mortal view.

Sobs mingled with groans came from the friends gathered there, for Mrs. Benoir had died as she had lived, beloved by all who knew her.

It has been said that there is no grief so great but that in time it will wear away. But people shook their heads as Hugh Benoir went by, for he looked as if years instead of months had passed over him since his wife's death.

His eyes were sunken, his step enfeebled, and all vigor of health gone.

Cora noticed the change and grew alarmed. "Dr. Brainard," said she, one day, when she answered the bell, and met him at the door, "are you going to see father?"

"Yes."

"I wish you would urge him to take something. He grows worse each day."

"I will do my best, Cora, but I am afraid medicine will do him little good."

"Do try," said she, clasping his hand. "I cannot bear to see him suffer so."

"Ah, doctor, is that you?" said her father, opening his door. "Come in."

"It is of no use," said he, when Dr. Brainard recommended several things. "I do not need medicine. It is this mental torture that is killing me. I feel as if I cannot stand it any longer." To the suggestion that he should go to Europe for a time, he answered: "One cannot run away from sorrow; it follows us where we will, and it will not 'down at our bidding.'"

"But you do not know what a wonderful invigorator the

sea air is. Only try it, and I am sure you will be pleased with the result. One is apt to grow melancholy when shut up with none but books for company. Seriously, I think it is your duty to go."

"But what would I do with Cora? take her with me?"

"No, not this time. I would cheerfully take her into my own family and care for her until your return."

"But it would break her heart to part from me now, poor child! She has been constantly with me since her mother died. She is very quiet, but I know she suffers intensely."

"I do not doubt it, such natures suffer most, but I think Cora would be glad to have you go, much as it might pain her, for she is very deeply concerned about your health."

"She is in the hall. I will call her in, and if she is willing, I will consent to go," said he. Cora came in with a frightened look on her face, for she knew not what she was to hear. "You are no worse, father?" asked she, going over and sittting down by his side.

"No, my child, but I think of going to Europe soon."

"Oh father!"

"But Dr. Brainard thinks it best."

"It will be so hard to have you leave me," said she, turning away to hide her tears.

"I know it, Cora," said he, stroking her hair, "and I wish I could take you with me. Would you like to stay at the doctor's while I am gone? He has kindly asked that you might."

"If Mrs. Brainard and Estella would have no objections, I would rather stay with them than any one else."

"They will have no objections I am sure. Estella will be pleased to have one so near her own age with her," said the doctor.

"Is that all you want with me, father?"

"Yes, pet."

"Then, if you will excuse me, I will go."

"Now that it is decided, when will you start?" asked the doctor, addressing Mr. Benoir.

"Next week, if possible. I shall commence to make arrangements immediately. You can draw on me through the bank for anything Cora may need, and should I never return, I want you to be her guardian."

"It shall be as you wish."

"You will be kind to her, doctor, for she is a strange child, and sensitive to a fault."

"I pledge you my honor that I will be a father to her in every sense of the word. I see you are tired and need quiet, and I will leave you. Be sure to take the medicine I gave you. Good-morning."

* * * * * * *

All arrangements have been made. Hugh Benoir was to start for Europe. It was the last night Cora and her father would spend together for months, and perhaps forever. To-morrow the house would be closed until his return. It was a sad, sad evening to them both, and they proposed to spend it in her mother's room, which had not been opened since Mrs. Benoir closed it herself.

Cora opened the door and stood irresolute for a moment on the threshold. It seemed almost a sacrilege to enter. There was her chair drawn up by the grate, her slippers beside it; on the table her embroidery and writing-desk, with the pen thrown down on a half-finished page. Cora looked up at her father as she noted these things. He was leaning against the door, a look of intense pain on his face, and his teeth tightly set over his bloodless lips.

"Shall I put them away, father?" said Cora, in a tremulous voice, moving toward the table.

"No, no!" said he, putting out his hand as if to shield them; "her hands placed them there; leave them alone. Only one thing remove, and that is her picture over the mantel; I wish to take it with me."

Cora took down the picture and placed it in his hand.

"My wife! my wife!" said he with emotion, as he looked at the beautiful face, "Oh that you were with us still!"

"Father," said Cora, putting her arms around his neck, "mother is an angel now, and much as we miss her dear presence we must not wish her back. 'He doeth all things well.' Let us try and remember this."

"I know it, my child, but it is so hard to say 'Thy will be done.' I cannot bow meekly under the rod that has stricken me. What will I do without my little ministering angel when I am far away, a stranger in a strange land?"

"You must write to me then whenever you feel lonely, and I will comfort you all I can."

"You have been a great comfort already, Cora. Life would have been insupportable if it had not been for you. You have waited on me without a murmur."

"I had no reason to murmur, father. It was a pleasure to wait on you, and I am only sorry that I cannot do more," said she, her voice trembling at the thought that he would soon be too far away for her to care for him.

He gathered her into his arms, and sitting down in a chair, rocked her back and forth as if she were a babe he was hushing to sleep. It was a night that neither forgot during the long separation that followed.

The clock was striking eleven. Mr. Benoir gently unwound Cora's arms from about his neck, and said: "It is late, my child; I must say good-night, and if ever we meet again I trust it will be with happier hearts. Shall I leave you here?"

Cora clung to him until he closed the door, then sank down by a chair and cried, "Oh, Father in Heaven, spare him! spare him for my sake!"

The parting between Mr. Benoir and the servants, the

next morning, would have touched the hardest heart. There was John, and his wife, who had nursed him when a babe, and had grown old in his service, with tears rolling down their wrinkled cheeks, bidding him God-speed. Nor was Mr. Benoir less affected, for he had become greatly attached to them during these long years. Cora stood apart from them all, her eyes closed, and arms folded tightly across her heart, as if that would ease the pain there.

"Cora, my child," said her father, crossing over to where she stood, "don't grieve so; I will come back again."

"Oh, if I could only think so. I have tried to be cheerful, tried not to cause you any more pain, but cannot, cannot help it," she said, throwing herself into his arms and bursting into tears.

He did not hush her grief, but softly stroked her hair for a minute, then drew her down by his side, and talked with her pleasantly until she had regained her wonted composure and a little of her old cheerfulness.

"Shall we go now?" he asked at length.

She assented, and they left the house, entered the carriage, and drove down to the wharf.

"Ah, good-morning, Hugh!" said Dr. Brainard, coming up when the carriage stopped. "A fine morning to sail! you will have a pleasant journey, no doubt. Cora, Estella came down with me."

The meeting between the girls was very cordial, and Dr. Brainard and Mr. Benoir left them to themselves.

As soon as her father left her, Cora's cheerfulness vanished, and, seating herself, she covered her face with her hands, to gain strength for the ordeal before her.

"Cora," said Dr. Brainard, coming up a few minutes later and gently removing her hands, "your father is waiting to say good-bye."

Cora sprang up and caught her father's hands, her voice too full for utterance. He clasped her in his arms, saying, "Cora, my darling child! good-bye. May God bless you!"

She clung to him a moment in the agony of despair, then, with a great sob, let him go, and leaned upon Estella for support. She felt the crowd sweep by to enter the steamer, but she did not look up. She heard the bell ring, and knew that the vessel would soon move off, but she did not heed it. Estella was frightened at her mute grief, and shaking her gently by the arm, said, "Cora, your father is waving to you from the deck."

"Oh, Estella, how can I see him go!" she cried, covering her face with her hands.

"It will be hard, I know, but you must remember that his very life depends upon this journey. This separation is paining him also. Do not grieve him more by causing him to bear away with him the remembrance of such a doleful face."

Cora moved away from Estella, leaned over the railing, waved her handkerchief in response, and remained looking outward until her father could no longer be distinguished, then walked slowly back with the doctor and Estella, and entered the carriage that awaited them Leaning her head on Estella's shoulder, she wept all the way to the home that was to be hers until her father should return.

"My poor little girl! how I wish I could comfort you!' said the doctor, when they arrived at his house, and he lifted her out of the carriage.

At these few words, so kindly uttered, her tears burst forth anew, and she clung to the doctor's hand, feeling that he alone stood between her and the world which had grown so cold and dark."

CHAPTER II.

CORA was selfish in nothing but her grief. This she brooded over until she could think or speak of nothing else.

"Cora," said the doctor, coming into the room where she sat gazing out of the window at the leaden clouds, with despair written on every feature of her pale face, "are you cold? Come to the fire."

For a moment she continued her gaze, then turned and said:

"Am I cold? Oh, yes, so cold that I feel as if nothing could ever warm me into life again. My heart is as dead as this!" she exclaimed, passionately, laying her hand on a bunch of withered flowers, "but my head is throbbing and my pulse is quick; see!"

"You are nervous and need rest. I will tell Estella to go with you to your room. You will feel better in the morning."

"Never while I feel as bitter as I do. I don't see why I have to suffer so. What have I done to deserve it?"

"Cora, I am astonished to find you trying to steel your heart against God's tender mercies," said the doctor, rather sternly. "Your trials are great, and I know they are hard to bear, but think how many have lost both father and mother—been thrown out upon the cold charities of the world with none to help them. You have a loving father and friends, and are surrounded by all the luxuries wealth can give. I may appear harsh, Cora, but do not mean to be. I have taken a strange interest in you and cannot see your loving, trusting nature hardened by the waves of distrust that seem to sweep over you. Oh, Cora, still trust in the God whom your angel mother trusted in," said he looking sorrowfully down into the pale face that with its look of suffering reminded him strangely of Beatrice.

"Thank you, I will think of your words," said she quietly, then slowly left the room.

There is no hopelessness like that of youth. In after years we can look back and know that the problem which lay so blankly before us has worked out its own solution, and that it was but an opening to green fields and flowery paths, wherein our tired feet found rest.

But to her the problem seemed so difficult, the cloud stretched out so hopelessly before her life, that she lived in utter darkness.

She had cheered and encouraged her father because she felt it her duty, but now that he was gone, and all restraint taken away, she gave up to the bitterness she felt.

As she sat before the fire in her room that night, pondering over the doctor's words, a sense of her true condition flashed through her mind.

Was she really forsaking the teachings of her youth? God forbid! and kneeling down by her bed she prayed as she never had before, not that the cup might pass by, but that He would shape her path to his own choosing and make her willing to say, "Thy will be done;" and out of the dust and ashes of it all, there came a new hope, a new faith, that was far, far beyond her greatest expectations.

"How do you feel this morning?" asked Doctor Brainard of Cora, a few days after his conversation with her.

"Better, thank you," she replied, smiling.

"I am glad tc hear it. You must take plenty of exercise and get red cheeks, like Estella's," said he, playfully pulling her curls. "What a contrast there is between you, you little drooping snow-drop!"

There was indeed a contrast between them. Estella was tall and beautifully formed. She had large, hazel eyes, with long, golden lashes sweeping her fair, oval face, that was haughty in its contour; nose Grecian in shape;

mouth straight and firm; long, sunny hair that she wore in massive braids wound round her classic head, which gave it a queenly grace. Her manner was cool and lady-like, never betraying the least emotion. Cora was her opposite, slight and pale, with brown, clustering curls; large, truthful blue eyes and daintily arched brows; a mouth beautifully curved, with a child-like tremor about it. There are some faces we meet which seem to have a subtle influence that makes us like them in spite of ourselves. Such a face had Cora Benoir. Estella was far the more beautiful; yet she lacked that sweet, half shy, half sad expression that was so attractive in Cora.

"Where is your mother, Estella?" asked the doctor, when the breakfast-bell rang.

"In her room. She was at Mrs. Stone's party last night, and did not get home till very late."

The doctor sighed.

"Had you not better tell her breakfast is ready?" said he, after a time.

"She has heard the bell."

He looked at his watch. "Come, let us go to breakfast, for it is time to visit my patients."

"From father! Why doctor, where did you get it?" said Cora, her face beaming as she picked up the letter that lay on her plate, and glanced at her address.

"It came this morning. The steamer remains about two hours at Halifax, and he posted it there.

"He is feeling better already," said Cora, as she read the letter.

"No doubt, he would tell a different tale now," said the doctor, laughing.

Cora looked up questioningly.

"He is only sea-sick."

"Oh!" said she, feeling relieved.

"Is he pleased with his journey, so far?"

"Yes, sir. Would you like to read the letter?"

He took it, read it through, then handed it back, saying:

"You need not have any more fears, Cora, for your father will come back as well as ever."

Just as they had finished breakfast, Mrs. Brainard swept into the room and sat down at the table. She was tall and slender, with black hair and dark, piercing eyes, and her clear, olive complexion was in perfect harmony with the wine-colored dress she wore. She was very young in appearance, and one would not think the tall, fair-haired girl by her side her daughter.

"Good-morning," said Dr. Brainard, pleasantly.

"Good-morning," she replied, indifferently.

"The ham and eggs are cold," said she, turning to the servant who stood by her chair, "and if it happens again, you will lose your place, remember that, Hannah."

"It was not Hannah's fault, for we waited breakfast some time for you," said Estella.

"Wait until you are spoken to, if you please! Your impudence is unbearable, and I will have no more it."

Estella paid no attention to her mother's angry look or words, but turning to Cora, said, "Come into the library, I want to show you the book of engravings that father received last week."

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Cora, as she turned over the leaves.

"They are all Swiss scenes. What could be more picturesque than that group of peasants? How I would like to go to Switzerland. Nothing would please me better than to clamber over the Alps, or in the long summer days rest beside Lake Leman, in sight of the snow-white battlements of Chillon, that Byron has told us about. You ought to read Mr. Harmon's letters to father, they put me in a perfect fever for traveling. You, I suppose, will get glowing descriptions from your father. He can

write again in two weeks, can he not?" she asked, addressing her father who had just entered the room.

"Yes, he will be safe in Liverpool before that time unless something unusual happens."

"Don't you wish you could have gone with your father, Cora?" asked Estella.

"No, I want to wait until I am older, and my education is finished, then I can appreciate such a trip."

"Do you expect to go?"

"Certainly, it is an old dream of mine."

"I hope your dream will prove a reality; I am afraid mine never will. I have been coaxing father this long while to go, but he says that one trip to Europe has been enough for him, and that the rest of his days he means to remain in his own country."

"Which is far superior to any other," said the doctor, looking up from a note he had been writing.

"But it is quite fashionable to go to Europe now."

"Oh, is this why you wish to go, Estella?" said the doctor, laughing.

"No, sir, but because I really wish to see the place I have read so much about."

"I guess I will send you over with a party of our friends one of these days."

Estella changed the subject.

"This is such a beautiful morning, Cora, let us go out for a ride."

"Estella, I would like to know where you are going?" said Mrs. Brainard, coming to the door, as they were ready to drive off. "You know Eugene is coming today, and I wish you to be here to meet him."

"I am not particularly anxious whether I am or not. You can entertain him if I am not," and she drove off without looking at her.

"How can you talk so to your mother?" said Cora.

"Ah, my dear, you will get used to that if you remain

with us long. I idolize my father, but I fear I have but little love for my mother. Had you been forced to bear what I have all my life, you would have cried yourself to death long ago, but I am made of entirely different material, and such things do not hurt me."

"Perhaps you do not always do right, Estella."

"I know that I do not, but there is a point where forbearance ceases to be a virtue. You know how patient my father is, and you ought to see how she treats him. Why—but let us talk of something else, or I will forget she is my mother. We will drive faster, and try to get back before Eugene comes."

"May I ask who Eugene is?"

"A cousin of mine. He graduated at Princeton last week. He is an orphan, and like yourself, has but few relatives; we, I believe, being the only ones, excepting his grandmother. The little village in which she lives is too quiet and monotonous to suit him, and he has decided to make his home with us until he has one of his own. He is handsome and very wealthy, but I know you will not like him if he is anything like he was four years ago. Mother has set her heart on making a match between us, but I never saw a relative of mine that I could love well enough to marry, and I would not have him if he were worth ten times as much as he is. A nice life we would live! Wouldn't our wills clash!"

"Does your cousin know your mother's designs?"

"No, indeed, and she will be careful that he does not."

"Oh, Estella, this day has brought mother so vividly before my mind," said Cora, as they came in sight of the large greenhouses. "She was with me the last time that I was here. Oh, can I ever forget her!"

Estella was silent.

"I am going to buy some flowers, Cora; would you like

to get out and go with me?" asked she at length, trying to draw her mind from the past.

"I would rather remain here."

"Eugene has come," said Estella, when they arrived home. "Hear the piano; he is a brilliant musician."

"Cousin Estella, how glad I am to see you!" said Eugene, rising from the piano and fondly kissing her; then holding her off at arm's length, he exclaimed, "What a beauty you have grown to be!"

"Thank you; how glad I am that I can return the compliment. This is my friend, Miss Cora Benoir," said she, turning to her as she stood in the doorway. "She is staying with us while her father is in Europe, and I shall expect you to make yourself very agreeable to my guest."

He bowed low, placed her a chair, then went on into the next room, where Estella had gone to remove her wrappings, and said: "You would not remain at home to meet me," in a reproachful tone.

"I did not think you would care. Accept this as a peace offering," said she, taking a moss rosebud from her bouquet, and pinning it on his buttonhole. "We understand each other too well to quarrel," said she, looking up into his face.

"That means, I suppose, that you have as little confidence in me now as when we were children together, and that you love me as little."

"Exactly, but then you are handsome and talented, and looking at you in that light, I am very proud that you are my cousin. Now don't get angry, but let us go to mother and Cora."

"They would suit each other so well," said Mrs. Brainard, in a low voice to Cora, "but I cannot make her think so. I shall expect you, Cora, to help me."

"I abhor match-making," Cora replied,

"Indeed!"

Cora colored at the ridicule the tone meant to apply, and walking away, sat down in the bay window.

"What are you dreaming about?" cried out Estella.

"Come, sing this piece from Tom Moore. I want Cousin Eugene to hear what a voice you have."

"Please excuse me."

"No, you are too modest; here is the music. I will put back the curtain, so you will have more light."

Cora complied reluctantly. The bright rays of the sun fell through the window, across her pale face, lighting it with a sunny glow as she sat at the piano, and the words of the song fell from her lips as sweet and as fine as a bird's warblings.

Eugene stood and watched her with a look of admiration in his large eyes. She looked so pure, so innocent, so unlike the women he had known all his life.

The color came and went in her cheeks, and the violet eyes filled with tears at the sad, passionate words of the song.

"A creature all soul!" he mentally exclaimed. "She could love deeply, passionately perhaps, but could not hate. It would be something to win her love. I have a notion to try, but it may grow monotonous after a time. How different she is from my matchless Estella, mine at the speaking of the word, if I may understand my aunt aright. No, no, good aunt, keep your daughter, I have no relish for the truth, even though it fall from beautiful lips. I would not dare to flirt with her, for she is cold as marble, keen and swift as an arrow, and besides understands me too thoroughly. But as for that little blossom ——" He did not finish the sentence, for the song was ended, and she looked up with tears still quivering on the long, brown lashes.

A guilty flush spread over his face, for, traitor-like, he felt she had divined his thoughts; but the next moment the utter absurdity of the feeling presented itself to his

mind, and giving her a sweet smile, and a look from his dark, fascinating eyes:

"You sing well. Many having such a voice would be tempted to go on the stage."

"I have never been so ambitious; but should I ever be forced to depend on my own exertions for a living, should in all probability put my voice to some use. Estella has told me you were quite a musician. Please favor me with this piece from Beethoven."

"People have flatttered me enough to tell me that I am," said he, bowing. "After I am through, your verdict shall decide it."

"I am not capable of judging."

"Oh, but you are. This is one of my favorites," said he, taking the music from her hand; "Is it yours?"

"Yes, but I admire all of Beethoven's compositions."

"How I wish I could play like you," said Cora, after he had complied with her request. "Your touch is so light, easy and graceful."

"Yet your voice is worth it all, and you must sing for me again. Sing me this old ballad."

Estella looked up from the music he had presented her a few moments before, and an angry light came into her eyes as she noticed his lover-like behavior to Cora.

Would he try to blight her young life? Would he sue for her love, and having gained it, toy with it, as a child with a plaything? Yes, she knew his race well. She would warn Cora. She would not be blind to his thoughts.

"Cora," said she, interrupting them, "see how our flowers have withered. Let us go and put them in the water."

CHAPTER III.

"Come, I would forewarn thee and forearm thee; for keen
are the weapons of his warfare,
And while my soul hath scorned him, I have watched
his skill from afar."

"CORA, are you going to school?" asked Estella, addressing her as she sat in the library with Eugene, discussing the merits of some book, a few weeks after his arrival.

"I must start again some time; I suppose I may as well go this morning," she replied, rising from her chair, reluctantly.

"What will you do with me?" said Eugene, with mock gravity.

"Leave you at home, or let you call on the ladies. You know Nina Rivers. She is quite a belle, and no doubt she would be pleased to add your name to her list of admirers."

"I don't like your belles, they are always such horrid flirts."

"And pray what are you? It would be 'diamond cut diamond,' I think."

"You misjudge me," said he, with a slight touch of anger in his tone.

"No, I think not. Men of your temperament are all such. It is just as natural for them to flirt as it is to breathe. But, Eugene, do spare the innocent. If you must flirt, let it be with your own kind," said she, seriously, and in a low tone.

He looked at her defiantly a moment, then coming up to her side, said:

"I shall do as I please, now and always, remember that, and don't interfere."

"Remember that I shall interfere, and on the first occasion, too."

"And what good do you think it will do, my pretty cousin?" said he, smiling.

She drew herself up proudly, and left the room.

There are some men so base at heart that there is no deed too dark for them to do, if it would accomplish their own ends. Such a man was Eugene Tracy. Yet he had some good qualities, prominent among them was his generosity. No beggar asked in vain for alms. None ever poured a sorrowful tale in his ear, but that they found sympathy; but where his own interests were concerned he was selfish to the heart's core. He had never known a mother's nor a father's love; they had died ere he was old enough to feel their influence. Perhaps, if they had lived, he would have been a different man.

Cora's life had been almost one of seclusion. She cared not for society. To her it held no charms, and she felt more at home with her books and her music. Yet she was not unlike other girls. Sometimes her thoughts would wander off in a dreamy sort of way, while visions of the future, vague, yet sweet, would fill her mind, and prominent among her dreams now was a tall form of manly grace, a face handsome enough to enrapture an artist. Forgive her. She was so young, so unused to the way of the world, and women older and better versed in love than she had fallen in admiration before her hero.

A flush mounted on her cheek, as Eugene entered the room and stood by her side. She picked up her school-books to hide her confusion, but he noticed this, and taking advantage of it, began his role.

"I shall be so lonely to-day without you, for you are so kind, and have helped to make my time pass so different from aunt and Estella."

"But they do not mean to be unkind," said she, at last lifting her face.

"Perhaps not; yet it has always been so. After my

father died, I remained with them until I went to college, but do what I would, I could never please them. They say that I have talents, that I can become distinguished, if I choose, and I have sometimes thought that I would put my wealth and learning to some use; but who would be proud of me if I did? who cares if I live or die? If my parents had only lived, it would have been so different. Oh, you do not know what a dreary life it is to live uncared for, unloved!"

"No, I do not, and I trust I never may. I could not live without love. But you are not uncared for. Your aunt, your uncle, your cousin care for you; they would be proud to see you fill a high position in the world, and I am sure I would too."

"Would you, really? Thank you. That assurance cheers me as nothing else could, and will repay me for long, hard years of study. Believe me, trust me, be my guide, make me what I should be," said he, with sudden earnestness, looking down into her clear, blue eyes; and for the moment he was actually in earnest, for he obeyed every impulse whether good or bad.

"I cannot shape your future life, that depends on you alone, but I will help you all I can. I will be your friend always." Then she went away, feeling that Estella was unjust toward him, and that she had allowed herself to be influenced by her words, for she had been cold and distant whenever he approached her; but she resolved that hereafter she would make amends for it all.

"Ladies, if you will allow me, I will walk as far as the seminary with you," said Eugene, coming out of the door as they were starting.

He questioned Cora about her studies, and affected surprise when she expressed her liking for Greek and mathematics.

"You are so different from any one that I have met before. Don't look hurt. I am better pleased with you

than I ever was with any other young lady," said he, softly.

"Don't let him flatter you, Cora," said Estella, who had caught the smile he gave her, but not the words; "he has in all probability told many young ladies the same he is now telling you."

"How do you know?" he asked, quickly, his black eyes flashing.

"Don't I know you are a flirt?"

"I will not deny your accusations any more, but I will say, I can appreciate, yes, I can honor truth and innocence, when I meet it."

"Perhaps so," said she, in a tone that showed her doubt of it.

"Every one would think me a scoundrel, to hear you talk," said he, angrily. "I trust she understands me better than you."

"It is to be hoped, at least, that she does," she replied, indifferently.

"Cora," said Estella, after her cousin had left them, "do you believe all that Eugene tells you?"

"You would not have me believe that Eugene tells what is untrue?"

"I do not mean exactly that; but he says things that he knows can never be—that he would not even desire to be. Remember that all his life he has been surrounded by the gay and worldly, and he is not one to resist temptation."

"Then the more charitable we ought to be with his faults."

"Well, we will not quarrel. I like you, Cora, and have said this only for your good. All are not so true as you are."

"Don't praise me, Estella; you do not know what my feelings are sometimes."

"But you are different from Eugene and me. You

would scorn to tell an untruth, or to be anything but what you really are. We are not always so scrupulous. Your life has always been so secluded, that you know but little of the world. Perhaps I know little more; but what I do know only convinces me that very few are true."

"I cannot think like you, Estella. I cannot think meanly of any one until their actions prove it. If my faith in every one must grow dim, let me find it out myself. Let me keep my trust as long as I can, and when the time comes that I cannot keep it, I will be warned; but not now."

"Brave words, Cora, but I am afraid your loving, trusting nature will be duped some day. Madame De Bruler is waiting to speak to you."

"Good-morning, Cora!" and Madame De Bruler cordially embraced her pupil. "I was just on the point of sending for you. Blanche Wardleigh had a hemorrhage last night, and begged that I would have you come to her. You will find her in her old room."

Cora was soon beside her friend.

"Oh, Cora, I am glad to see you. It seems such an age since you were at school," said Blanche, putting her arms around her neck and kissing her.

"I am glad to see you, but sorry you are sick. I trust that you will be better soon."

"I know that I am worse, I feel so weak here," said she, laying her hand on her chest. "Father is coming to take me home to-morrow. Brother Grant has just finished at Princeton, and father has made him his agent. He is going south, and will take me with him for my health; but I know it will be of no use—my days are numbered. I ought to have told them sooner, but I dreaded to alarm mother. You must not forget me, Cora —you have been my dearest friend—and sometimes you must write to me, and tell me all about school. I did

hope I could have finished my studies before I left; but it does not matter now, I shall not need them up there."

"You are gloomy, Blanche. I have great faith in a change of climate, because it is already doing my father so much good, and I would not be surprised if you would come back and graduate with us yet," said Cora, trying to appear cheerful, although her heart almost doubted what she said.

"No, Cora, I shall never be here again. I am going just as sister Grace did. If Madame De Bruler is willing, you will stay with me to-night, won't you?"

"Yes, gladly."

"Estella," said Cora, going to her at recreation hour, "I will not go home with you to-night. Blanche will go home to-morrow, and wishes me to stay with her till then. She thinks she cannot get well, and I have but little hope of it myself. You will excuse me?"

"Certainly, but is there really no hope for her?"

"I have just been talking to Madame De Bruler. The doctor had said it would be better to send her home at once, and he would hardly have said that, if she was in no danger."

"Where is Cora?" asked Eugene, meeting Estella on the street as she was coming home from school.

"She will stay with Blanche Wardleigh to-night, for Blanche is going home to-morrow. She and Blanche are very intimate."

"Who is Blanche Wardleigh?"

"She is Blanche Wardleigh of Brighton, that is all I can tell you."

"I wonder if she is Grant Wardleigh's sister?"

"I have heard her speak of a brother Grant, at Princeton."

"It is the same, then. Talking of true men, Estella, you ought to know Grant Wardleigh. He is the best fellow that I ever met. He was my room-mate for the

last three years, and I never knew him to commit a mean act in all that while. He adores the ladies. You could not convince him they were anything less than angels."

"It is a pity he didn't convert you," said she, ironically.

"I think I should have been dubious about you being one, if he had."

She curled her lips scornfully, and walked away.

Eugene followed close behind, whistling merrily.

"Come, Estella, let us play this duet. I beg pardon for what I said to-day."

She came and sat down at the piano, as unconcerned as if nothing had happened.

"Has not Cora a grand voice?" he asked, after they were through.

"Yes, but it will never do her much good. She is so shy that she can hardly ever be persuaded to sing."

"She has been shielded too much like a tropical plant. She will get over all that when she sees more of the world. Isn't she the most innocent creature that you ever met?"

"Yes; and for that reason you should not take advantage of her."

"I am not doing so. I assure you I admire her immensely."

"I would like to know what you see in that little ignoramus to admire?" said Mrs. Brainard, who just then entered the room, and had caught the thread of their conversation. "She is as awkward as a country girl, and too thin and pale to be a beauty."

"Beg pardon, aunt, but you are mistaken for once. Miss Cora is not ignorant. I doubt if there are any of her age whose education is more thorough. She is bashful, I admit, but that has a charm for me, for I am tired of bold women." He paused a moment, to see the effect

of his last words, and then went on. "She is not beautiful like Estella, few are; but then she is interesting, at least I think so," and he smiled at the pet he had put his aunt in.

"There is no accounting for men's taste, they always admire these milk-and-water characters that any one can twine around their finger," said Mrs. Brainard.

"Just try to twine her around your finger, mother, and see how you will succeed," said Estella.

"Aunt cannot expect to find every one as strong-minded as herself," said Eugene.

"Don't say I am strong-minded," in an angry tone. "If there is anything that I detest, it is a strong-minded woman."

Eugene and Estella laughed, and Mrs. Brainard haughtily swept out of the room.

Cora little thought as she sat at her friend's bedside that she was the subject of conversation at Dr. Brainard's, nor did she care; she only thought of her friend's comfort. After she had given her the medicine the doctor had left, she asked if she should finish the book they had commenced reading together before.

"Yes," said Blanche, "I would like to have you finish it before I go home. Shade the light, so that it will not hurt my eyes. There; thank you."

It was late in the evening before the book was finished. Then they both were silent, for the weird, sad story had thrown a spell upon them that each was loath to break. Cora glanced at Blanche as she lay there, her long, black hair sweeping over the pillow, her dark eyes closed, her face thin and pale, with a hectic spot glowing on either cheek. There was a sweet, patient look that one seeing could not readily forget. It looked so hard that one so young, so beautiful, should die. "Must she lose all she loved?" Then she thought of her mother, and the tears rolled down her cheeks.

Blanche's large, dark eyes unclosed and eagerly scanned her face.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I was thinking of mother."

"If I could only comfort you, but a few words are all the world can give, and they seem cold. I have kept you up late, you ought to have been in bed long ago. It is such a pleasure to know that I shall have you with me the last night that I am here; and, oh, Cora, do not forget me after I leave. If I am too weak to write, Grant will answer your letters. I have told him so much about you, that you will not seem a stranger to him, and when I am dead, think of me sometimes for the sake of days that are gone."

"My dear, dear friend, I shall never forget you. It grieves me to think that we may never meet again."

"Do not say never meet again, Cora. I will only go before, you will come by and by."

"You do not know how rebellious I felt toward God, or you would not say so. I would not be reconciled to my mother's death, although I would let no one know how bitter I felt. Those feelings are all gone now; but will God ever forgive me?

"I felt just as you do when Grace died. She was my twin sister; we had shared each other's thoughts ever since we were old enough to talk; we read the same books; we loved the same music; took pleasure in the same pursuits, and when she was taken away I felt that God was cruel, that he had dealt unjustly. Mother tried to reason with me, but for a long time I was deaf to it all, but now I feel that He has forgiven me, and I do not fear to meet Him. I am getting hoarse, and will stop talking and try to sleep, for I have a long journey before me to-morrow. Poor father! he will find me changed. I wish that I had prepared him for the worst."

It was a sad group that gathered around Blanche Ward-

leigh in the school-room the next morning to say good-bye. Not an eye was dry, for Blanche was a favorite with them all. Even Estella cried. The girls looked on in amazement, for never had Estella been known to shed tears. Mr. Wardleigh was a kind, fatherly old gentleman, loving his child almost to idolatry, for she was his only remaining daughter, one other having been swept away just as she was budding into womanhood, by consumption. Blanche was sixteen, and had left them in the very bloom of health. It was thought that she, at least, would escape the destroyer. A few weeks before she had taken a severe cold, attended by a violent cough. She had not acquainted her parents with it, thinking it would wear off, but she daily grew weaker, and on summoning a physician, he pronounced it quick consumption. Mr. Wardleigh looked on his daughter with a sorrowful heart, and although he talked cheerfully of her recovery, it was more to cheer Blanche, who was desponding, than from any hope he entertained of it himself. Madame De Bruler had no trouble in quieting her pupils that day; all were as still as if some great sorrow had befallen each one of them, and when recitations were over, they went to their rooms, or silently wended their way home.

"What is the matter?" asked Eugene of Estella, as she and Cora entered the house on their return from school.

"Nothing; why?"

"You looked so serious."

"Is that anything strange?"

"Yes; you are quiet enough always, but to-night you are sad, fair cousin. Tell me all about it, I am ready to offer sympathy."

"Thank you; I do not need it."

"Guess what I have for you, snowdrop?" said Dr. Brainard, addressing Cora, as he stood with his arm resting on the mantel, gazing down on the trio.

Cora looked up, saw a smile play around his lips, then her eyes brightened. "A letter from father I know."

"Ah, you are good at guessing! Here."

Cora took the letter and darted from the room. In a little while she reappeared, her face beaming with joy.

"Oh, doctor! he is so much better, and has met with a pleasant party of Americans in Chester."

"I am glad to hear it, and glad, too, that he is safe across the ocean."

"Did your friend, Miss Wardleigh, return home to-day?" asked Eugene of Cora.

"Yes. It was quite a struggle for her to say good-bye to us. I never saw any one so attached to her school-mates. And her father was so kind."

"Did you ever see him, Eugene?" asked Estella.

"Yes."

"Does his son resemble him?"

"No. He is a blonde, with perfect features, but not the least feminine in appearance. The ladies, I believe, think him very handsome, and he is such a good, honest fellow, that he is a favorite with all. But this admiration has not made him the least conceited or vain, and he is very intelligent, too. He bore off the first honors at college.

"I bought you a new book to-day, Estella—entitled 'Ferndale.' It was written by George Graham. He lived here a few years ago. Don't you remember that pale, slight artist, that had such sorrowful-looking blue eyes?"

"Yes, I have been at his studio, but what has become of him? I think I have not seen him for two years."

"He is in Philadelphia. Grant Wardleigh told me not long ago, that he was engaged to his sister Grace, when she died. Speaking of Grant and his sister last

night, reminded me of it to-day while in a bookstore, and I bought it, thinking you might like to read it."

"I shall, most assuredly, since I know who the characters are."

"Now, Estella, read us 'Ferndale,'" said Eugene, after tea. "I feel just in the humor to listen. Uncle, don't you want to hear 'Ferndale'?"

"I have no objections."

They were all much interested in the story, when Mrs. Brainard swept into the room, dressed for an evening party. She wore an amber-colored silk with a bertha of black lace, while jewels flashed from her neck and arms. She looked beautiful, and she knew it.

"You are as radiant as a star, aunt," said Eugene, gayly.

"Are you going out again to-night?" asked her husband.

"Yes, you need not think because you stay at home, that every one else must. I would not miss Mrs. Fay's party for anything. Eugene, be so kind as to see if the carriage is at the door."

A look of pain crossed the doctor's face, he sighed, settled back in his easy-chair, but said nothing.

"The carriage is ready, aunt. Allow me to see you to it," said Eugene.

"Now, Estella, go on with your reading," said he, coming back and seating himself by her side

The book was half finished, and Estella was dipping into a new chapter, when the doctor looked at his watch, and said:

"It is ten o'clock. Time we were all asleep. Come, Estella, put up your book until to-morrow."

"Graham is an easy, pleasant writer, don't you think so, Estella?" said Eugene.

"Yes," said Estella, "and if his life furnished the material for the book, I pity him."

"So do I," said Cora. "It must be terrible to have the cup of happiness dashed so suddenly from one's lips. Oh, it seems to me that I could not live, if ever I loved any one as devotedly as he did Gertrude in the story, and have that person taken away."

"You know, Cora, some one tells us,

"'Life must long be borne ere sorrow breaks the chains.'"

"But I would wish to die. It would not be so hard, I think, after one has grown old, to lose those we loved, for we would know that there would soon be a happy reunion on the other side."

"What do you think about it, uncle?" asked Eugene.

"I think, too, it would be hard to see any we loved in their youth and beauty, laid in the grave; but it would be harder to live and see love grow cold, for in their graves we would know their love went with them. But to live side by side for years as though oceans rolled between, is far worse. God forbid, Cora, that you should live to suffer from either," said he, with emotion, forgetting, apparently, the picture of his own life conveyed in his words; but he remembered in a minute, and turning from them with a hasty "good-night," left the room.

A strange, gloomy feeling came over Cora. She knew not what occasioned it, whether the book or his words, but she could not shake it off, do what she would. Was it a foreboding of evil in store for her? she asked herself. Ah! she little knew, sitting there, that the two she called her friends would be the means of making her life even more pitiful than the hero's in "Ferndale!"

"Next week I will be seventeen years old," said Estella to Cora, as she entered her room, "and I have made up my mind to give a party. Eugene has promised to make all arrangements; he has good taste and will make it a success. Nina Rivers gives a party to-morrow night. Eugene is going. He told me last evening that he had been corresponding with her for a long time. I wonder

what mother would think if she knew that! Eugene is a great flirt, and I would laugh if he were caught at last. Nina, at one time, was a special favorite of his, and she is prettier now than she used to be. I would be very glad to find it true, for perhaps then I would have some peace, and my ambitious mamma would cease her scheming."

Why did Cora's heart so suddenly stand still, at Estella's words? What was it to her where he went or whom he loved? He was only her friend, she reasoned, and what else was she to expect? Oh, why did her heart beat so painfully—did she love him?

"Why, Cora! what is the matter? You are as pale as a ghost," said Estella.

"I do not feel well," said she, turning away, for fear Estella's eyes would read the truth.

"Stay with me to-night, please."

Cora complied with her request, and under the cover of darkness hid from her the truth that was gnawing at her heart; but far into the night, while Estella thought she was asleep, she lay there by her side, battling with the feeling her words had awakened.

CHAPTER IV.

"I loved him deeply, fondly, for I was half a child,
And his spirit held a mastery mysterious and wild.
I saw him as a being unrivaled on the earth,
And dreamed not in my earlier days of deeper truth and worth."

"MAY I come in, doctor?" asked Cora, opening the library door.

"Certainly, snowdrop. I thought you had gone out with Eugene and Estella. Are you not interested in the party, too?"

"Yes, sir, but I preferred staying home to-day. I have just received a letter from father. He is in Rome,

and thinks of returning soon," said she, sitting down on an ottoman at his feet.

"And take you away, my sunshine? I am almost selfish enough to wish that he would prolong his stay. How the sight of your face carries me back to the past, when your mother, father and I, were playmates. You are very much like your mother, Cora. You have the same brown curls and blue eyes, the same loving disposition. She was a great favorite with us all—we went to her to settle our disputes. Your father was a great, handsome fellow, then, and boy-like we were fierce rivals. I went away to study a profession, at last, and while I was gone, Hugh carried off the prize. There is the office bell! I am sorry to leave you, Cora, but a doctor has never a minute to call his own. On the table are some books I bought to-day. Look at them; perhaps they will interest you."

Cora did not look at the books, but she bowed her head on her hands and murmured:

"Oh, if I were only in my own home, I could forget him then; but it is so hard here! He was so cruel—no, not cruel either, for he was not to blame. He has only asked for friendship, and I have given him love! What would he think of me, if he knew it?" and she resolved to conquer her love—yes, if it killed her!

"Cora!"

That word called her to her senses; she dashed away her tears and sprang to her feet.

"Cora, where are you? My dress has just been sent home—come and see it."

"I never saw you so animated: What has come over you?"

"You are surprised. I am a Brainard most of the time, to-day, a Tracy—caught the spirit, perhaps!" said she, laughing. "Mother is anxious that I shall look ex-

ceedingly well, to-morrow night, you know for what purpose. Eugene would be amused if he knew it; but look at my dress, is it not beautiful?"

"Very; that shade of blue suits your complexion so well."

"You don't know what you have missed by not coming with us, Miss Cora," said Eugene, meeting her as she came from Estella's room. Then catching sight of her tear-stained face, he exclaimed, "You have been crying!"

"Have you received bad news from your father?" asked Estella.

"No." And she hastily left the room, for fear he would read her thoughts.

The night for the party came, and very beautiful did Estella look in heavy blue corded silk, with folds of misty lace covering the gleaming white of her fair shoulders. She wore no ornaments; only a bunch of pink rose-buds caught the lace on her bosom. Her rounded arms were bare, and almost as white as the gloves she wore. Her hair was braided simply and wound around her head in a way that showed well her classic brow. She looked a queen as she stood there receiving her guests, in her quiet, stately way.

Mrs. Brainard standing in the door, richly attired in pale green silk, her dark hair looped up with scarlet berries, thought Eugene could not fail to be impressed with Estella's beauty, nor would he prefer that silly chit over there, thought she, glancing contemptuously at Cora, who wore only a plain white cashmere dress, a bunch of purple violets that nestled among her brown curls, and a tiny bouquet on her bosom.

"Well, aunt, what do you find so interesting in Cora? You have been watching her for the last five minutes," said Eugene, touching her shoulder.

"I was only wondering," she replied, "why Cora is so

different from Estella. See how awkward she looks, and how she blushes, talking to Mr. Lingle."

"Do you think her awkward? I am surprised. She is perfectly charming when she blushss. Men think that women's greatest charm; the poets have celebrated it in verse."

"Trash!"

"Who, the poets? Ah, aunt, I see you feel disposed to contradict me, so I will go and relieve Cora from that gentleman's attentions, and ask her to sing."

"What impudence!" she thought, when he had left her. "If it were not for insulting her father, she should not stay another hour in this house!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Lingle, but we want Cora to sing," said Eugene, offering her his arm.

She took it with a look of relief, but said: "I cannot sing, indeed I cannot, before all this company."

"Not even to please me?" said he, looking down into her face.

She turned away her face from his burning gaze, but did not reply.

"Come, sing the piece you did for me the first day that I met you."

After the first few notes, a hush fell over them all; you could have heard a pin drop in any part of the room. Loud and clear the song rang out, and then died away in low, passionate wails that filled their eyes with tears, so suggestive were they of loved faces hid forever under the sod—dead hopes that had burned down to cold, white ashes, never more to be revived—broken friendships long since forgotten—blighted loves that have trailed their heart-strings low in the dust. The song was ended, she arose from the piano, while compliments rained upon her from all sides. Blushing under the smile Eugene gave her, she went out and hid herself among the flowers in

the conservatory. "Does he love me?" she murmured to herself, and as if in response came the tender voice—

"Cora."

She was startled, but turned not away; she knew whose voice it was, and her face only bent lower over the blooming fuschia.

"Cora," he repeated, "you know why I have sought you here," and the two white hands were imprisoned in one of his own, while the other drew her toward him. "I love you! Can I, dare I hope it will be returned?"

She did not question if he loved another. Estella, her warning, the world, all were forgotten. She did not answer, but lower and lower sank her head until it rested on his shoulder—rested there in perfect faith, confidence and love.

Eugene Tracy was intoxicated with delight. He folded his arms around the slender form, and kissed passionately the coral, quivering mouth. It was so sweet, so consoling to his vanity, that she, so young, so pure, had given him her heart's love, and for the time he tried to persuade himself that he was in earnest.

Some one struck up a wild, gay waltz. It brought Cora out of her world of bliss. She sprang from his arms, and like a frightened deer, rushed from his presence, never stopping until she had gained her own room and locked the door behind her. Then she threw herself in a chair, and, foolish girl, cried for pure joy.

Eugene remained where she had left him a few minutes, smiling to himself, and softly stroking his mustache, then went out and joined Estella.

"I have hardly had a chance to speak to you this evening, my cousin. You are looking well. How many hearts have you won, how many broken?"

"Perhaps I did not consider any hearts here worth breaking or winning."

"Indeed! I am afraid that the youth, beauty and wit

gathered here have been poorly appreciated. You have queened it right royally, though. By the way, what has become of your friend, Cora?"

"Oh, I don't know. I have not seen her since she sang for us. There, some one is calling me! Excuse me, please."

Eugene took a card from his pocket, wrote a few words on it, then went out in the hall, and gave it to a servant to take to Cora's room.

Cora hastily wiped away her tears as some one knocked at the door. She opened it, took the card and read: "Come down immediately, I have reason for it."

"Can I go?" she asked herself. "Can they read the secret in my face?" She walked down the stairs, her heart almost failing her as she came into the lighted hall.

Eugene met her at the parlor door, and taking her arm in his own, said: "I thought it best to tell you to come down, for my aunt wants me to marry Estella, and if she missed you, she might suspect my designs and treat you unkindly. You see I have thought only of you. I care naught for myself, and for your sake it will be better to keep it a secret until your father's return. You do not care?"

"No, not as long as you desire it, said she, looking up fondly into his face."

"Thank you, my pet. Let me introduce you to Gerald Lingle; he is a young lawyer, but not at all like his father," and he swept her away in the crowd.

It was far into the night; the guests had all departed, and all was as quiet as the dead. Up in her room on a rug before the grate sat Cora, her fair, dimpled cheek resting on her hand, and the dove-like eyes were gazing at the glowing anthracite as if conjuring up some beautiful picture of the future. She was very happy; her heart beat tumultuously as she thought of his kiss, of his words of love. He was so good, so noble, she thought, and he

had honored her with his love. Oh, she could never be grateful enough for it all! Yesterday she was so miserable, and to-night there was such a bright transformation that she almost doubted its reality.

One, two, three silver strokes from the clock in the room below. She started up, half surprised at the lateness of the hour, and going to the mirror brushed out the soft, brown curls. "If Estella could see me now," said she, smiling to herself, "she would have no cause to speak of my pale cheeks. Oh, love—love, what a wonderful invigorator thou art!"

She hastily disrobed, stopping to kiss the card she drew from her pocket, with its few penciled words, then laid her head upon the pillow, her mind full of happy thoughts.

Silly, you think her? Ah, yes! but then it is a glorious thing to be silly sometimes. You who have grown old and weary, scorched with the noontide sun that beats over your rugged pathway, smile scornfully at this; but smile as you may, you can look back on the past years and see yourself, not as you are now, but fair and young, your heart beating with ardent hopes, your brain filled with the consciousness of your love! Were they not happy days? No fancied Eden was ever fairer in your eyes.

Cora descended somewhat reluctantly to her late breakfast the next morning, and her heart sank as she entered the room. Eugene gave her a frigid good-morning; Mrs. Brainard looked at her sharply, and Estella scarcely noticed her at all. The doctor was the only one who was cordial in his greeting. They had often met her before in this manner, but it had not troubled her; but now she felt as if they knew all, and were silent toward her on that account. She sat down to the table, but scarcely touched anything.

Eugene looked at her, and laughingly said: "Late hours do not agree with you, Miss Cora."

"What is the matter now, Cora?" asked the doctor. "No appetite? You did not rise early enough. Staying up late at night is bad."

"Eugene, will you drive us to school this morning? It is very late, and I am afraid some of our classes will have recited," said Estella.

"Certainly, cousin. Like the knights of old, I am always at the service of the fair."

"You will soon be through school; then what do you propose to do—travel?" asked Eugene, of Estella as they drove along.

"I would like to, but will no doubt sacrifice myself on the altar of mammon, as my mother has before me. A woman's chief aim is supposed to be a rich husband, a brown-stone front, in fact, all wherewith to make a fashionable show, and shall I prove an exception to the rule?"

"Well, such a life would not make you unhappy."

A strange smile passed over her face, a smile he could not fathom. He did not know that under the cold, calm exterior, there glowed a heart that all the fashionable world could not satisfy. Like Maud Muller,

"a vague unrest
And a nameless longing filled her breast,
A wish she hardly dared to own
For something better than she had known."

She was no enthusiast. Hers was a nature patient, persevering, exacting. She never rushed wildly into anything; cool deliberation marked every action. She could live on independent of any one or anything, but she would not be happy.

"Well, here we are at the seminary," said Eugene, and then, as he lifted Cora out of the buggy, softly pressed her hand, and whispered in her ear, "Good-bye, my darling."

The hypocrite! Did he think of the fond hopes he was

blighting? One would have thought, at least, that he did not care, had they seen the amused look on his face as he drove away.

Arrived at the house, he lounged into the room where his aunt was sitting, reading.

"May I smoke?" he asked, taking a cigar from his pocket.

"Certainly!" Then closing her book, she looked at Eugene and said: "I half suspect you made love to Cora last night."

"Well, what if I did?" asked he, insolently.

"Nothing; only I would say, be careful! Mr. Benoir is not a man to be trifled with."

Eugene took the cigar from his mouth, and softly laughed.

"Aunt, you are too ready to jump at conclusions. Why can I not admire Cora without loving her? I am not so susceptible as to fall in love with every pretty face I meet."

"Don't do anything you may regret, then."

"My life itself is one long regret," he said, ruefully.

"I am surprised. I thought one must have a conscience in order to regret. You, I supposed, had parted long ago with anything so troublesome."

"Now, aunt, don't go to sermonizing, for Estella does enough of that, and I am no logician."

"Pardon me," said she, mildly. "May I ask if you enjoyed the party last night?"

"Yes,"—then after a time—"has not Gerald Lingle been admitted to the bar?" he asked, lazily puffing his cigar.

"Yes, three or four years ago. He is said now to be a very talented lawyer. Did you notice how attentive he was to Cora last night? I suppose he is well aware of the handsome fortune she possesses."

"Do you think that the attraction?" he asked, laughing.

"Certainly. It could not be her face. She is anything but a beauty."

"How jealous you women are of each other!"

"Jealous?"

"Yes; I never knew a woman but could find some blemish in another, even were she as beautiful as Venus, or as graceful as Hebe."

"You are mistaken. I would not wish to pluck one leaf from her crown."

"Well, aunt, you always knew I was a graceless scamp, so it is not worth while to mind me. Heigh-ho! Eleven o'clock. I have made an engagement at that hour. Pray excuse me."

Taking up his hat, he commenced whistling, and left the room.

"Yes, he speaks the truth for once, when he says he is a graceless scamp. He has respect for neither youth nor age. If it were not for his fortune, he should not trouble me long," said she, half aloud.

"What is the matter?" asked the doctor, kindly, as he entered the room, stood by his wife's chair, and looked down into the face that had an ugly frown on the broad forehead.

"Nothing that concerns you, sir!" was the haughty reply.

He took no notice of the tone in which this was said, but asked:

"Is it nothing that I can help?"

"Nothing that you can help," and she arose from her chair to leave the room, a weary look on her face, as if

"Stay one moment," as she reached the door, "I have something to say to you."

She stopped, her brow contracting, and said, half impatiently, half angrily: "Well?"

"I am afraid Eugene has made Cora believe he loves her. I know not if he is in earnest, but even if he were, Hugh Benoir would never wish his daughter to marry such a man, and as she is left in our care, I wish you would see that he carries this on no further."

"I am afraid the mischief is already done, for Cora, I think, loves him. I see only one alternative, and that is, to send her away."

"I could not do it, even if I felt so disposed. If that is your opinion, I have nothing more to say," said he, leaving the room.

CHAPTER V.

"Be not afraid!
'Tis but a pang and then a thrill,
A fever fit and then a chill,
And then an end of human ill,
For thou art dead!"

THE soft breezes of the Sunny South swept through the room, playing with the lace curtains, and now and then lifting the invalid's dark hair gently from her burning brow, as she lay on a couch by the low, open window. Blanche Wardleigh was dying. For the last two weeks she had seemed more like her old self, but she suddenly grew worse, and had passed a sleepless night. On summoning the doctor, he looked at her a moment, and then said:

"She has but a few hours to live."

"Shall I send for my parents?" Grant asked.

"It would do no good; they could not get here before the end. I will leave you a cordial to give her whenever she grows faint. I will come in again, but will not remain with you, for you will want no stranger to look on her last hours."

Grant sat down by his sister to await the "grim messenger." She looked like one dead—her eyes were sunk-

en, her lips and cheeks colorless, and her hands almost transparent. She had changed greatly in the last few weeks. One could hardly have recognized in the wreck that lay there, the Blanche of other days. Grant looked at her sorrowfully, as he clasped her frail hands. It was so hard to have his last—his only sister, die."

"Grant," said she, turning her large, dark, restless eyes toward him, "what did the doctor tell you?"

"He told me, little sister, that you have but a few hours to live," said he, kissing her brow tenderly. "Are you afraid to go?"

"No, Grant, but if I could only see father and mother it would take away half the pain of dying. I had hoped I could breathe my last in the dear old home where I first opened my eyes. After I am dead, take me back; let me rest beside Grace in the old church-yard. Grant, please raise me a little on my pillow, my breath is so short, and I have much to say to you before I go. How glad I am, my darling brother, that you are with me," said she, her voice dying away almost inaudibly, and her dark eyes closing.

He gave her a spoonful of the cordial, and then gently fanned her until she revived.

"Shall I call the nurse?" he asked, when she opened her eyes.

"No, I want no one but you. Get a sheet of paper and a pencil, I want to give all my friends something."

"Now, I want to talk about Cora Benoir," said she, after Grant had written down what she desired. "Her last letter lies in that drawer. I was too weak to answer it, you must do it for me, Grant. Tell her how I died; that I thought of her in my last hours, and send her my Bible; tell her to read it sometimes for my sake. Poor Cora, her life is full of sorrow, and I am afraid she forgets God sometimes. I trust that you may meet her, for I know that you would love her. Tell father and

mother it was so hard to die away from them, and that it would have been sweet to have lived for their sake; but tell them not to grieve for me, for it will not be long until we meet again. You, my brother, have perhaps a long life before you, and oh, live to do good! Be kind to the poor in our little village; and Grant, be not only true to yourself, but to your God, so that when you are called to cross the dark river of death, you will not be afraid."

He raised her in his arms, laid her head upon his breast. "Rest here, my sister," said he, in a broken voice.

She looked up in his face with a grateful smile, then closed her eyes and was silent.

One, two, three hours dragged slowly by. The doctor came, laid his hand on her brow, on which the death-damp was already gathering. "Poor child! you will not suffer much longer," said he, when she begged them to place her by the open window.

"The air is so hot, it stifles me," she whispered.

"It is not warm, my sister."

"Then this is death, my brother?"

"Yes, it is death, Blanche."

She spoke no more after that, but lay quietly in his arms, while he fanned her.

Night settled over the city, but still she lay in his arms. Toward midnight a violent paroxysm of coughing seized her, and she fell back in his arms with a shiver—dead.

He laid her gently on the bed, called the nurse, and then went out into the night and paced up and down the long hotel veranda, with bowed head and tears running down his face. He had seen Grace die, but this was his youngest, his pet sister. It was so terrible to be left alone, to see her, who but a short time ago was so full of life, suddenly wither and die as a flower. How could he tell his parents that she was dead! But it must be done, and taking his hat, he went into the office and sent the mes-

sage that in a short time would sadden the little household her presence had brightened.

* * * * * * *

The morning sun arose from behind the trees, danced over hill and valley, darted through the half-closed shutters of the great white house on the hill, and rested for a moment on the marble face of the dead. Later, it threw its beams over the group gathered around the grave in the old church-yard, where Blanche Wardleigh was to sleep until time "should be no longer." The minister who had watched her youthful feet from going astray; the class that she, Sabbath after Sabbath, had instructed; the poor that she with her bounty had helped; the stricken parents; the bereaved brother—all were there to pay a last tribute to their loved dead. Ah! the sun in all its course looked down on no sadder sight.

Sorrowfully the group wended their way homeward. The mother looked upon her son, and prayed that God in his infinite mercy would spare her last, her only child.

He must have divined her thoughts, for he looked down in her face, and drawing her arm tenderly within his own, said:

"I will try and fill their place, mother."

"Grant, have you answered Cora Benoir's letter?" asked Mrs. Wardleigh, a few days after the funeral.

"No, but I was thinking of doing so."

"Perhaps it will be best not to delay it longer, for she may feel anxious about Blanche. She little thinks Blanche is in her grave. How they loved each other! Never did I receive a letter but it mentioned her name. I hope that I may meet Miss Benoir some day; I should like to thank her for her kindness to my poor child."

Grant went to his room, and wrote to Cora, telling her of Blanche's death; of her words, and the Bible she left her: then of his mother, and the interest she had taken in her, and then thanked her for what she had been to his

sister. It was a painful task, and he gave a sigh of relief as he folded his letter, directed and sealed the Bible, and sent them to the office.

* * * * * * *

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Brainard, coming into the library, and finding Cora crying.

"Blanche Wardleigh is dead."

"Who is Blanche Wardleigh?—oh, I remember now—one of your schoolmates."

"What were you saying?" Estella asked, as she came into the room.

"Blanche Wardleigh is dead," replied her mother.

"Oh, Cora! when did she die?" she asked, eagerly.

"At midnight, on the first of the month. I have just received a letter from her brother; read it."

Estella read the letter through, but not a feature moved, not a tear stole down her cheek. She rested her face on her hand, and gazed out of the window, with the least tinge of sadness in her eyes.

Eugene Tracy entered the room, stood by her chair; but she did not heed him, so wrapped was she in her thoughts.

"'What has come over the spirit of your dream,' fair lady?"

She turned quickly, her face showing how unwelcome his presence was, but said:

"Cora has just received a letter from Grant Wardleigh. Blanche is dead," then arose and left the room.

"Cora, may I come in?" she asked, a minute after, tapping at her door.

Cora opened the door, her eyes red with weeping.

She handed her back the letter, put her arms around her, kissed her, and then left the room, and Cora knew that she had her sympathy, silent though the demonstration had been.

"Where is Cora?" asked the doctor of his wife, coming into the room where she sat that evening.

"In her room. She has heard that one of her schoolmates is dead, and she feels very badly about it."

"I have just received a letter from her father, he will be home soon. He has found a daughter of an old friend in France. She is living with an old aunt, who is very infirm; she can't live much longer, and when she dies, this little French girl, Minnie Heath—I believe that is what he calls her—will have no protector, so he is going to bring her home with him."

"Has Miss Heath a fortune?"

"He did not say."

"Did Mr. Benoir say when he would sail for home?"

"Yes, in three weeks."

"Thank goodness! I will soon be rid of the puritan," said she to herself; then aloud: "I don't think it necessary to speak to Eugene in regard to Cora, for you know she will soon be under her father's care, and, rest assured, he will have no opportunity of seeing her then."

"I will do as you say. God knows I have tried to do my duty; but I fear I have most miserably failed!"

"What an ado you make about nothing! His flirting will not kill her. She may suffer severely for a time, but she will get over it."

"I will never forgive Eugene if I find he has deceived her."

"She ought not to have been so silly as to have believed him."

"How did she know he was untrue? He is an adept at hiding his faults."

"You could not be more concerned if she were your own daughter," said she, warmly.

"You must remember she is the only child of the dearest friend I have on earth, and her happiness does concern me almost as much as if she was my own daughter."

"Perhaps, had you said she was dearer to you for the mother's sake, rather than the father's, it would have been nearer the truth," said she, scornfully.

"My friendship for her was such that it could not hurt either you or I—and you know it."

"There are a great many things I ought to know that I do not," she said, spitefully.

He did not reply, but gazed down into the fire. Who could blame him if a vision came before his mind of a face exceedingly fair, with mild blue eyes and soft brown curls—a face that had smiled upon him in his boyhood, but that now was laid beneath the sod. Ah! did she who sat opposite think of the grief she had caused the noble heart that had always been loyal to her? She had it in her power to make his life a happy or an unhappy one; but she had chosen the latter—had caused lines of care to settle on his brow, and his hair to whiten ere its time.

* * * * * * *

"Guess what I have to tell you?" said Mrs. Brainard, when Eugene came in that evening.

"Tell me at once; I never could guess."

"Mr. Benoir will sail for home in three weeks; so, you see, your little flirtation is almost at an end, and if you are wise, you will drop it just where it is."

"Please excuse me from discussing this theme; it is worn threadbare," said he, and then left the room.

"Benoir is coming home," said he, as he walked slowly down the street. "Of course she will want to tell her father, and that will never do. Fudge! I have played my game until I am tired of it. I marry her? How ridiculous! Believe I will leave here. I have been wanting to go to South America for some time, and as Frank Hale is going next week, I will join him. I hope Cora will have the good sense not to make a scene about it when I tell her."

"Cora," said Eugene, going into the conservatory

where she was training a spray of ivy over the window, "I am going to South America. I leave here to-morrow to join my party.

The spray of ivy fell from her hands, and she turned as if to question him, her face white with pain.

"Don't look at me in that way!" he exclaimed. "I would have spared you this if I could, but my aunt gave me to understand last night, that your father would not allow me to marry you. He will be home soon, and could I bear to remain here without seeing you? No—no, Cora, it would make us both miserable, and I have concluded to go away so that you may forget me. Only speak one word—say that you forgive me."

She saw him now as he really was; saw the lie that lay underneath his words. Oh, could it be that her idol had fallen so low, her idol that she had worshiped as devotedly as the Pagan his clay image? Ah! the wheels of Juggernaut never crushed its victim more cruelly than his words crushed her. For a moment she looked at him, then said, calmly: "Forgive you—yes—and in a short time I shall forget you, for you are not worth remembering; but there is One that will not forget or forgive you," and she walked proudly out of the room, leaving him astonished and ashamed.

"She has more spirit than I gave her credit for," said he, stroking his mustache, with a perplexed look on his face. "Well, it is no use to worry about it, but I trust she will not look in that injured way at dinner."

Cora had too much pride to betray her feelings, and at dinner she met him cordially, and with as much ease as if it had been Estella. None knew the struggle that was going on in her heart, nor of the sorrow over her fallen idol. "Ah!" she thought, "I could have looked upon his dead face with less grief, for then my faith would have remained unbroken; but he whom I thought so true

has fallen—fallen! oh, so low that I can have no pity, only contempt."

How that day passed she could never tell, but she felt that night when she looked back on the hours of torture, that she had been in a torment more terrible than all Dante's imaginings. There was no milder way of expressing the agony of the time. She had learned the bitter lesson that the world was not so fair nor friends so true as she had pictured them, and she shuddered as she thought of the darkness and loneliness of the future; for where maturity sees hope shining through the clouds, youth sees only despair.

The first thing that met Cora's gaze the next morning, as she descended the stairs, was Eugene's trunks, ready strapped for his departure. In spite of the contempt she felt for him, her heart gave a great throb, and she clasped her hands tightly over her eyes, as if that would stay the thought that he was going away—going away from her forever!

"Are you going to faint?" asked Estella, from the head of the stairs.

The words banished the momentary weakness. She looked up with a slight smile on her face and said: "That would be an impossibility just now. What would make me faint?"

"Those trunks."

"I have seen just as formidable a row of them before."

"Confess, now, that you are ready to cry your eyes out because Eugene is going to leave us— you may as well."

"I shall not confess anything of the kind."

"Well, you are a puzzle! I have thought all the while you were very much in love with my cousin."

"People are very much mistaken sometimes," said Cora, smiling.

"So they are. Come, let us go to breakfast."

Cora gave no outward sign of her sufferings, with the exception of blanched cheeks and lips. The doctor gave a great sigh of relief as he saw her calmly say good-bye to Eugene, and he thought the shaft had not struck so deep after all. But could he have seen her a few minutes after, as she lay on the bed in her own room, and have heard the convulsive sobs that shook her, he would have thought differently.

She arose at last, and, pushing back her hair, said:

"My life commences anew from this hour; the past shall be as a sealed book, and henceforth, though my path be always alone, I shall ever trust myself under the Father's loving hand."

"Cora, here is a letter from your father, the last one you will get from Europe," said the doctor, coming into the room where Cora sat reading that evening. "In a little while he will be with us again. I am very glad for your sake, Cora, but I shall give you up reluctantly, for I will be so lonely without your bright face. To-day you look wan and pale. What is the matter?"

For a moment she was tempted to tell him all, then she thought his generous heart had enough to bear. She would not add to his burden, and she answered:

"Nothing is seriously the matter. I confess I am not in the best of spirits. I wonder what this Minnie Heath is like, and if I shall love her as I do Estella," said she, changing the subject. "Father does not say much about her. Perhaps he wishes to surprise me. I imagine she is quite a child, for he calls her a little girl. It will be pleasant to have her with me, I think."

"Yes, she can be to you as a younger sister."

"I believe you did not tell me when your father would sail," said the doctor, as he was about leaving the room.

"On the twenty-second, in the steamer *Persia*."

CHAPTER VI.

"I cannot speak, tears so obstruct my words
And choke me with unutterable joy."

"WELL, Cora, the *Persia* will arrive to-night. Is that what has given you rosy cheeks and a pleasant smile upon your lips?" asked the doctor of Cora, as she sat at the piano, idly drumming on the keys.

"Is that not enough, doctor? My heart never beat so jubilantly over anything as it does over his coming home. It has been a long, patient waiting, but my reward is to be great. Oh, doctor, how can I ever thank you for the good you have done my father!" said she, earnestly, with tears in her eyes.

"I did your father no good, it was the trip that has done it."

"But you recommended it. If it had not been for you, I would have selfishly preferred he had stayed."

"You bravely let him go, though, when you found it was for his good. I trust that you will not soon be separated from him again. You are going down to meet your father to-night?"

"Certainly; nothing could keep me away."

"Be ready to start at ten o'clock, then; I may not see you again before that time," said the doctor, leaving the room.

"Wear a wrap of some kind, Cora, for it is very chilly out," said the doctor, a little after nine, as he stood before the grate. "Are you not going with us, Estella?"

"Mother is not well, you know. I will stay and receive Mr. Benoir when he comes. He will remain with us a few days, will he not, father?"

"I want him to."

It was a beautiful night; the waves rose and fell, glittering in the moonbeams. The white sails of the vessels along the wharf flapped in the wind and threw ghastly

shadows on their decks. Cora walked up and down, her head burning and her heart in a perfect tumult. It seemed hours that she had been looking out on the water.

"What if the steamer were wrecked, and my father lost?" she asked herself. But just as the question arose in her mind, there was a great shout—the steamer was in sight. Cora almost held her breath, as nearer and nearer it came, plowing through the deep, up to the pier. "Oh, if he were only there!"

"Is Mr. Benoir on board?" shouted the doctor.

"Yes, sir," responded a gentleman.

A tide of unspeakable joy welled up from her heart as she heard that familiar voice, and leaning her head on her hand, she thanked God for his goodness.

"Cora!" and in a moment she was clasped in his strong arms.

"Oh, father!" was all she could say.

"This is my ward, Minnie Heath, my daughter," said Mr. Benoir, turning to a young lady by his side.

Cora smiled as she kissed her, for she thought of the little girl she had imagined her to be. She was rather below medium height, it was true, but one glance at her face convinced Cora she was but little younger than herself.

"Mr. Benoir, please see that my trunks are all right, that porter is so stupid," said Miss Heath.

"This way, Miss Heath, the carriage is waiting," said Cora, when Mr. Benoir had gone to do her bidding.

"Don't call me Miss Heath, call me Minnie, for I mean to ignore etiquette, and call you Cora."

"That will please me; we are to be sisters, you know. Did you have a pleasant voyage?"

"Yes, and no. I was terribly sea-sick at first, but after that I had a very pleasant time. I was glad, though, to get on land again."

"Now for home," said the doctor, taking up the reins.

"And this is New York, the birth-place of my father?" said Minnie to Cora. "I can hardly realize it. Poor father! If he could only have lived to come with me!" said she, a little sadly, and she sank back into the carriage and relapsed into silence.

Cora watched her. Hers was a face dark, bright and piquant; black eyes, that even in the moonlight looked as if they could dance with mischief; full red lips; a low forehead with jetty masses of black hair. Altogether, the face was prepossessing, and Cora knew that she should like her.

"Here we are at home," said the doctor, breaking the silence. "Ladies, are you asleep?"

Estella met them at the door, with a look of pleasure on her haughty face.

"How glad I am to see that you are looking so well," said she to Mr. Benoir. "And you, I shall not meet as a stranger," said she, after she had been introduced to Miss Heath, and stooped and kissed her. "Mother told me to present her compliments, but she was not well enough to see you," said she, leading the way to the parlor.

Mr. Benoir and Dr. Brainard were as jovial as schoolboys; they talked long, and almost forgot the ladies' presence.

Estella grew impatient:

"Cora, there is a possibility of us staying here all night, if we listen to them. It is very late, and we will retire. Miss Heath, I have given you the room adjoining Cora's. Are you ready, Cora?"

"Yes, as soon as I say good-night to father," and she bent over the back of his chair and kissed him.

"Dear me! I thought I should find every one so different here from what they are in France," said Minnie, as they were about to retire—for girl-like, they had concluded to occupy the same room that night—"but the

only difference I can see is, that at one place they speak English, and at the other, French."

"I was a little surprised to hear you speak such perfect English."

"I have had an English governess ever since I can remember, and my father was an American, you know."

"You all look so sad here," said Minnie, after surveying herself in the glass for a minute. "The doctor looks sad, and the mademoiselle looks sad, and you look sad. Are you unhappy?"

"Not any more so, I suppose, than the most of mortals."

Minnie hummed a line of a French song that Cora could not understand—then added she was sleepy, and would go to bed! and when Cora turned out the gas, she was far in the land of dreams.

"Father is at home! oh, how much unhappiness that sweeps away!" thought Cora, as she laid her head upon the pillow. "I would be perfectly happy, if it were not for Eugene. Oh, if he had only been true! Why can I not scorn him as he deserves to be scorned? why can I not crush out this hopeless love? I must arouse myself, must shake off this morbid feeling. I will bring myself to look upon my father as all in all, and it shall compensate for what I have lost. Mother, angel mother! help me, for now your child must share the common lot—the lot of woman—suffering and tears!"

The next morning, Mrs. Brainard met her guests with a cordiality that was quite unlike her, and no mother could have been more kind and attentive than she was to Cora. To Minnie she was merely polite, for there was something in her black eyes that kept her at a distance.

"Here, Cora, is your present," said Mr. Benoir, after breakfast, clasping a diamond necklace around her neck, which flashed and scintillated in the sunlight.

"Thank you, father. Oh, how beautiful!" said she, holding it up.

"I thought of you, Estella, while in Paris, and bought you a set of amethysts; will you accept them?" said Mr. Benoir.

"With pleasure," said she, extending her hand for them. "It was kind in you to remember me."

"Cora, I will have the servants recalled, and we will go home to-day," said Mr. Benoir.

"Just as you please, father."

"Not going to leave us to-day? That is too bad! We expected you to stay a week with us, at least, and I have learned, myself, to look upon Cora as almost a daughter, and it will pain me to have her leave us," said Mrs. Brainard, blandly.

"Yes, stay a few days with us, Hugh," said the doctor, "you have not rested from your journey yet."

"Thank you, doctor, but we must go home some time, and it might as well be to-day. John and his wife are anxious to return, and the sooner we are settled the better we all shall feel. We do not live far apart, and I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you often at my house."

"I don't like the doctor's wife nor his daughter," said Minnie to Cora, that day.

"Why?"

"There is a patronizing air about his wife that makes me distrnst her, and his daughter is an iceberg; I almost freeze when she is near me. I will be glad when we leave here."

"You are mistaken; Estella, though outwardly cold, is not so at heart. Your first impression is wrong."

"I am a firm believer in first impressions," replied Minnie.

"One cannot always rely on them, though. I could give you an example from my own life, were it necessary,"

said Cora, thinking of her first impression of Eugene Tracy.

"You could not convince me that I am wrong, and as it is unpleasant, we will say no more about it."

"What a beautiful home yours is," said Minnie, that night, as she wandered through the parlors, library, or wherever fancy dictates. "Is this your room?" said she, placing her hand on the knob of a door that would not open.

"No, it is mother's; and it has not been opened since she died. Everything is just as she left it. Father says it shall always be left so."

"Pardon me," said Minnie, when she saw tears in Cora's eyes, "I did not mean to say anything to wound you."

"Your words did not hurt me, nor did they cause me to think of my mother, for she has been in my thoughts all day. Come with me, and I will show you your room. There it is, just opposite my own. You need not sleep there unless you want to, for my room is always open to you. How are you pleased with it?"

"Very well; the view is beautiful from this window, and the room is light and airy. To-morrow I will hang my pictures here. I have no doubt I shall like New York in a short time, as well as Paris."

"I hope you will. You must feel lonely in a strange land."

"Yes, I do feel lonely, but I would not wish to go back. France has nothing to draw me to it now, for mother and father are both dead. I wish, though, their graves were where I could visit them. It was the only pang I felt when leaving there."

"Did you not leave an aunt?"

"Yes, but she is very distantly related. She was old and out of her mind, and will not miss me, and consequently, I felt no great sorrow in leaving her. I have

but few friends in Europe. Father for several years had done little else but travel. I and my governess were most always with him; so you see, we stayed in no place long enough to make many acquaintances. Such a thing as a confidante I have never had, and I have always been left to follow my own inclinations, so don't be surprised if you find me very naughty."

"I don't think you are very naughty," said Cora, smiling, as she looked in her bright face.

"Well, Minnie, are you going to school?" said Mr. Benoir, the next morning at breakfast.

"I suppose I ought to. Where do you go, Cora?"

"To Madame De Bruler. She is a French lady, and very kind; you would be sure to like her."

"Well, if I find myself far enough advanced to go in your classes, I may, but if not, you may expect to see me remain at home. I am not the least ambitious; I love ease above everything else," said she, lazily balancing her fork on her finger. "I confess I do not like to study."

"Go with me to-morrow, Minnie, and see how you like it," said Cora.

Minnie went, and when she found herself much further advanced than Cora, she concluded to finish there. "That is, if I do not have to study too hard," she laughingly said to Cora.

Minnie became a general favorite at school, both with teachers and scholars; yet she was not perfection, for she was imperious, selfish and hasty. Offend her, and she would pierce you with arrows of sarcasm, and turn haughtily away from your explanations; but perhaps the next moment she would come to you all tears and forgiveness, and you would find it impossible to resist her pleadings. She was not a diligent student, but her memory was good, and she managed to glide through all with an ease that made the others envious.

Her nature was naturally sunny; no cloud could long

hang over her, though, when she did suffer, it was intense and deep. She was quick-tempered, but like a flash of lightning, in a moment it had come and gone. The house would have been lonely, and its silence almost unbearable, if it had not been for her; she was like a stray sunbeam, darting here and there in the most unheard-of fashion. Was Mr. Benoir in one of his melancholy moods—she would dance into the library, tear down his books, scatter his papers, or ask him questions until his melancholy had vanished. Was Cora grieving over the past—her mirth-inspiring laughter cheated her of half her sorrow; yet there were times when she would steal away from Minnie's searching gaze, and taking from a drawer a few crumpled notes, would read them over and over again, as if the contents were not already indelibly stamped upon her heart. But one day a new impulse seized her, and lighting a taper, she laid the notes on the marble hearth and touched them with it. In a moment they were in a blaze; the next, there only remained of the old love, memory and the white, dead ashes. Then and there she resolutely banished him from her heart, and although Estella was a frequent visitor at the house, Cora was never known to speak to him. These visits were a source of annoyance to Minnie, for Estella had never won her friendship. There was something impenetrable about Estella, and it fretted Minnie because she could not understand her. To Cora's oft-repeated question, "Why do you dislike her?" she would reply, "I do not know but it is so."

CHAPTER VII.

"Who could blame had I loved that face
Ere my eyes could twice explore her?"

ANOTHER year had passed away, and Madame De Bruler pronounced the young ladies' education finished. The annual reception was given to introduce her pupils

—now no longer such—to the fashionable world. Coaches were rolling to and from the door.

The sounds of gay music could be heard by the passer-by, and from the large balconied windows of the drawing-rooms might be seen group after group of beautiful women and distinguished looking men in the promenade. Everything was as it should be; the most fastidious could not fail to be satisfied, either as they looked at the tasteful decorations of the rooms, the entertainment, the music, or the guests; therefore, knowing this, Madame De Bruler was delighted and at rest. She moved through her rooms, receiving and entertaining her guests with grace and ease. Of the young ladies who were at this season coming out into society under her auspices, one could hardly tell which of the three, Minnie Heath, Cora Benoir, or Estella Brainard, created the greatest sensation, for all were universally admired. There was the statuesque Estella,

" With stately mien
And glance of calm hauteur,
Who moves a glance and looks a queen.
All passionless and pure,"

and the gay and sparkling Minnie, flitting like a butterfly from flower to flower, and turning the heads of half the youthful Adonises gathered there. But little she cared for their love—she would have trampled their hearts as ruthlessly under her feet as she did the moss rosebuds in the carpet. She sought admiration, and received it to her heart's content, for none failed to praise the bright, laughing face. Cora, though spoken of last, was not least. She had changed much in the last year, had lost her childishness and timidity as she matured into womanhood. Her face was still pale, but when she smiled, it brightened all over, like Moore's Nourmahal. Expression was her chief attraction; the color came and left her cheeks as shadows do in the sunlight. Soul was in all

she did. It flashed through her words, mirrored itself in her dove-like eyes, like a blazing mass of pearls, bright and soft. While looking at her, one felt like asking, with the poet,

"Are there not deep, sad oracles to read
In the clear stillness of that radiant face?"

Gerald Lingle had been a devoted admirer of Cora ever since Estella Brainard's birthday party. To-night, as he was urging her to sing, Madame De Bruler came up to her, leaning on the arm of a gentleman.

"Allow me, my dear Cora," she said, "to introduce Mr. Wardleigh, your once loved schoolmate's brother. I have no need to recall Blanche, for I am sure you have not forgotten her."

A rich flush mounted to Cora's cheeks, and her eyes flashed with pleasure, as with a frank expression of joyful greeting, she extended her hand.

Gerald Lingle drew back after he was introduced, for he knew she would wish to be alone with the brother of her dear, dead friend. She understood his kindness, and gave him a smile of thanks.

"I was hardly prepared to find you a tall, graceful woman, Miss Benoir," said Grant Wardleigh. "From sister's conversation I had imagined you to be almost a little girl, and I am afraid I have always thought of you as such."

"I was but a girl of fifteen when Blanche knew me," she replied.

After that their conversation drifted to other subjects, and as they swept up and down the promenade, her arm resting on his own, a soft enchanting grace floating around her, he felt

"As if his soul that moment caught
An image it through life had sought."

She was a woman worth winning, he thought, and he would try for the prize. He spoke to her of his home, of

travels, and of Blanche, whose young life was ended so soon, of her wish that they should be friends.

"And we will be, will we not?" he asked.

"Yes, for I have thought of you as a friend. Blanche spoke of you so often that you could not seem a stranger to me. Do you intend remaing in the city very long, Mr. Wardleigh?" she asked.

"Yes, I am going to practice law with Judge Glynn. You will allow me to call on you?"

"I shall be happy to see you at any time."

"Thank you, but I am afraid you will repent of the answer you have just given me, for I am a stranger here, and who knows but that my office will be found so dreary in the evenings, that I shall take advantage of it, and burden you with my presence frequently."

"When I repent, you will know of it," said Cora, laughing.

"Who is that young lady talking to Mr. Lingle?" he asked.

"My father's ward, Minnie Heath. She is full of vivacity and wit. I will introduce you; I know that you will like her. But there is my most iutimate friend, and in my opinion the belle of the room," and she pointed to Estella, as she sat with her graceful Grecian head bent lightly forward, her massive golden braids wound carelessly around it, her chiseled features serenely beautiful, and her hands, white as alabaster, resting half clasped.

Grant Wardleigh looked at her a moment in silence, then said:

"A snow cloud moving serenely through silent air—nothing more."

"If you knew her as well as I, you would not have said so," remarked Cora.

"I may be mistaken, but looking at her now, she impresses me as such, and faces are nearly always the indexes of the mind."

"Pardon me, Mr. Wardleigh, but we want Miss Cora to sing," said Madame De Bruler. "Oblige us this once, my dear."

Grant offered his arm, and conducted her to the piano.

She sang a Spanish song fraught with passion and tears —joy and sorrow commingled, and a silence fell over them all as the clear, bird-like voice rang through the room.

Grant Wardleigh was not a little astonished; he had never heard of her possessing such an exquisite voice.

Cora arose from the piano, took his proffered arm, blushing slighly at the praise she received from those around her.

"I am lost in admiration! words of mine cannot do you justice," said he, as they moved away. "Your voice is grand, I——"

"There, say no more," said Cora, interrupting him. "You'll make me vain."

"I am not afraid. One can be conscious of their powers without being vain, and yours is not a head that vanity could tnrn."

"Take care, you know not how frivolous I may be."

"My sister knew you better, I think, than any one else. You have changed little, if any, since then; I can read it in your pure, open face. You are a true woman. I only wish I could believe all such," said he, with a tender light in his fair eyes.

That night as Cora stood before the mirror, taking the rosebuds from her hair, the image of Eugene Tracy and Grant Wardleigh floated before her mind; she compared the two, and weighed them well in the balance. Ah! how dwarfed, how insignificant he appeared by the side of Grant Wardleigh, with his nobleness and truth, for he was truthful she knew; every word had the ring of true metal. She wondered how she could have been so blind, so easily deceived in those days. "And he is going to call. I am glad; it will be pleasant for Minnie," she

argued. But very little Minnie cared for any one; even then she lay back in a luxuriant chair, laughing softly to think what fools they had been to flutter around her. "Who cares if the moth does get singed?—I don't!" she said to herself.

Estella's mind was running almost in the same channel with Cora's. She, too, was thinking of Grant Wardleigh. Ever since Cora had laid that letter in her hands, nearly two years ago, she had endowed Grant with all the virtues possible for man to attain—she had thought of him as a man vastly superior to the majority of his sex—and to-night, as she gazed upon his face, she felt that she had not over-rated his goodness. She knew that deception was no part of his nature. But how he came to be the intimate friend of her cousin Eugene was a mystery to her. Surely no true friendship could grow up between two so totally unlike. "Was it possible that he was deceived in him, or was he trying to raise from the ruins a man? It was a useless task," she thought, if he were.

"Well, Minnie," said Mr. Benoir the next morning, "I suppose you lost your heart last night, and I may as well think of preparing to give up my guardianship."

"No, indeed! My heart is all here; not a piece of it gone."

"You must be hard-hearted to withstand all the soft glances and tender words that were showered on you last night. I am afraid you are a coquette."

"Who can blame me? They all know I am Minnie Heath, worth half a million. If it were not for this fact, how many of the gay throng that were gathered there last night would have deigned to notice me? I have seen enough of the world to understand it pretty thoroughly, so let them take care, for I will have no mercy."

"But there might be some in earnest, some that would love you for yourself alone."

"We can generally tell truth from sham; believe me,

I would not be so cruel as to intentionally hurt one that was in earnest."

"What makes you so quiet?" asked she, turning to Cora, who sat with her face resting thoughtfully on her hand. "Thinking of your new suitor? He paid very marked attention to you last night, and Mr. Lingle looked like a thunder-cloud."

"Who do you mean?"

"Mr. Wardleigh, of course."

"My thoughts were far from him. I was listening respectfully to what you were saying, and thinking the butterfly was worth something more than its wings after all."

"Now, Cora, that is too bad, to compare me to a butterfly, for crush its wings, and what remains? I am sorry if I have impressed you as such a shallow, worthless being," said Minnie, half hurt at Cora's words.

"Pardon me, Minnie, I was jesting. I know you have a warm, true heart, and so do others. You are not angry?"

"Not in the least? When will Mr. Wardleigh call?"

"He promised to call this evening."

"Who is it that is going to call?" asked Mr. Benoir, who for the last few minutes had been engrossed with his newspaper.

"Mr. Wardleigh—attorney-at-law—late of Brighton, and now practicing with Judge Glynn," said Minnie, laughing.

"Wardleigh! I had a long talk with him in the judge's office yesterday. He is a fine fellow. There, Minnie, is one that I think honest, why don't you try to win him?"

Minnie shrugged her shoulders. "You might as well put me into prison at once, as to marry me to such a man. Why, I would be continually shocking him with my hoydenish ways. Leave him to Cora; they suit admirably."

"He does suit me," replied Cora, "and I am glad he has honored me with his friendship."

"Cora, what shall we do? It is such a beautiful day that it is a shame to stay in the house," said Minnie, after dinner.

"How would you like to drive out to Greenwood?"

"Nothing would please me better."

It was late in the afternoon when they arrived at Greenwood, and walked slowly up the long, shady avenues.

"How quietly they sleep," said Cora, as she sat down by a grave to rest. "The shadows of the leaves chasing each other over the marble, are the only symbols of unrest. "Oh! the beauty, the wit, the genius that slumber here—slumber so quietly, that none would think they had ever loved, sorrowed, or suffered; yet through what depths of passion and pain, and through what labyrinths of vain endeavor they came—as we all shall come at last—to this! Death could have no terror for me. It would be sweet, I think, to rest peacefully beneath the tender grasses and clinging mosses that will like these creep over our graves, and be oblivious to the world's envy or hate."

"See how late it is; the sun is quite down," said Minnie, at length.

"Yes, it is time we were returning. Do the cemeteries here resemble those in France?"

"Yes, only the graves there are more profusely scattered with flowers. What would I not give to have the privilege you have had to-day, of placing a bouquet on my mother's grave. I paid Francois, one of our old servants, a large sum to see that my parents' graves were not neglected, but I am afraid he will grow careless by-and-by. Nothing would pain me more than to go back and find their graves overgrown with weeds."

"There are two gentlemen in the parlor, to see you," said Jane, the servant, that evening after their return.

"Did you have any trouble in finding us?" asked Cora, after entering the room. "I forgot to give you my address."

"Mr. Lingle was kind enough to call at the hotel and pilot me here."

"Mr. Lingle," said Minnie, turning to him later that evening, "you spoke last night of a picnic soon to be; what about it?"

"All arrangements have been made. We are going Thursday, up the Hudson, on the *Harper*, and you young ladies are requested to be of our number. The band will be in attendanee, and I think we will have a very pleasant time."

"I am glad there is promise of a little gayety. I have been coaxing Cora to go to Saratoga this summer; but I am afraid my coaxing won't do any good."

"I am afraid it won't, Minnie," said she, smiling. "If I go any place, it will be to some little retreat where I can have quiet and rest."

"The larger the crowd, and the greater the excitement, the better I enjoy myself," said Minnie.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A sister's quiet love
Stirs my heart for thee;
Ask me for none other,
For it paineth me."

THE day for the picnic dawned bright and beautiful, and a merry party gathered on the *Harper*, under flying colors and enlivening strains of music. Minnie was in her element, darting here and there, wild, wayward and capricious as an April day, changeable as the summer clouds, and restless as the waves. She was in raptures with the scenery as they sailed up the river, and declared that it excelled la belle France.

Estella was there, and promenaded the deck with Grant

Wardleigh, and Cora with Gerald Lingle. Minnie would stay with no one, but was first at one end of the boat and then at the other, seeing all that was to be seen.

They arrived at their destination at last, a little green hollow on the opposite side of the bank, with tall maples throwing out on the water their long, cool shadows, and the velvety grass making the hills "look green afar."

"What an abode for a sylvan!" cried Minnie, as she sprang ashore.

"Beautiful as the home of Undine; one could imagine her feet had pressed this flowery sod," said Cora.

"Or we might compare it to the Isle of the immortal Calypso," said Estella.

"Oh, I could live here forever!" said Minnie, gathering her arms full of wild flowers, "for

'Never had sultan roof like this,
Never king such castle walls.'

"What dreams I could dream in this beautiful retreat! what castles in the air! Look, Cora, how this vine clings to the rocks. Is it not beautiful? Let me pin a spray of it in your hair, for you are like it."

"She is very complimentary, don't you think?" asked Cora of Gerald Lingle, who was walking by her side.

"No—yes—I beg your pardon, but I have not the least idea of what you were saying," said he, confused.

"Dear me! we cannot repeat it, so you do not know what you have lost. Tell me what you were thinking of? Something extremely interesting, to make you unmindful of our presence," said Minnie.

"I was thinking of nothing that would interest you."

"Try me," said she, looking up, saucily. "Oh, I know," and she ran away singing,

'But before the day was over, he'd somewhat made up his mind
That he'd pop the question to her, if to him her heart inclined!'

"The saucy girl," said Cora, laughing.

"Cora!"

She turned and looked up in surprise.

"Minnie was right," said he, in reply to her look. "You must know, Cora, that I love you. Almost from the first time I saw your face, you have been inexpressibly dear to me. It has been the one dream of my life to call you mine. Am I to be disappointed?" he asked, bitterly, when he saw her unmoved.

"Gerald, my dear friend, I am proud to think you have honored me with your love, but pained when I know that I can never return it. Do not let this estrange us, for I need your friendship. Believe me, Gerald, if I had known your thoughts, I would have told you how hopeless your dream was, long ago," said she.

"Answer me one question, Cora; are you engaged to another?"

"I am not."

"Then may I not hope that you will love me?" said he, holding her hands in an iron-grasp, while his dark eyes searched her face.

"No, Gerald; as a dear brother I shall always love you, but the deeper, truer love for which you ask, I can never give. You are not angry?" she asked, looking at his knitted brow. "I would have prevented it if I could."

"No, Cora, I am not angry, but it is so hard to give up all my cherished dreams and hopes; so hard to give up all thoughts of ever possessing you. My friendship you shall always have, but pardon me if I do not see you for a time. I must live down this unrequited love. Come, let us join the rest of the party," and giving her his arm, they walked up to a group and found Minnie debating where to have dinner.

"You truants," cried Minnie, when she saw them. "It is well you have come or you would have missed your dinner,"

"That would have been a grievous disappointment, for we are very hungry," said Cora.

Gerald Lingle left her then, nor did she see him again until they were on the boat, homeward bound. Sunset had fallen upon them as they sailed slowly down the river, and the broad beams of yellow light shot through the trees, making everything look like carved gold, and bathing in its mellow rays the faces of all. The last solitary beam had melted away, but the clouds overhead became richer and rosier, and the river a perfect scene of beauty. "Pure as innocence, and smooth as the brow of childhood," it stretched away, tinged by the most glorious colors the eye ever beheld. Long lines of imperial purple, the tenderest azure, broad spaces of gleaming gold and bars of the richest crimson, all blended together on the beautiful sheet of quivering water.

Cora stood leaning on the railing, looking out on the view before her. The sight filled her heart brimfull of loveliness, so as even to surcharge her eyes with tears. But all seemed impressed with the beauty and grandeur of the evening, for a sunset on the water awakens the most delicious emotions. The majesty of the beauty represses all sounds, it awes the soul to silence. Old memories throng upon the heart—memories of earlier, happier days, and of the loved and lost—the lost—that never again shall gladden our eyes.

Gerald Lingle paced up and down the deck, buried in his own thoughts, his chin almost resting on his breast. He raised his head when he heard Minnie's low, musical laugh, and saw her standing by Cora's side, pointing to a bird skimming over the water near them, which glided within the purple shadows and was seen no more.

"Ah, they are happy!" he thought, "but all my hopes and aspirations, the brightness of the future, the soaring ambition, the romantic day-dream have vanished—vanished like the bird in the gloaming. Angry with her?

the dove! I could bless and revere her memory forever!" and he gazed tenderly at the fair face, the mild blue eyes, and the brown, curling hair.

Cora turned around and caught his gaze fixed upon her. She blushed deeply, for she knew how he suffered, and that she was the cause.

"If he only can forget me," she murmured to herself.

"And you did not accept him, Cora?" said Minnie, who had been watching the two with eagle eyes.

"Accept who?"

"Don't pretend so much ignorance; you know who I mean."

Cora did not answer, but walked over to the other side of the boat, where Estella was talking to Grant Wardleigh, her usually calm face radiant with smiles. She made way for Cora as she approached, and said:

"You are just in time. Mr. Wardleigh is going to tell about his visit to the Dismal Swamp."

Twilight had deepened. One by one the stars came out in the sky, and the outlines of objects began to intermingle. The trees on the banks were blending, and the spaces beneath their branches becoming black, while the distant waters glimmered dim and dusky. The moon had risen slowly, and rested upon the hill-tops like a great watch-fire. But no matter how witching the hour, how touching or how beautiful, one cannot stay all night mid moonlight and music, and the tired little party arrived at home, bidding a reluctant adieu to the long summer day that had been crowned with pleasure to all but one.

"Cora, you are the most provoking girl living," said Minnie that night, when she failed to draw from Cora what Gerald Lingle had said to her. "I would not have refused to tell you anything of the kind."

"I would not have asked you."

"Humph!" said Minnie, and turned half angrily away.

"Let me loop up your hair, Minnie," said Cora, taking

no notice of her anger. "Mr. Trevanor will soon be here."

"I wish Mr. Trevanor was at the bottom of the Red Sea! I don't want to see him—I am tired."

"What did you tell him to call for?"

"What else could I do? I hate the stiff, prim old bachelor, and would not have him if every hair in his head was strung with diamonds. I am vexed now to think I gave him my permission to call, but Frank Gray was standing near, and I wanted to make him jealous."

Such was Minnie's story, but if Cora could have looked into her heart, she would have seen that she was secretly fretting because Gerald Lingle would not make his customary call that evening, and would have seen what Minnie would not own to herself, that she cared for him in a way that common friendship did not require.

"What has become of Gerald Lingle?" asked Mr. Benoir, one day. "I have not seen him for a long time. Don't he call here any more?"

"No, sir," said Minnie. "Grant Wardleigh says he has left the city."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Ask Cora, she can tell you."

But Cora did not tell, nor pay any attention to Minnie's words. Mr. Benoir guessed the truth, however, and asked no questions.

It was three months before Gerald Lingle returned to New York; then he settled down to his law books with a determination that insured success. Cora met him frequently, and his greeting was as kindly as of yore, but he did not call on her. To Minnie he became quite attentive whenever he met her at a party or opera, and she laid a number of plans to get him to the house. It was a long time before she succeeded, but after that he was as frequent a caller as Grant Wardleigh himself. Cora thought Gerald was in a fair way to forget her, and she

was glad of it. She knew from Minnie's incessant chatter that she was not indifferent toward him, though she took great pains to convince her otherwise.

Mr. Benoir saw how things were progressing, and said, one day, he would not be surprised if he had two lawyers in his family, yet.

Minnie and Cora both assured him there was not a particle of danger, but Mr. Benoir wisely shook his head, and said he knew better.

The days rolled on, and they were golden ones to Cora. Unconsciously the old idol had been dethroned, and a new one raised instead. A brother she had never had, but Grant Wardleigh was as untiring in his kindness as the most loving of brothers, and she gave him all a sister's affection, she thought, but unawares her feelings had drifted into something deeper than platonic love. She found she had been deceiving herself as time wore on, and that she loved Grant Wardleigh as she had never loved before. Did he love her? He had not said so in so many words, but every look had spoken volumes. She was content, for she trusted in his honor, and knew that all would come clear by and by.

"Well, Minnie," said Mr. Benoir, coming into the room one day, where Minnie was sitting, "guess what news I have for you?"

"Indeed, I can never guess."

"Try."

"I have lost my fortune."

"Does my face look as if I were the bearer of bad news?"

"No, but I did not know what else could concern me."

"Does not Gerald Lingle concern you?"

"Yes, sir, some little; but what about him?"

"He is Judge Lingle, now."

"Only thirty-three years old, and a judge! that is something that does not occur every day!"

"No, and you may reasonbly be proud of him."

"Cora," said Minnie, bounding up the stairs, "don't you think; Gerald is a judge!"

"I am very glad for your sake," said Cora, quietly.

"You say that in a matter-of-fact way. Your father said it was unusual for a man of Gerald's years to be a judge."

"I know it," said Cora, laughing at her ardor, and looking up from her book, asked: "What would you have me do?"

"I would not have you do anything, but you do not seem to care that he has been successful."

"You would not expect me to be as enthusiastic as yourself?"

"I don't see why you should not be," said she, in a careless manner.

"Now, Minnie, you do know why. You know you care infinitely more for him than I do."

"I don't know as I do," said she, pettishly, as she left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

"Leaves have their time to fall
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath,
And stars to set; but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine, oh, death."

ESTELLA was fairly launched on the sea of fashionable life. Night after night found her at party or opera. She was not vain, but she knew she was beautiful and admired; and what woman conscious of her power does not love to exercise it?

It was Mrs. Brainard's aim to secure her daughter a wealthy husband, and no pains or money was spared in working for the desired goal. The ultimatum of Estella's hopes was a husband, too—not one that possessed wealth alone, but that had all the qualities essential to the mak-

ing of a true, noble man—one that she could love, and would love her in return. As for Mrs. Brainard, she had none of these "quixotic ideas," as she termed them. Wealth to her was all in all. It allowed her to lead a fashionable life—what more was needed?

The winter season had but commenced. Mrs. Garner, one of Mrs. Brainard's "five hundred" friends, was to give a party that was to eclipse all former ones in brilliancy and expense. Estella and her mother were going, and she went into the library, as was her custom, to kiss her father good-night.

As she stood on the threshold, her heart suddenly fell, and something seemed to say: "Do not go; stay with your father." "How silly I am," she thought, and turned away; but in after years she felt that she would have given much of her life if she had obeyed that warning.

The party was composed of the most refined and wealthy people in the city, and Estella had, as usual, a group of admirers around her, but there was an undercurrent of sadness, that made itself felt under all the gay exterior, and it was a relief when she arrived at home.

"I locked my room, Estella, before I went away, and you had better do the same when you go out, for I don't believe Bridget is as honest as she might be. I must go into the library and get the key."

Why did Mrs. Brainard start so suddenly back as she entered the room? Was it an unusual sight to see the doctor sitting there so late at night, or was it the closed eyes and the pale face that looked so deathly under the glare of the gas-light that startled her?

She went close up to him and shook him by the arm.

"Come, wake up; it is very late," she said.

But the watch ticking on the table was the only sound she heard.

Ah! you may clasp your hands, and call on his name, but he will not answer; for even as you stood in that

crowded throng, basking in the smiles of the gay and frivolous, this tired, patient heart was having the only rest it had known for years—far, far beyond all care, all toil—never to know anything but joy, forever.

Estella heard her mother's cry and rushed into the room. One glance told her what her heart most dreaded. She stood one moment looking at her father, her face as white as the dress she wore. "Oh, my father! if I had only remained at home! but I left you to die alone! Oh, mother! I never—never can forgive myself." Mrs. Brainard stood mute before his chair, and gazed with something like sadness on that noble face. Did her cruelty come before her mind? Did she think how she had tried him, until his weary burden had snapped asunder the threads of life? Did she realize that it was herself who had caused him in the prime of life to lay before her, a corpse? Perhaps so, but she gave no outward signs of remorse.

"Estella, he may not be dead; ring for the servants and send for a physician, immediately; as for myself, I have not strength enough to do anything."

"It is little use, mother," said she, passing her hand tenderly over his icy face. "See, there is no warmth there."

A physician came, looked at him and said: "He has been dead for some time. Heart disease the cause. His death has, in all probability, been hastened by some mental excitement or sorrow."

Estella calmly gave orders to the servants, then went to her room, her head throbbing almost to bursting, and all the night paced up and down the room, her white dress rustling on the floor behind her, and the amethysts gleaming on her neck and arms seemed to mock her in her misery.

"Oh, if I had only remained at home!" she kept crying

to herself. "It would have taken away half my grief to have been with him when he died."

CHAPTER X.

MORNING dawned, and through the gray mist gradually beamed the sun. Estella slowly took off her jewels and dress, donned a dark wrapper, and then went down the stairs into the library, and looked once more on the pale face of her father. She shed no tears, she uttered no moan, but despair was written on her beautiful face.

"Henry," said she, turning to a servant, "go and tell Mr. Benoir what has happened," and she left the room as calmly as she had entered it.

Mr. Benoir found Estella in the deserted parlor, walking up and down, her arms tightly folded across her breast.

"Oh, Mr. Benoir, I am so glad that you have come. I knew no one else to send for, and I know not what to do myself. Will you see that all is done?"

"Gladly, Estella, and will save you all the trouble possible. Can I see your father?"

"Yes," and she led the way to the room in which they had laid him.

Mr. Benoir looked down on the face, that death as yet had not changed, with feelings of intense sorrow. "My poor friend!" he said, "I little thought while talking to you yesterday, that I was destined never again to see you alive. Ah, Estella, how uncertain life is!"

He was a little surprised to see her shed no tears, but the hard look on her face convinced him that she suffered.

"Where is your mother?" he asked. "Will she have any orders for me to execute?"

"I think not. She will give orders about nothing but her mourning. The dress-makers will be sent for; you could do nothing there."

"Shall I send Cora to you?"

"Don't be offended, Mr. Benoir, but I would rather be alone. Let her come and see father, though—she loved him dearly."

"Hannah, tell Estella I wish to see her," said Mrs. Brainard, faintly, holding a vinaigrette to her nose.

"Oh, how terrible this all is!"

"What do you want, mother?" asked Estella, standing in the doorway.

"Have you dispatched for Eugene?"

"No, it would be of no use. He is in Havana, and could not get here. Is that all you wanted?"

"Yes. I declare, she is like a stone," said her mother, after she was gone.

"Do I want any breakfast? no—no," said she, as Hannah put down a plate of dainty food. "I cannot eat a bite!" but in spite of this assertion she managed to finish a broiled bird, and a large slice of toast.

"Minnie," said Cora, after her father had returned, "Dr. Brainard is dead."

"Dead! Why, when did he die?"

"Some time last night—no one knows at what hour—but when they came home from the park last night, they found him dead in the chair."

"Does Estella and her mother take it very hard?"

"Father did not say anything about Mrs. Brainard, but is alarmed about Estella. She has not shed any tears, but goes about the house like one in a dream."

"I should think they would feel very remorseful for leaving him to die alone. Mrs. Brainard has always treated him shamefully."

Cora mourned for the doctor as if he had been some near relative. He had been as kind and tender to her as a father, and watched her while at his home, with a parent's solicitude. His sufferings were at an end now, and it consoled her to think that no more would harsh words or neglect pain his generous heart. Oh, if his wife had

ever loved him, how sorrowful she must feel for every unkind word, and to know that from the mute lips would never come one word to tell her she was forgiven!

"Don't Mrs. Brainard take on?" whispered Minnie to Cora, the next day at the funeral. "I wonder how many crocodile tears she is shedding?"

"Hush, Minnie!" said Cora, reproachfully.

"Well, you know," persisted Minnie, "that 'still water runs deep.'"

"We cannot tell what her feelings are, and we have no right to criticise."

A reproof from Cora always silenced Minnie, and she said no more.

Society missed the stately Estella for a few weeks, and then she was thought of no more. Her friends offered condolence as etiquette required, then troubled themselves no further. Cora was the only one that really loved her, and she visited her as often as she would allow, for Estella had grown colder and more distant than ever, and sometimes even refused to see her.

CHAPTER XI.

"I HEAR thy voice, oh, beautiful Spring,
Borne by the zephyr of silken wing;
Come with me, loved one, oh, come with me
Where the Oriole builds in the bright green tree!"

"WHAT a beautiful spring day this has been," said Cora, one evening, as she and Grant sat by the open window.

"It has been a beautiful day, and it has made me long for my old home. I think I shall go next week."

Cora heard this with a touch of pain, for she knew how lonely she would feel after he was gone.

"Will you stay long?"

"I am not very busy now, and I shall probably remain two or three months. There is only one thing that I

shall regret in going, and that is the necessity of being deprived of your society," said he, looking down tenderly into her face.

"And I shall miss you," said she, softly.

He took her hands, pressed them gently, and said:

"That assurance will shorten my stay. I must go now; it is eleven o'clock," said he, glancing at his watch.

Grant was gone, and Minnie laughingly declared that Cora acted like one lost.

"When were you to see Estella last?" asked Minnie one day, of Cora, at dinner.

"Not since last week."

"Nina Rivers told me to-day that she and her mother are going to Cape May next week."

"Going to Cape May! What nonsense!" said Mr. Benoir. "The doctor was very much in debt when he died, and it took half his fortune to liquidate the claims. Still, they would have enough to live comfortably, if they would practice a little economy; but I am afraid if Mrs. Brainard keeps on at this rate, she will find herself without anything before long."

"Minnie, there is something in this letter that will interest you," said Cora, giving her a letter she had just received from Grant a few days after.

"Oh, how delightful!" said Minnie. "To think we are invited to spend the summer at Grant's home, and such a nice party to go with us."

"I am sorry Estella has gone to Cape May. She would like to have gone with us, I know," said Cora.

"I am glad she is not going with us."

"Minnie, you are selfish!"

"I know it, my mentor; but Estella cares a great deal for display, and would have no chance of showing her elegant wardrobe there. She likes excitement and a crowd, and I wish that she may have them."

"I thought that you liked excitement and a crowd?

You were lamenting last summer because I would not go to Saratoga with you."

"I do like a crowd, but quiet and Gerald are more desirable."

"That is the secret of your delight, then?"

"Yes."

"Cora," said Minnie, that night, coming up to her room with a disappointed look on her face, "Gerald says he cannot go with us, and that he will be so busy that he cannot come for a month, if then."

"That is a disappointment, but not so great as if he could not come at all."

"Beautiful—beautiful!" exclaimed Minnie, as she stood on the veranda of the Wardleigh mansion, and gazed on its extensive grounds, which were profusely scattered with flowers. "Grant, you ought to be as happy as a king here."

"I am, Miss Minnie."

"Cora, you do not say a word."

"I am lost in admiration," she replied.

"Come, ladies," said Grant, turning to the group, "I know your journey has made you hungry, and Chloe says tea is waiting. After that, if you are not too tired we will go over the grounds."

"And this is Blanche's grave," said Cora to Grant, the next evening, as they were strolling over the old churchyard.

"Yes, this is Blanche's grave—and that is Grace's."

Then a silence fell between them, for both were busy with their thoughts.

"Cora," said he at last, "it was Blanche's desire that I should meet and love you. Long before I knew you, the letters you had written to my sister had awakened a friendly interest in my heart for you; but when we met, and I found a woman who had lived in the blaze of fashion all her life, and yet had never become contaminated

with it, whose heart remained as pure as a child's, I learned to love you. I have not spoken of this before, Cora, because I felt so unworthy of you. Every day I strove to become truer for your sake, and may I hope that your feelings are not indifferent toward me?"

She was silent.

"Oh, Cora! say that you will love me."

Still she was silent, but she raised her eyes, all eloquent with tears, and Grant read his answer there.

"My darling—my own, precious darling!" said he, drawing her toward him, and pressing his first kiss on her lips. "Oh, if Blanche could only have known this!"

"Who knows but she does. Her spirit, like that we were reading in the German legend this morning, may be hovering around those she loved."

"Her face was ever pure and saint-like, and I can almost imagine I see her looking down upon us now."

"Is not that Minnie and Gerald coming toward us?" asked Cora, as she heard a low, silvery laugh.

"Yes; I thought when I received his letter, saying that he could not come until the latter part of the summer, that he could not remain away that long from Minnie's side."

"Grant," said Gerald, as they met, "don't think I have been guilty of deception. I wrote to you that I could not come but I found it so insufferably dull after you all had gone, that I concluded to run down for a few days, anyhow.

"Miss Cora," said he, turning to her, "the country air seems to have had a powerful effect on you already—your cheeks are as pink as Minnie's bouquet of wild roses."

"I am afraid the country air is not all that has made her cheeks so rosy," said Minnie, looking up laughingly into her face; then noting her embarrassment, she changed the subject by saying she was tired, and proposing that they should return to the house.

CHAPTER XII.

"Verily, there is nothing so true that the damps of error have not warped it;
Verily, there is nothing so false that a sparkle of truth is not in it."

A GLARING, midsummer sun, a long, dusty road. Eugene Tracy glanced at both and shrugged his shoulders, as he jumped off the cars at the little wayside station called Brighton.

"I wonder why Grant is not here to meet me? Nice way to treat an invited guest, I do think!" said he, frowning and muttering something between his teeth.

"Say, boy," said he suddenly, to a little ragged urchin standing near. "How far is the Wardleigh place from here?"

"Dunno," said the boy, giving him an idiotic stare.

"Well, do you know where Grant Wardleigh lives, then?" asked he, impatiently, thinking the boy had not understood him at first.

"'Spect I do."

"Where?"

"Now, stranger, what would you give to know?" asked he, leaning against the fence, putting his hands in his pockets, and squinting up his eyes in a way that would have done credit to Sam Weller.

Eugene Tracy grew enraged. "Are you going to tell me or not?" asked he, shaking him by the arm.

"Seeing you are so mad, 'spect I'll have to," said the boy as he felt the grasp tighten on his arm. "It is the first white house on this yer road. You can't miss it. Now let go of me; let go of me, I tell you!" and he pulled away.

"Tell me if it is a long walk, first."

"It might be longer."

"That is not answering my question!"

"You old pepper-pod! I won't tell you another thing!" said the boy when he found himself free, and picking up a stone he whirled it at him, then scampered off as fast as he could.

Eugene Tracy walked angrily away. To be compelled to walk on such a day as this was to his mind an insult too great to be borne. But what was he to do? To go back was impossible, for no train would be due until midnight. So he had to swallow his wrath and walk on, which was a disagreeable thing to do—more so from the fact that there were few disagreeable things he had ever been forced to do. Had his life been one less of ease, he might perhaps have been different; as it was, he was still the unprincipled man of years before.

"Thank fortune, there is the house at last!" said he, stopping to wipe the dust and perspiration from his face, after having traveled along for more than an hour. "Catch me ever making such a fool of myself again!"

At that moment a gleam of a white dress flitted through the trees, and he heard a clear voice singing "Daisy Dean." In a moment more he stood face to face with Cora Benoir.

He expected tears and reproaches, but instead of that, she came forward, smiling, and held out her hand in a cordial manner. "Mr. Tracy, how glad I am to see you! This is such a pleasant surprise."

But not so self-possessed was he. A look of shame spread over his face; he stood still, hesitated, and then stammered out that he did not think she had remembered him all these years.

"Oh! you know one does not so easily forget old friends," said she, softly, laying a little stress on the last word.

He winced at that, for he knew what a wretch she thought him. She saw his confusion, and laughed somewhat maliciously, he thought, and no doubt he would

have turned and left, had not Grant Wardleigh that moment appeared on the avenue.

"Hallo! old boy! how are you? What stray cloud have you dropped from?"

"From a cloud of dust," said he, in a displeased tone

"If you had told me when you were coming, I would have met you, and saved you this long, dusty walk."

"I sent you a letter three days ago."

"I did not receive it. But never mind, Eugene, I will atone by making your visit as pleasant as possible. I beg pardon, Miss Cora," said Grant, turning to where she stood, "this is my friend and class-mate, Mr. Tracy, Miss Benoir; I was so surprised to see Eugene, that I almost forgot you were here."

"There is no need of introduction; Mr. Tracy is no stranger to me," said she, pleasantly.

"You must excuse us now," said Grant, as they ascended the steps of the veranda, "I am going to take Eugene to his room. It lacks but half an hour of dinner," said he, looking at his watch, "and I want him to look well, for remember how many pairs of bright eyes will be flashed upon him."

"And that reminds me it is time to dress, too, though I do not expect any eyes to flash at me," said Cora.

Grant laughed, and bending down he whispered something in her ears that made her cheeks like two red roses.

"So you knew Miss Benoir before you met her to-day?" said Grant to Eugene, after Cora had left them.

"Yes, I met her four years ago, while visiting my aunt in New York."

"This way, Eugene, there is your room. I will leave you now. When you are ready, join me in the library; I want to introduce you to the ladies." Eugene closed the door somewhat savagely after his friend, threw his hat on the floor, and walked over to the window, only to

catch a glimpse of Cora's bewitching face as she talked to a lady on the graveled walk. Drawing down the blind, Eugene called himself a fool for being upset at sight of this woman's face, then sat down in a chair and began cursing the whole sex in general, just as most men do when they find a woman has beaten them; and there is no telling what state of mind he might have arrived at, had not the hum of voices below warned him that it was four o'clock. So making a hasty toilet, he descended to the library, where he found Grant, Cora, the handsome Judge Lingle, and also Minnie Heath, Ida Nathan, and Helen Fay. The girls were all very pretty, and stylish enough to attract the attention of one as fastidious as Eugene. But he had eyes for no one except Cora. He could not believe that the elegant woman before him was the Cora he had held in his arms, kissed and caressed, in the days long since gone by. She was no longer a shrinking, blushing girl, but a self-possessed and beautiful woman. He wondered if she remembered the past. He was determined to see. But she understood him better than she did four years before, and when he came over to her side, and the conversation drifted on the past, she adroitly changed the subject, and talked as indifferently as if he had never been in her thoughts. During dinner she directed her conversation chiefly to Grant Wardleigh and Judge Lingle. Eugene Tracy she ignored altogether.

This was a new phase in his life, and he opened his eyes in astonishment, for his wealth never failed before in gaining him attention. But this woman defied him in every way and manner. Should he let her see that he cared? No! And all that afternoon he flirted most desperately with the other ladies. But what satisfaction was there in doing so, when Cora looked on in smiling approbation?

"Is that Mrs. Brainard's nephew?" asked Minnie, coming up to Cora and whispering in her ear.

"Yes."

"I thought so. He is just like Mrs. Brainard. I wonder why he is not with her!"

"Grant invited him here. He is an old friend and schoolmate of his."

"I am surprised, for he looks dissipated, and Grant has always seemed particular in his choice of friends."

"Hush! there comes Grant and Miss Fay; he might not like to hear you criticise his friend so harshly."

"I don't care a fig! Grant understands me."

"But there is Miss Fay."

"Well, she ought to have her eyes opened. He was playing the devoted to her to-day."

"What do you know about him, Minnie?" she asked, a little curious.

"Nothing, only I surmise a great deal; yes, a great deal more that you think I do, you sly little puss."

"You are a witch!" said Cora, laughing.

"Something of one," said Minnie, with pretended gravity. "You see you need not keep your secrets from me, for I am sure to find them out."

"Gerald has been hunting you all over the house, and looks quite disconsolate because he could not find you," said Grant, as he approached her.

"If that is the case, I must go to him. Where is he?"

"I left him in the music-room."

"Grant said you wanted me," said Minnie, entering the room where Gerald was leaning against the window.

"Yes, I was hunting you; where have you been all the evening?"

"Everywhere almost. This is such a beautiful place, I never get tired of strolling around."

"Come and sing for me."

"What shall I sing?"

"Anything."

Minnie sat down to the piano and sung one of his

favorites. After she was through she looked up into his face and saw him gazing at her attentively.

"What makes you so quiet?" she asked.

"I was thinking of you."

"Am I such a melancholy subject?"

"I was thinking whether you could love me."

"That would depend on circumstances," said Minnie, roguishly.

"I love you, Minnie."

"You loved Cora once," said she, not because she doubted its truth, but because she was a little piqued to know he had loved before.

"I thought I loved her once, and for many—many days I felt very badly because she rejected me; but after I was thrown in your society, a deeper, warmer feeling sprang up in my heart for you than I ever experienced for Cora."

"Are you sure you do not love her still?" she asked.

"As a friend, I do, but you are all the world to me. Will you not try to love me?"

"No, I will not try," then noting the look of sadness that passed over his face, said, "for I love you already."

"Oh, Minnie!" and he caught the fingers that were nervously flitting over the piano keys in his own, while he pressed a kiss on her blushing cheek.

"There is that odious Eugene Tracy!" said she, trying to free her fingers, as she saw him pass the window and enter the room with Helen Fay. "See, the moon is shining," said she, indifferently, "let us take a walk."

"I am afraid we interrupted a very pleasant tete-a-tete, Miss Fay," said Eugene.

"Yes, the judge looked as if he had just offered himself."

"He is becoming quite distinguished in his profession, is he not?"

"Yes, and is very popular with the ladies, but pays attention to no one but Minnie and Cora. Report was once that he proposed to Cora, and was rejected. How true it was, I cannot say; but he left New York for a time, and after he returned it was long before he visited them. Minnie captivated his fancy, it seems, and drew him there at last, or he imagines that he still has a chance of winning Cora. Let us join Ida on the veranda, for it is so warm in here."

"Minnie, what is the matter with you? you are trying to stick pins into the brush instead of the cushion, and a moment ago you were tearing your gloves to pieces," said Cora, that night, when they had retired to their room.

"Something has happened," said Minnie.

"May I ask what it is?" said Cora, because she knew Minnie wanted to tell her.

"You may guess."

"Gerald proposed, and was accepted."

"Grant told you."

"No, he did not, but I have known for a long time that Gerald loved you, and I hoped that it would meet with this result. He is good and noble, Minnie, and in every way worthy of you. I hope that you may be very happy," said she, taking the bright, blushing face between her hands, and kissing her.

"Why did you not marry him, Cora? He proposed to you once, for he told me so himself."

"I did not love him, Minnie. Was not that a good reason?"

"Now that I have given you my confidence, I think you might give me yours."

"I am almost sure I could not tell you anything you do not know."

"Yes, you could. I may have surmised a great many things, but I am not certain that I am right,"

"Well, what is it you wish to know?"

"Are you and Grant Wardleigh engaged?"

"We are."

"Has Grant written to your father?"

"He has, and received an answer. Father always liked Grant, and is pleased with my choice."

"I wonder what your father will say when he knows that I have accepted Gerald?"

"He will say you have acted wisely. Do you know, Minnie, you have won a man that a dozen maneuvering mothers have failed in catching for their daughters? I trust you will appreciate him as he deserves to be appreciated."

"I trust I shall! I will try to make him happy, anyhow!"

"Who wants to play croquet?" said Minnie Heath, the next morning, after breakfast, standing in the doorway, and swinging a mallet in her hand.

"We all do, I guess. Come, Cora, Eugene."

Eugene thought he would force her to be friendly, but to his great annoyance, she avoided him without seeming to, and during the play she was never near him. Cora, at last, grew tired, and throwing down her mallet, seated herself on a rustic bench. A very pretty picture she made as she sat there, her fair face shaded by a broad-brimmed straw hat.

Eugene Tracy leaned lazily against the tree, and watched.

"What a fool I have been," said he to himself. "Jove! I would give a fortune to make her care for me as she did once; and why can I not? I was never defeated in my life. At any rate, I am not to be frightened by two rivals."

"Miss Cora," said he, approaching her, "you remind me of Maud Muller."

"Thank you; but she was never such an indolent piece of humanity, for you know,

"'Maud Muller, on a summer day,
Raked the meadow, sweet with hay.'"

"Dear me! how poetical you are," said Minnie, seating herself by Cora's side, "and how appropriate those lines were, for there is the meadow with its new-mown hay, there the hill, over there the judge, and here Maud Muller—

"'And the judge looked back as he climbed the hill,
And saw Maud Muller standing still,
A form more fair, a face more sweet,
Ne'er had it been his lot to meet.'"

"Who knows but that he is thinking of this now? one might imagine he were, to see how intently he is gazing at you, Cora."

"Minnie, be so kind as to entertain Mr. Tracy, I have letters to write," and without waiting for an answer, Cora was off.

"Well, that is decidedly cool!" thought Eugene, "but I will be even with her yet; I won't be outwitted by a woman," and he frowned threateningly.

"Just look at Cora and Judge Lingle! I thought she had letters to write. That will be a match yet, don't you think?" looking at him in a way that was irritating.

"Who the deuce cares? I don't!"

"Fie! fie! Mr. Tracy! To hear you talk, one would think you had some interest in the matter."

Cora's coolness piqued him, but Minnie's small talk annoyed him beyond forbearance. She was a hasty, but candid little creature, and from the very first she did not hesitate to show him by word and manner what she thought of him, and he detested her for it.

"Do you love Cora?" she asked at length, in a pitying sort of way, that added the climax to his almost irritated temper.

"You are the most disagreeable woman I ever met!" he exclaimed.

"And you are the most disagreeable man I ever met—Cora would be a fool to waste a breath on you!" said she, petulantly.

Eugene Tracy did not deign a reply, but strode angrily away to the house, entered the library, and sat down by the window, feeling as miserable as only a man can feel who has been defeated in the plans that lay so near his heart, for this woman had touched his heart, that lay beneath the deep surface of vanity and sin, hardened flirt though he was. But the love which should have purified and exalted his nature, only made him more designing still, and he felt at that moment, if he had the chance, that he would not hesitate in any manner to put his rivals out of his path.

"Where are you going, Cora?" asked Minnie.

"To the library, to write my letters."

"So you said some time ago."

"I intended to then, but Gerald wanted to speak to me."

Cora came in, humming a song, selected her materials for writing, picked up her pen and commenced; but when she saw Eugene at the window, and noticed how troubled he looked, her heart reproached her for what she had done. She forgot the treatment she had received from his hands four years ago, and laying down her pen, she crossed the room and laid her hand on his arm. "Eugene, will you forgive me for my rudeness to-day?"

How could he deny the pleading of the quivering lips, and the eyes which reminded him of twin violets, looking into his. "I have nothing to forgive, Cora."

"We are friends, then," said she, holding out her hand.

"If you wish."

"I do wish it, Eugene, for I know you are unhappy. Something troubles you. Can I not help you?"

"No! I am tired of life, that is all," said he, in a despairing sort of way.

"Oh, Eugene! why should it be? with wealth, talents, all, in fact, to make your life pleasant and useful."

"Yes, and it is this wealth that has been my curse. Had I been forced to work for a living, I should have been a better man to-day!"

"But don't you remember what good you once told me you were going to do with all this wealth?"

"Remember? Yes, often. Oh, if I could only retrace my steps and start again!"

"Why not commence now? You are young yet."

"I feel so degraded and so steeped in wickedness, that I have not the strength to rise, Cora."

"Carlyle says: 'From the lowest depths there is a path to the loftiest heights.' Only form your purpose, Eugene, then resolve that it shall be victory or death, and you can accomplish anything."

"It is too late," said he, sadly.

"It is never too late," said she, earnestly, laying her hand on his bowed head in a caressing manner, as of old. Then, half frightened at her boldness, she left the room.

All the good in his nature was aroused at this woman's words, and he really did feel disgusted with himself. She seemed so pure, so high above him, that for the time he felt like leading a better life; but such feelings, with men of his nature, come as the sunbeams, and vanish as quickly.

"Did you write your letters, Cora?" asked Minnie, that night, as they were preparing to retire.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, only because I saw you talking very earnestly to Eugene Tracy about the time I thought you were writing. I detest him!"

"He has faults, Minnie, like the rest of us. He is an orphan, and his life has never been shielded like ours. Perhaps, had we been placed in his position, and surrounded by all the temptations that a fortune like his too surely brings, we would have been no better. You must remember this, Minnie, and judge him accordingly."

"Well, he need not be so crusty."

"I suspect you were teasing him."

"Yes, I was, but he deserved it. Are you angry with me, Cora?" said she, putting her arms about her in a coaxing way.

"Angry! how could I be?" said she, looking into the bright face and black eyes that were sparkling with mischief.

"Have I tried your patience?" asked Minnie, as she came down the stairs the next morning to take a walk.

"No, we are in no great hurry," replied Gerald.

"How grand!" said Cora, as they entered a grove, where the dewdrops hung glittering like diamonds on every spray, and the air was jubilant with the song of birds. "Minnie, one hour of this is worth fifty of Saratoga."

"Yes, or any other fashionable watering-place. The air itself is exhilarating."

"We can do justice to our breakfast, after such a walk," said Cora.

"Where have you been?" greeted them from all, as they entered the house.

"We have had such a delightful walk; are we late for breakfast?" asked Minnie.

"Yes, Chloe has been scolding because the muffins were getting cold. Put your flowers down, and come in and get her in a good humer," said Ida.

"I must place them in water first; they are too beautiful to let them wither."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these, It might have been."

THE summer had drifted into autumn, and it was time Grant Wardleigh's guests were returning home. It was a beautiful place, and the family were so pleasant that they kept putting off their departure from day to day. But the last night had come; to-morrow they were to leave. They had visited all their old haunts that day, with feelings akin to sorrow. Grant and Cora lingered long at Blanche's grave, where they had first plighted their love, and laid upon it a wreath of pale autumn flowers.

They were all gathered in the parlor, talking over the pleasures of the summer, and wondering when they would meet again. For once, the fun-loving Minnie was still, and bade them good-night with a sober face. Cora and Eugene were the last to leave.

"Don't go," said he, as she arose from her chair. "Sing for me once more; you promised, you know."

She hesitated a moment, then sat down at the piano, ran over a prelude, and sang:

"I have just been learning the lesson of life,
The sad—sad lesson of loving,
And all of its powers, for pleasure or pain,
Been slowly and sadly proving;
And all that is left of the bright—bright dream,
With its thousand brilliant phases,
Is a handful of dust in the coffin hid,
And a coffin under the daisies.

"And thus forever throughout the wild world
Is love a sorrow proving;
There are still many sorrowful things in life,
But the saddest of all is loving."

She stopped there, looked up into his face, then arose and walked out on the veranda. He followed her.

"Cora," he asked, "has the lesson of life been a sad one to you?"

"Why do you ask?" said she, moving away a little proudly.

"You know why I ask, Cora. You know how I treated you, four years ago; but I do love you now—yes, as truly as man can ever love."

"You told a girl that once, and she believed you. Pardon me, but I am a woman now."

"But I am madly, deadly in earnest now! Forget and forgive the past, Cora. Tell me how to prove my love, and see how gladly I will do it."

"I have nothing to forgive, for I forgave your neglect long ago, nor do I wish to prove your love, for I am engaged."

"May I ask to whom?"

"Grant Wardleigh."

"He is the only one worthy of you, Cora. You have had your revenge."

"Don't think me so mean as to have wished anything of the kind. You misjudge me, Eugene."

"I am sorry; forgive me."

She could not help pitying him, as he stood there in the moonlight, with that sad, despairing look on his handsome face.

"Eugene," she said, at last, "I want you always to be my friend. I am greatly interested in you, and I want to see you happy—want to see you fill the position that your wealth and talents will enable you to fill. If you love me, as you say you do, let that love be the means of placing you where I shall be proud of you."

"I cannot promise you that it will, Cora. One glance at the past is enough to make me give up in despair; it has been so utterly worthless."

"If looking into the past has any tendency to create despondency, then you should not dwell on such things.

Remember that the future is before you, and I want you to promise that you will live to do good."

"I promise, Cora; but you know how weak I am."

"Thank you. Now, Eugene, I must say good-night."

"Must you go? Oh, it is a bitter thought to know that I shall never see you again as Cora Benoir! But may love and happiness ever be yours! And now, Cora—darling Cora," said he, taking her in his arms, and kissing her on the brow, "good-night!"

Long ere Cora awoke the next morning, Eugene Tracy was far away. Who knows but this woman's words may be the means of infusing new life into his heart, a new faith, a new purpose, and the life we thought so wrecked, so incapable of any good, shall blossom forth in all the nobleness for which it was designed? God grant that it may!

There was the hurry and bustle that there always is previous to the departure of a fashionable party. The girls had gathered in one room, and were talking and packing their trunks with great rapidity.

"Oh, girls, will I ever get through?" asked Minnie, coming in with her arms loaded with dresses, and tossing them down by her trunk. "Just look at that cool, provoking Cora, sitting over there, like 'patience on a monument,' while I am in such a fidget. Dear me! I shall not get dressed in time for breakfast; and old Aunt Chloe will make such a fuss. Cora, do come and help me—that is a good girl!"

"I will pack your trunk, or rather finish packing it," said she, laughing at the heedless manner in which the articles had been thrown in, "and you can go and dress."

"Thank you, my mentor."

"Where is Mr. Tracy?" said Minnie, glancing around the breakfast-table.

"You must give him a lecture on early rising, Mr. Wardleigh," said Ada Nathan.

"Eugene is not here," replied he, "he left on the night train."

"What did he do that for?" asked Minnie. "It was a shame in him to desert us, just when we needed him to make our party a jolly one."

"Business demanded it, I suppose," said Grant, "for he came to my room last night, and said he found it would be best for him to leave on that train."

"I think it strange he left so suddenly. He said nothing about going last night," said Minnie. "What do you think about it, Cora?"

"I think he must have a reason for leaving."

Minnie gave her an inquisitive look that attracted Grant Wardleigh's attention. Cora blushed as he, too, looked at her, but said nothing.

"Nine o'clock," said Grant, suddenly arising from his chair. "Nearly train time, you see. We had better start."

"Good-bye, Cora," said Mrs. Wardleigh, taking her hands. "I am sorry to see you leave, but I hope it will not be long until Grant brings you back to us."

"It will not be my fault if I don't, mother," said he, smiling.

It was a merry party that started from the station, and a still merrier one as they took a boat on the Hudson, and met a party of old friends, who, like themselves, were returning from their summer retreat, among whom were Mrs. Brainard and Estella.

"Mrs. Brainard looks more disagreeable than ever, and Estella like a snow woman," said Minnie to Gerald.

"I have always thought Estella very beautiful."

"So have I, but it is frozen beauty; I shiver to look at her."

"Where is Eugene?" asked Mrs. Brainard, of Grant, as he was walking up and down the deck with Cora. "I

have been looking for him, but do not see him. Has he not been visiting you?"

"He has," replied Grant, "but he left last night, and as I supposed business was the cause, I did not question him."

Mrs. Brainard glanced at Cora, then moved away, her head elevated like an "antelope scenting danger from afar."

Grant laughed. "Mrs. Brainard is vexed about Eugene. It is a little strange that he left so suddenly."

"Mrs. Brainard need not look at me so suspiciously, for there is no need of it now," said Cora.

Grant looked at her questioningly.

"Did not Eugene tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"We were engaged, once."

"How long ago?" asked he in surprise.

"Four years ago."

"Did she break it?" asked he, pointing to Mrs. Brainard.

"No, he broke it himself. I was a school-girl then, and very young. He caught my fancy, with his handsome face and polite manners, and I thought I loved him dearly —yes, so dearly, that I would have given up everything, and have waited years had it been necessary. But he said we could not marry; that cruel fate had separated us. So careful had he concealed his falseness from me, that this was the first glance I had of his true character; but that was enough. He had only been flirting with me, and it helped to cure me of my folly. I suffered intensely at first, but after a time he dropped as completely out of my life as if he had never existed. Mrs. Brainard wished him to marry Estella, and believed me to be the cause of his not doing so, and, as he is still unmarried, she continues to look on me with suspicion."

"Did you never see Eugene after he broke the engagement?"

"No; he started for South America immediately, and until he visited your home, I knew nothing more about him. You know that I have constantly been thrown in his society for the last few weeks, and only last night he again asked me to be his wife. This time he appeared to be sincere, but of course was refused, which accounts for his hasty departure last night, though he said nothing about going."

"Had you not been engaged to me, would your answer have been the same?" said Grant, showing how easily he could be excited to jealousy.

"Certainly it would, for I did not love him. You are not angry?" she asked, looking up into his sober face. "I did not tell you this before, because he was your friend, and knew if I told you that you would have lost your confidence in him. But I intended to tell you what happened last night, if he did not."

"I am not angry with you, Cora; I knew Eugene was unprincipled in some things, but never thought he would have done an act like that."

"I want you to be his friend still, Grant, for I really think he now means to do what is right. We ought to be thankful, at least I ought to be; for had not things happened as they have, I would never have loved you. You will forgive him now, for I have."

"You are the most generous woman living, Cora, and I am not half worthy of you."

"There, not another word of that," said Cora. "Please don't," said she, when he talked on, "for here comes Minnie. She half suspects the truth now, and I would not have her certain of it, for she so dislikes Eugene that she would let him know it the first time they met."

"Dear me! Cora, what a sober face you have. Is Mrs. Brainard the cause?" asked Minnie.

"Mrs. Brainard only wanted to know where Eugene is," she replied.

"Well, that is just what I am dying to find out. You know where he is. Now, Cora, own up."

"No, Minnie, I do not know where he is."

"Well, you at least know what he left for. You won't tell. Well, I can guess. He proposed to you last night. I knew he would when I saw him stop you as you were about to leave the room, for he has been watching you with hungry eyes for some time past. Mrs. Brainard is very much disappointed because she did not find him here. She came to me a few moments ago, and asked in her sly way a number of questions about you and Eugene. But I told her she need not worry, for you were already engaged to Grant."

"Oh, Minnie!" exclaimed Cora.

"Now, what harm was there in telling her? She would soon have known it, anyhow."

"There was really no harm, but I do not like the way in which you told her."

"Pardon me, Cora, but it vexed me to hear her worry herself so much about your affairs, and caused me to make that saucy answer. See! the boat is going to land. How glad I am, for I was never so tired in my life."

The *creme de la creme* of New York was in a flutter when their engagement came out. "The best match of the season," all said. "Mr. Benoir might justly feel proud of his son-in-law elect, for he was the finest gentleman in the circle, and Gerald Lingle might think himself fortunate in getting Mr. Benoir's ward. It was not every man that could make half a million by marrying," the mercenary people said.

"So, Minnie, you think you are going to be married for love, and not for money," said Mr. Benoir, after their arrival.

"He is not going to marry me for money. You cannot make me lose my trust in him, say what you will."

"Nor would I have you," said he, seriously. "When are you going to marry Gerald?"

"Whenever Cora marries Grant. I am in no hurry to leave you, my guardian, for you have been like a father to me, and endured my willfulness with kindness and patience."

"You have always acted in obedience to my wishes, Minnie, and it has been a pleasure to have you with me. Have you set any definite time for your marriage?" said he, turning to Cora.

"No, father, I have thought nothing seriously about it I am in no hurry to leave you, either."

"I forgot to tell you, Cora," said Minnie, after Mr. Benoir had left the room, "when I told Mrs. Brainard, yesterday, that you were engaged to Grant, Estella was standing by, and grew so pale that I was frightened. Do you believe she cares anything for Grant?"

"I think not."

CHAPTER XIV.

"There is no cure in after years
For hopeless love."

"MR. CLAYMORE in the parlor, ma'am," said a servant, looking into the room where Mrs. Brainard and Estella were sitting, the former reading, the latter pretending to embroider a pair of slippers, but her eyes were fixed in a deep study, and her hands lay motionless in her lap.

"Are you sure he wants me—is it not Estella?" said Mrs. Brainard, at the same time glancing at her daughter, to see if she would evince any surprise.

If Estella heard, she gave no sign, but sat still, and drew her needle indifferently through her embroidery.

"Very well. Tell him I will be down directly," said

she, going to the mirror, and re-arranging the great coil of hair at the back of her head. Then opening the door, she descended to the parlor.

Estella raised her eyes as the door closed, and leaning back in her chair, gave a little scornful laugh, for she thought how devotedly he had followed her footsteps all summer, and how repeatedly she had chilled him whenever he attempted to offer himself—and now he had come to her mother for help!

"Well," said Mrs. Brainard, about an hour after, as she entered the room, "I suppose you know what Mr. Claymore wanted?"

"How should I know?"

"He wants you to be his wife!"

"Indeed! and expects me to consent after the petition has been delivered second-handed. Mr. Claymore ought to have known me better."

"He was afraid you would refuse him!"

"What did he come for, then?"

"Estella, you put me out of all patience!"

"Oh, pray don't let me!" said she, ironically.

"Estella, will you accept this man, or not?"

"Most assuredly I will not. Go down and tell him so at once."

"He is not here, and if he were, you should be the one to tell him."

"That would be a great pleasure for me. I will write him a note, for it will save him the trouble of calling again," and she crossed the room for her writing-desk.

"No, you will not write him a note," said Mrs. Brainard, who, darting forward, seized the writing-desk, threw it into a drawer, locked it, and put the key in her pocket.

Estella surveyed her movements with the greatest nonchalance, then said, quietly, "I can find pen, ink and paper in any store in the city."

Mrs. Brainard, before replying, went to the window, and for a few minutes gazed intently on the street below, then came came back to Estella, and said, in a voice just then marvelous for its tenderness: "My daughter, why are you so careless of your own interest? Mr. Claymore is wealthy, and of a good family. What more could you wish?"

"Suppose I should ask for one I could love, and that would love me in return, just for myself alone, and not for the wealth I might bring him," said Estella, for the first time aroused, and something like a quiver in her voice which was usually so cold and even.

"A great fool would he be who could do that," said her mother scornfully. "Estella, after last winter's experience, I should think you would have banished such sentiments forever."

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking up quickly in her mother's face.

"I refer to your penchant for Mr. Wardleigh. You were in his society more or less last winter, and tried, by all the arts woman can command, to lure him on to a proposal of marriage. I know it all, but what has it amounted to?"

Estella sat still and bit her lips, while her face was scarlet, even to the roots of her hair.

"It was mean, yes, contemptible," said she, angrily, "for you to watch my movements with only one aim, and that to glory over my defeat, as you are now doing; and no true mother would taunt her daughter with anything she knew had caused her much suffering."

"Suffering! Estella, talk sense. Nothing could touch your heart. Indeed, I have often wondered if you had a heart. That marble statue on the bracket yonder seems to have as much feeling as you."

"Because I am outwardly so much like my mother, it does not prove that I have no feeling."

"You are not like me," said her mother, sharply. "You resemble your father—are as stubborn and as willful when you take the notion."

"Ah, what a pity it is that I do not possess more of his traits of character. If I did, you might have a hope of getting rid of me, but as it is, there is no help for it."

"I will see if there is no help for it," said her mother, in angry tones.

"We shall see," said Estella, her eyes flashing.

"We shall see," echoed her mother, going out and slamming the door.

Estella sat still. Her face, which a moment ago was flushed with anger, was now one of hopeless dejection. She buried her face in her hands, and, proud, worldly woman that people thought her, wept like a child.

Ah, the world seems only the surface of the heart, and knows nothing of the great waves of remorse and sorrow that at times sweep over the soul. If it did, it would be less severe in its censure.

"This will never do," said Estella, getting up and bathing her face. "It is nearly four o'clock, and I will soon be summoned down to dinner. I have no desire to wear my heart upon my sleeve, particularly in her presence."

When Estella entered the dining-room, a short time after, all traces of tears were removed, and her manner as cold and haughty as if no emotion had ever moved her.

"I have just received a letter from your cousin Eugene. He is with his grandmother," said Mrs. Brainard, as Estella sat down.

Estella did not reply, but dipped her spoon leisurely up and down in her cup of coffee.

"I have just received a letter from Eugene," repeated her mother.

"So I heard you say a moment ago."

"He is visiting his grandmother," Mrs. Brainard went on, "and she has sent a very urgent invitation for you to visit her. Eugene is anxious that you should come, too. I want you to go, Estella, for much depends upon this visit. Yon have heretofore seemed unconscious of the possibility of sharing his wealth, and I want you to come back his promised wife. Now this is your last chance, for in the spring, he writes, he will leave for an extended European tour. They live a very retired life at his grandmother's, and, consequently, you will have no rivals, and if the result is not what I expect, I shall conclude it is your own fault, for I cannot believe my daughter so devoid of personal attractions as to be unable to win a husband," said she, in a tone intended to touch her pride and to arouse her to action; but Estella had been used to such insinuations all her life, and it fell on her ear unheeded, though not unheard.

Estella listened until she was through without saying a word, then she looked at her mother, and said: "Suppose I should meet with success, and after the desired point had been gained, I should refuse—what then?"

"Then you must marry Mr. Claymore."

"Must! Please explain?"

"Well, there are two very good reasons. In the first place, you know, or at least you ought to know, that since your father died—contrary to public opinion—our income has been small, so small, indeed, that I have had to sacrifice some of the property to defray the expense of the trip we have taken this summer. I have done it with the aim of procuring you a rich husband, but so far I have been disappointed. And that brings me to the second reason, which is, that I have my own interest to look to, and cannot be burdened with an old maid daughter."

"Ah!" said Estella, darting a sharp look at her mother, "I thought there was some personal interest in the mat-

ter, for I never knew you to advocate a case very warmly unless there was. What a pity you are Eugene's aunt? You are so youthful looking, when you call into requisition all the cosmetics on your toilet-table, that you might win him yourself. And there is Mr. Claymore, who is old enough to be my father. I am sure he would make you the most suitable husband. Take him, do, and don't try to force him on me!"

"I would be ashamed not to have any more love or respect for a mother than to talk to her in that manner," said Mrs. Brainard, in an angry voice.

"Love! respect!" exclaimed Estella, while a smile played around her mouth. "Let me answer you by quoting from one of your favorite authors: 'Love begets love; respect begets respect.' Now that I have finished, pray excuse me," said she, with mock courtesy.

Mrs. Brainard let her go, feeling as if she would like to have dashed after her the cup she held in her hand.

"It is nearly time for Mr. Claymore to call," said Mrs. Brainard that evening to herself, as she glanced up at the clock, "and what to do I hardly know. She won't see him, or if she did she would refuse him, that is certain, and that will never do; for marry him she must, if Eugene won't have her. Then after she is gone I will have a chance for myself. There, I declare! if that is not the bell, now! Hannah, go to the door.

"Ah! Mr. Claymore, good-evening," said she, rustling into the parlor a few minutes after.

"Good-evening," said the portly figure, arising with some difficulty from the easy-chair. "Ahem!" and he played uneasily with his watch chain. "Where is your daughter?"

"The dear girl has a terrible headache, and begged me to come in her place," said she, in a bland manner.

"Did you tell her what I wanted?" asked he, with some hesitation.

"Yes, I broached the subject to her, but she was in no mood to listen. I think if you only wait awhile, she wil give you a hearing."

"But if she should refuse me?"

"If she should refuse you," said Mrs. Brainard, trying to repress a smile, "why then, of course, you could do nothing more; but you should not be faint-hearted."

"I am not faint-hearted, madame, but if I humble myself to ask her to be my wife, it would be a great mortification to have her refuse."

"Most people would not think so. Love surmounts all difficulties."

"Excuse me, madame," said he, dryly, "but I never professed to love your daughter. I consider her a very estimable young lady, also very handsome and stylish, but I do not love her, nor do I ask for love in return. I want to give my house a fine mistress, one who can rule over my household with taste, and do credit to my guests, and such a one I believe I shall find in your daughter."

He waited a minute after having delivered this little pompous speech, to see if she would reply, but as she did not, he arose to leave, remarking: "As there is no prospect of seeing your daughter at present, I might as well say good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

"What a conceited fool!" said Mrs. Brainard, as soon as the door closed. "What a 'shade of the mighty' he thinks himself. Estella, frivolous as she is, is too good for him, but it is no time to have conscientious scruples. He will let her dress, and fill the house with guests, and she will be content."

"Now for another lecture," said Estella, the next morning, as she stood before the mirror, brushing out her long, sunny hair, before going down to breakfast. "I wonder what she told Mr. Claymore last night. I hope he will feel himself insulted, and stay away in the

future. No wonder father buried himself so much in his library. For my part, I would as soon meet a band of savages, as to face her when she is bent on putting one of her darling projects into execution. I sometimes wonder if she really can be my mother, we understand and love each other so little. How ridiculous it is in her to try to make me marry Eugene, or old Mr. Claymore!—How Eugene would laugh if he knew she looked upon him as her future son-in-law! No, my aristocratic mamma, if ever I marry, it will be a man of Mr. Wardleigh's stamp, and not a thorough man of the world like Eugene Tracy. Ah, how happy Cora Benoir must be! and yet, Cora was once the betrothed of my dissipated cousin, and loved him dearly, too, if there is any truth in the notes from her that I found in an old portfolio of his, not long ago. How we do live things down in this world! I am ready, I believe," she said, taking a last look in the glass. Then she sauntered slowly down the stairs into the dining-room, and took a seat at the table.

Mrs. Brainard looked up and gave her a frigid good-morning, and then, to Estella's surprise, was silent the rest of the meal. Thus two or three days passed, each ignoring the other's presence, only when it was actually necessary to use a few words of common courtesy. Mrs. Brainard grew uneasy at last, when she saw Estella give no signs of relenting. One morning she again broached the old subject.

"Estella, when are you going to make that promised visit?"

"I have no recollection of promising to visit any one."

"Why, are you not going to do as Eugene wished?"

"Certainly not!" replied she, with emphasis.

"Very well, then, Stewart shall hand to you what remains as your portion, and you can go! Such an ungrateful daughter shall not stay under my roof any longer."

"Just as you please, mother; your society is not so delightful that one should desire to remain in it. But are'nt you afraid such a course will ruin your future prospects? Your elderly gentlemen friends will be sure to think you are somewhat cramped in money affairs, and what would they want you for but your wealth?"

Mrs. Brainard shot a fierce glance of hatred at her daughter, but she leisurely buttered her toast, and took no notice of it.

"Miss Estella, here is a letter your mother told me to give you," said Hannah, coming out into the hall as Estella prepared to go and call on Cora, the morning after her conversation with her mother.

"From Eugene," said she, breaking the seal and sitting down on the steps to read it. A smile played around her lips as she read the postscript, as follows:

"'Estella, if you have any heart, you will take pity on me and accept grandmother's invitation. It is dreadful lonely here, and I am dying to see some one, but am obliged to stay a while, out of respect to the old lady. Come, and bring me all the latest news.'"

"The latest news!" said Estella to herself. "I suppose that means all about Cora and Grant. I wonder if he does care anything for her. Hannah, tell mother that I shall be home for dinner," said she, as she passed out of the door.

"Cora," said Estella, as she arose to go, after having made her call, "I have just received a letter from Eugene. He is at his grandmother's, and he is so lonely there that he wants me to visit them. I have a mind to go."

"I would if I were you, Estella; you don't know what good you might do him. Your presence would shield him from so many temptations," said she, speaking with more warmth than she intended.

Estella watched her somewhat narrowly, for she was

trying to see what effect her words would have. Cora noticed it, and grew embarrassed.

"When do you think of starting, Estella?" she asked at length.

"Immediately."

"Grant is going to leave to-morrow evening for S——. I believe it is very near the place where Eugene now is. He would be glad to take you under his protection, I know. I will tell him to-night, if you wish me to."

She had not really thought of going, but to know that here was an opportunity to be near him, was enough to change her mind, and she accepted it gratefully, without hesitation.

"Cora, you have not told me anything about your marriage," said Estella, as she was about to leave, "is it to be soon?"

"No, not for a year, at least. You shall get timely warning to appear when it has been arranged," said Cora, smiling. "Please give Eugene my kindest regards."

"What a fool I have been to consent to go!" said Estella to herself, as she walked homeward. "It is only laying more sorrow in store for me. The oftener I see him, the greater will be the struggle to crush out this feeling. I was mad, blind, to let myself be so deluded. I might have known from the first that he loved Cora. One by one every joy melted from my grasp. Once,

> 'I yearned for the future, vague and vast:
> And lo! what treasure of glorious things
> Giant futurity shed from his wings.'

Now, I am without hope. I find no rest or peace at home, and the future is like a troubled sea. Oh, Grant! you had it in your hands to make a good, true woman of me," she cried.

"Mother," said Estella, entering the room where she

was sitting, "I will start on that long-talked-of visit to-morrow, if you have no objection."

"I have none," said her mother, careful not to show how much it pleased her.

"Very well, then it is settled.

"What has Eugene written?"

"His letter was very brief. He said he was very lonely; but here is the letter, you may read it if you wish."

"I am afraid Eugene is in trouble. He does not stay in that dreary place for nothing," said Mrs. Brainard, glancing over his letter.

"He says, does he not, that he stays out of respect for his grandmother?"

"Nonsense! Eugene cares too little for any person's opinion, to subject himself to any privations. Mark my words he is in some difficulty."

"Nothing serious, I think. Eugene never goes beyond a certain point in anything."

"Oh, there is no telling what a man would do. What train will you leave on?"

"The earliest evening train."

"If I were going alone, it would be, but Mr. Wardleigh will start on the evening train for S——; it is near my destination, you know. Cora said it would be better to wait and have him go with me."

"Estella, Mr. Wardleigh wishes to see you," said Mrs. Brainard, the next morning after breakfast.

"Cora told me you were going to see Eugene," said Grant, as Estella entered the room. "I shall be happy to accompany you as far as S——. Shall I call for you this evening?"

"If it will put you to no inconvenience."

"None at all. Excuse me for not staying longer, but I shall be very busy until I leave."

Estella went to her room, and had almost completed packing her trunk, when she suddenly stopped and said

"I would like to know what I am going for. It is not because this visit promises to be a pleasant one, for it truly will not, nor because my mother will be pleased at my going, but, it is because, for a few hours, I shall have the pleasure of being by Grant's side. What folly!" and she threw down the lid of her trunk so heavily that it jarred the shelves above her head, bringing down an old portfolio of Eugene's, and scattering the letters it contained over the floor. Estella gathered them up, and was about to replace them, when she noticed they were the old notes of Cora's that she had read a short time before. A new thought floated across her mind; she put them together, tied them with a string, and placed them in her trunk. Long after, that one act caused her years of suffering and remorse, for it changed the whole current of her life.

CHAPTER XV.

"Aye, now I am in Arden; the more fool
I, when I was at home I was in a better place."

It was a cozy little room in which Estella was sittmg. A bright fire glowed in the grate, throwing its light over the soft carpet, luxuriant chairs and pictures, brackets and statues that adorned the walls. On a divan near one of the windows, reclined Eugene, a volume of Ruskin in his hand, but his eyes were fixed on Mignon, hanging oppposite.

"What do you find so attractive in that picture?" asked Estella.

"I was thinking how much it resembled Cora Benoir."

"Eugene, why did you not marry Cora Benoir?"

"Perhaps I never wanted to," said he, his dark eyes scanning her face to see if he could read what she was aiming at.

"There may be some truth in that, but why were you engaged to her?"

"Could I not be engaged to her without having any serious intentions?" asked he, impatiently.

"Yes, but that would not be honorable."

"Don't talk of honor, Estella, for neither of us has much of it."

"You are very frank, for once in your life."

"It is a pity I am not always so. Come, tell me how you found out I was engaged to her. Did she tell you?"

"Did you ever know Cora to tell anything?"

"You refuse to tell?"

"At present I do."

"Very well, I am not anxious to know."

"I did not suppose you would be. Do you know how long she has been engaged to Grant Wardleigh?"

"How should I know!"

"I thought Grant and you were such intimate friends."

"So we are, but he did not tell me that. Men don't talk about their affairs as women do," replied he, getting up and leaving the room, as if the conversation displeased him.

"How provoking he is!" mentally exclaimed Estella. "If he cares for Cora, he does not show it. Yet I am convinced something is the matter, or he would not have left Wardleigh's so suddenly, and Cora would not speak so shyly of him. I hope his interest may be as great as mine, for without his aid my plan would accomplish nothing, and I want to be certain of my mark before I betray myself."

Sorrow makes us either better or worse. Had Estella's life flowed on in a smooth, unbroken channel, it would have been free from shame or blame. But her happiness had all been swept away at one fell swoop, and after her great paroxysm of sorrow, she was determined to regain it, if it was within the limit of human power.

A few months ago she would have been horrified at the scheme she had planned, but now she did not stop to

think of the wrong or its consequence. Eugene, unprincipled as he was, had sent for her with no deeper motive than to hear about Cora, but she had gone to find a confederate in her crime.

"What a blue day it is," said Estella, an hour later, coming to the window where Eugene was looking out at the drenching rain.

"Yes, and it makes me miserable. How I detest such weather!

"'Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days be dark and dreary,'"

hummed he. "There is more truth than poetry in those lines, don't you think, Estella?"

"Yes, if one may judge from experience.

"Estella, I would give up every cent I possess to be a boy again."

She looked incredulous.

"Believe it or not, I am tired to death of the life I have led for the past five years."

"Why?"

"You, who pretend to know me so well, ought not to ask why. 'Truly the way of the transgressor is hard.'"

"Have you just found that out?" asked Estella, ironically.

"No, but it never came home with such force until——" He stopped there and did not finish the sentence.

"Until you were bitterly disappointed," said she, finishing it for him. "Eugene, I can tell your past better than any astrologer."

"Please favor me with a recital of all my misdeeds," said he, laughing, and sitting down in a chair. "I am just in a mood to listen."

"I shall only tell you of what is grieving you most. You flirted with Cora Benoir when she was a pale, faded, and rather awkward girl, staying at our home. You had

been used to the society of ladies who were as great flirts as yourself, but here was one entirely different from any you had ever met. She was young and innocent, and so full of truth that she did not doubt the truthfulness of others. You took advantage of all this and gained her love, then becoming wearied of it, trampled on it. She bore this as women of her disposition always do—without complaint or murmur. After long years you met her again, and the pale, awkward girl had matured into a beautiful, graceful woman, and as good as beautiful, when you fell in love with her in earnest, but it was too late," said she, speaking slowly, and watching his face closely to see if she had hit the truth. "And that is why," she went on, "you are moping away here by yourself. Is it not so, cousin?"

He darted a half-sad, half-sullen glance at her, and said: "If it were, you are not the one to tell it to. You are so unsympathetic."

Estella was gaining her point, and not heeding his reply, she said: "Suppose all obstacles were removed from your path; would you marry Cora?"

"Gladly," said he, forgetting his anxiety to conceal from her the truth.

"Well, then, suppose I could remove these obstacles?"

"How could you do it?" asked he, looking up quickly into her face.

"Believe me, I can do it if you will help me."

"You could not honorably."

"Let me remind you of what you said a few moments ago about honor."

"But I promised Cora I would try and lead a different life."

"Oh, well, then, I do not want to make you break your promise," and she walked away.

"Come back, Estella; don't be foolish; I want to ask you something."

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you not some self-interest in the matter? It seems to me you are very anxious about it."

"Could I not be so, because I want to see you happy?"

"No, Estella, you never take trouble for nothing."

"Would you be very much surprised to hear that I love Grant Wardleigh?"

"Yes, for I did not think your heart could be stirred to anything deeper than self love. Don't look at me so fiercely, but tell me how you propose to work this miracle."

"A few weeks ago I found an old portfolio of yours, and in it were several notes that she had written to you, the three weeks you visited here while she was with us. Now, Eugene, all you will have to do is to change the date of each, and if Grant comes to see us before he returns to New York, as he promised, to show him, in a confidential way, one or more of these notes. He has never told you that he was engaged to Cora, and will take it for granted you know nothing about it. I will do all that is needful. Grant will lose his trust in Cora, and each will be too proud to ask for an explanation. Then after a time you can urge your claims."

"You tempt me, Estella, but it will break Cora's heart."

"Don't fear. She loved you first, loved you deeply, too. Who knows but that she would have accepted you, had she been free, for she loved no one else for four long years. Grant Wardleigh is a great favorite of her father. She may have accepted him for that reason."

It looked probable to Eugene. The song she sang him —her parting words—came before his mind. Why would she take this interest, unless she cared for him, particularly, after the way in which he had treated her?

"What will you do?" asked Estella, impatient with his silence.

"Have you the notes with you?"

"Yes, and will get them in a moment."

"I will think about it to-night, and tell you the result in the morning," said he, as he took them.

Ah, had the beautiful, white-faced temptress forgotten a father's prayers, a father's loving counsel? Did she think of the kindness of the friend whose life she was blighting? One would have thought not, had they seen her as she paced up and down the room, a triumphant light in her eyes and a bright flush on her cheeks.

That night Eugene took the notes Estella had given him, and unfolding them, read the contents which five years ago he had laughed to scorn. They were tender, womanly little missives, and an electric thrill ran through his veins as he looked over them now. Ah, he would have given all the wealth of the Orient, had he possessed it, to know that she loved him, to receive only one line written by her hand, breathing the same spirit the notes did.

He took up a pen, changed the date of one, then threw the pen down. The good angel was at work in his heart, and the pale face of his mother, which long years ago had laid in the coffin, came before him. Should he drown all his good resolutions, and go back in the path which had brought him but little pleasure, a great deal of sorrow, a great deal of remorse? He took the notes and went to the grate. He would throw them in, put them out of the way of tempting him. Then he thought of Estella's words:

"She loved you first, who knows but that she would have accepted you had she been free."

He came back to the table, laid the notes on it, and taking up a pen, again changed the dates of each to suit, then threw them into a drawer and locked it.

He was tempted a dozen times that night to destroy the old letters. He thought of Cora's advice, of his promise

to her, then of Grant's kindness and the way he was about to repay it. Had he known the utter impossibility of her ever loving him, he would have been true to his resolve; but Estella awakened hope in his breast, and selfishness conquered.

At breakfast the next morning, Estella looked across the table at Eugene, and said:

"Well?"

"I have done as you wished," he replied, "and remember that whatever happens now, it is your fault."

"Thou can'st not say I did it," she laughingly replied.

They received invitations to dinner, that day, at one of Eugene's old friends. They went, and on returning, found Grant Wardleigh had been there, and gone away, leaving word that he would call a few minutes in the morning, before he left for the city.

"Confound it!" said Eugene, when he heard it.

For a moment Estella said nothing, but her face showed how disappointed she was.

"Eugene, you must see him to-night, and make him stay here until he leaves. Remember, your time is precious, and whatever you do must be done quickly, or it will be too late!"

"It is just five o'clock," said he, looking at his watch. "I have time to bring him up to supper, if I can find him."

As soon as Eugene had gone, Estella went to her room, and never did she pay such attention to her toilet as she did that evening, for she was dressing with an aim, now. She wore a heavy silk, trimmed in costly lace, not the least showy, but elegant and plain, and in her ears and at her throat, she wore corals that matched the scarlet of her lips. She stood before the glass, apparently well pleased with the result, for her face and hands looked very fair in the dark dress, relieved by a bit of white lace.

"Now, if he only comes," said she, walking up and down the floor.

She heard a clear, ringing laugh, and looking out of the window, saw Eugene and Grant approach the house, and her heart beat fast as the frank, manly face looked upon her and bowed.

"You are looking well, my dear," said Eugene's grandmother, Mrs. Sinclair, as Estella passed through her room. "Is Mr. Wardleigh a particular friend of yours?" she asked, smiling.

"He is. You saw him to-day; how do you like him?"

"He is very pleasant; has a fine, open face, and I was much pleased with him. But go, my dear, I hear Eugene's voice in the hall."

She welcomed him with a sweet smile, and something like a blush mantled her cheek as he took her hand; her calm stoicism melted away under his genial smile. That night she exerted every faculty—talked to him as she had never talked before, while Eugene looked on with a cynical light in his eyes.

"It is nearly twelve o'clock, Estella," said Eugene, at last. "Grant is no doubt very fatigued, and I propose that we retire."

"I had no idea it was so late. I am afraid I have tired you, Miss Estella," said Grant.

"Not at all; this has been a very pleasant evening."

"Come, make yourself at home," said Eugene, pushing him an easy-chair before the fire, "and decide to stay over to-morrow."

"Could not, possibly. I am so very busy."

"Estella says you are becoming quite popular. Oh! by the way, I had several new books sent to me the other day. One of them contains a severe criticism on Blanchard's last work. Let me show it to you," and he drew up a small, carved stand, and took from it a book, being careful as he did so, to drop from it at Grant's feet, one

of Cora's letters. Grant, of course, stooped to pick it up, the handwriting attracting his attention.

"Do you get letters from Cora?" he asked, while his eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"My dear fellow, did you not know that? But how should you; I have not given you my confidence of late. Read it, and let it explain, for I feel too indolent to repeat it."

"No, I thank you. She would not care to have me."

"Not when I give you my permission? It would be no breach of confidence."

Grant hesitated a moment, then slowly unfolded the letter as if deliberating something in his mind. At last he read, and his face turned ashy pale. He took a letter from his pocket, compared the two, then laid it down in silence, and picked up the book.

"Cool way to treat me. I think I deserve your congratulations."

"Hardly; you might have told me before."

"Positively, this is the first time I have had a chance."

"Show me what you wished me to read," said he, coolly, changing the subject, "then we will retire."

What the result of this maneuver would be, he could not tell, but he did know that there was a terrible struggle going on in his heart, and that love and confidence had received a powerful blow. He took no notice of this sudden change; it was no part of his to do so. But that night his heart smote him for what he had done, when from the lips of Grant there came the cry of Cora. Ah! even in his dreams, his honest, generous heart was being torn by a thousand conflicting emotions, that his once trusted friend, and for aught he knew, still trusted friend, had caused.

Estella arose early the next morning, and when Eugene came down the stairs, she caught him by the arm, an eager, questioning light in her eyes.

"I have done it," he said, in answer to her look; then he pushed her away rudely, impatiently, as if he loathed her.

She walked away surprised, mortified, for she did not expect to see that sullen look upon his face.

If a man truly loves, and the object of his affection be a true, noble woman, it cannot but shed a good influence over him.

Estella did not know how much good Cora's words had done, for he hated her, hated himself, because he had been so weak as to commit such a deed.

Estella had dressed for effect in the evening, so had she this morning. Perhaps she had never appeared to better advantage than she did in the blue dress she wore, which contrasted well with the dazzling pearl and rose of her complexion. But it was all lost on Grant. No stone image could have been more unconscious of beauty or taste than he was at the time.

She was somewhat awed when he met her at breakfast, for his face was very pale, betokening a night of pain and unrest. She was kind, but asked no questions.

"Tell Cora," she said, when he bade her good-bye, "that I sent my love."

He bowed low. He probably would not see Miss Cora, but if he did, he would deliver her message. She gave a little look of surprise, that was all, knowing that the first scene was over; but when would come the

"Last scene of all
That ends this strange, eventful history?"

* * * * * * *

"A letter, Miss Cora," said a servant, entering the room where she and Minnie were sitting.

"Cora!" came quickly from Minnie's lips, and she picked up a crystal goblet and dashed the contents in her face, for she was ashy pale, and clinging to a chair for

support, while the letter the servant had given her but a moment ago, was lying at her feet.

"I am not fainting, Minnie," said Cora, wiping the water from her face.

"You look as if you were. What was in that letter to hurt you so?"

"Don't ask me," said Cora, picking up the letter and putting it in her pocket, "for I cannot tell you."

Minnie asked no questions, for she knew it would be useless.

Cora went to her room, and once more drew out the letter, as if to make sure it was not all some terribe dream.

"MISS BENOIR,—In loving you, I gave you my whole heart, strong and undivided—a heart that never belonged in the slightest degree to another. You were my first love and will be my last. Being deceived in one woman whom I thought an angel, is enough; I ask for no further experience. I need not explain; your own guilty heart will tell you all. Henceforth we can be nothing to each other. GRANT WARDLEIGH."

"Oh, what have I done," she cried, "that he should treat me in this way!"

"Where is Cora?" asked Mr. Benoir of Minnie, when he came home to dinner.

"She is not well, and did not wish any dinner."

"I will go up and see her," said he, "in spite of her protest against it."

"My daughter, what is the matter?" asked he, when he entered the room and found her weeping.

She raised her tear-stained face, and with a cry, threw herself into her father's arms.

"Tell me all, my child," said he, kindly.

For an answer, she placed the note in his hand.

His brow grew dark as he read. "There is some strange mistake here; let me see him?"

"No, father, he does not wish me to explain. He has lost his confidence in me, and though I suffer deeply, I do not wish for love that could not trust through all."

"He is only jealous. Some one has misrepresented you to him."

"I never gave him cause for jealousy; never gave him cause to mistrust me; and, father, let it be a forbidden subject between us."

CHAPTER XVI.

"'Tis doubly vile, when
You fix an arrow in a blameless heart."

"I AM going home to-morrow," said Estella to Eugene, one morning, after reading a letter from home.

"What for?"

"Mother has written, it is rumored that the engagement between Grant and Cora has been broken off."

"Is it not what you expected?"

"Yes; and now it is time to work for my interest."

"And that is what you have been working for all the while. I don't think you consulted my interest at all."

"Have you not a good chance of winning, too? It will be your own fault if you do not succeed."

"Perhaps so," said he, dryly.

"Cora is as free as Grant. They are both our friends; are not our chances equal?"

"No, for I cannot see her."

"You can come to New York."

"I would not like to. She would think it strange that I knew her engagement was broken."

"Not at all. As soon as I go home I will call and tell her that I have heard the report, and express my surprise. She will tell me all about it, and will think, of course, that I have told you. After being in New York awhile, we will call together, and after that you can call

alone. You will know from the manner in which she treats you how to proceed."

"I dislike to go back, for I bade Cora adieu forever, and told Grant that I would leave for Europe in the spring."

"You can tell them you have changed your mind. I am surprised to find you so faint-hearted. You was not so once. And one that has made love to so many ladies as you, ought not to come to me for advice."

"Making love in fun, and making love in earnest are two very different things, Estella."

"I suppose so, but I do not think you will have any trouble, even if it be a case of true love, and if you do, the end will justify it."

"Shall I go home with you?" he asked, at length.

"You could not have a better excuse, and then it would keep mother quiet."

"Estella is going home to-morrow, and I am going with her, grandmother," said Eugene, entering her room, a few minutes after his conversation with Estella.

"Are you coming back to me soon, Eugene?"

"Not soon, I think."

"I am so sorry. If I could only be near you always! It is selfishness in me to even wish that you might prefer this little village to the city, but your mother with her latest breath gave you to me. Oh! you know not how earnestly I have prayed that you might not be led into temptation, for I felt that I could not meet your mother and know that I had failed to do my duty by her child. I am growing old, Eugene—ere you return I may be laid to rest. Try and do right; try to do as you think your angel mother would wish you to, and strive to meet her in Heaven."

Eugene's heart was touched when he saw the tears gliding down her wrinkled cheeks, and all his broken resolutions arose before him. Why had he not kept

them? Why had he given up his peace of mind? Ah, yes! why?

"Grandmother, I am not worthy of your prayers; do not waste them on me. You do not know how wicked I have been."

"No, Eugene, I know nothing, comparatively, about your past life, but be it as it may, I shall never cease praying for you, never give up the hope that you will yet be gathered into the fold."

Eugene was silent, for he knew how useless were her prayers, how useless were her hopes, yet he would not pain her patient heart by telling her so.

"You have been a good, dear grandmother to me," said he, respectfully touching his lips to the hand that lay on his own, "and I hope that you may live to a good old age, and that I may spend many pleasant weeks here before you are laid to rest."

"I know that I have not long to live, Eugene, for I feel myself failing day by day. It is not an unpleasant thought to know that the Master will soon call me, for one by one they have all passed away—all that were near and dear to me. But you remain, and you will soon marry and form new ties, and will not miss your old grandmother."

"Yes, grandmother, I would miss you, and no one's death would cause me as much grief as yours."

"Has Eugene been a bad boy, grandmother, and have you been telling him of his naughtiness," asked Estella, entering the room.

"No, I never think he is a bad boy. We have been talking of the past, and of his mother."

"Ah!" said Estella.

"Come and walk down to the village, Eugene, I have an errand there," said she, after a time.

Eugene obeyed reluctantly, for he felt as if she always came to banish his good impulses. But out from his

grandmother's presence, out into the cold, sharp air, and Estella by his side, laughing at his sober face, his conscience was soon hushed.

"You used to preach to me about honor and truth, Estella, and Pharisee-like, stand off and say, 'I am better than thou,' but how bravely you have gotten over it all," said Eugene, scornfully, for he was not pleased to hear her ridicule him for being touched at his grandmother's words.

"Circumstances always alter cases. I am aware I am not the girl I was once."

"Then don't laugh when another has a sober thought, Estella."

"What good does your sober thoughts—as you call them—do when you are going straight to make mischief?"

"I would spoil your prospects, if it were not for proving my falseness to Grant."

"I would not stop for such a small consideration," said Estella, ironically.

Eugene frowned and was silent, but he felt as if he would like to have boxed her ears soundly. Estella smiled to herself, because he dared make no outcry, let her be as tantalizing as she pleased.

"Do not look so much like clouds in November," said Estella to Eugene, that evening, "and I will tell you what mother says in a postscript to her letter, that I overlooked in the hasty reading that was given it this morning. She said that she met Cora the day before she wrote, and that she inquired after you very kindly. You see that she has not forgotten you, at least. There is something else that I have to say to you. You know why mother was so anxious to have me come here, and when we return you must appear very devoted to me before her, or she will have old Mr. Claymore visiting me."

"You need not see him against your will."

"No, but it is unpleasant to be forever quarreling about it. She is determined to get rid of me——"

"Sensible woman," said Eugene, interrupting her.

Estella went on, and did not heed his remark.

"And unless she thinks there is some prospect of my marrying you, she will never give me any peace until I have Mr. Claymore."

Mrs. Brainard was delighted to find that Eugene had returned with Estella, and she drew her aside, telling her that she had done a sensible thing for once, and that he would make her a much better husband than Mr. Claymore.

"So I thought," said Estella.

"It is very pleasant to have you with us again, Eugene. Do you intend remaining all winter?" said Mrs. Brainard.

"Yes, and probably longer, if I do not go to Europe in the spring. Estella has almost persuaded me out of the notion," said Eugene, glancing across the room at Estella, who sat reading by the fire.

"Has she? It was very kind in you to comply with her request," said Mrs. Brainard, well pleased.

Eugene guessed her thoughts, and smiled secretly at her mistake.

"I sent word to Cora that I was at home, and to come and stay all the evening," said Estella to Eugene, the next day. "She has sent word back that she had an engagement, but would call this afternoon. When you think she has been here long enough to tell me her troubles, you can come in, and probably she will invite you to call. I want you to do a favor for me, now that I have planned this for you. Probably it will be weeks before I can see Grant, and you must get him to call to-morrow evening, but at the same time, be careful not to let him know that I am anxious about it."

"I am puzzled, Estella, to know how you are going to proceed, after you do meet him. He knew that Cora told

you she was engaged to him; he will know also that you have heard the rumor that it is broken off."

"No, for I will tell him you never gave him your confidence, and that Cora kept the truth from me because she knew my mother was resolved that I should marry you. Only get him here—that is all I ask of you!"

"Dear Cora, how glad I am to see you!" said Estella, that afternoon, when Cora came. "It has been such a long while since I saw you. You look pale; have you been sick?"

"No, but not as well as usual!"

"What has become of Grant and Gerald?" asked Estella, at length.

"Gerald still waits on Minnie. They will be married soon.

"Are you not going to marry at the same time?"

"I shall not marry at all," said Cora, sadly. "Grant is angry with me."

"Grant angry? That is unlike him. What have you done?"

"Nothing that I know of. I received a brief note from him, just after he returned home, saying that henceforth it would be best that we remain as strangers, and that it was not necessary for him to explain, or for me to make any excuses. Did he say anything to you?"

"He said nothing about being angry with you, nor was he angry, for when I congratulated him he told me that he was as happy as it was possible for man to be. Why not ask him, Cora, what you have done to offend him?"

"He told me, you remember, to make no excuses, and I am too proud to do so, but Estella, you do not know what a heavy heart it has made me carry all this while."

"My dear friend, I am truly sorry for you. I wish it were in my power to make you happy. But never mind; everything happens for the best. All will come right yet. If Grant really loves you, he will return."

Eugene just then opened the door and came in.

Cora sprang up and held out her hand, saying: "Estella, why did you not tell me that he was here?"

"I wanted to surprise you, for I had such a time in getting him to consent to come."

"Are you going to remain all the winter in the city?"

"I really cannot tell, Miss Cora," he replied.

"I must go, Estella, for father will have a friend to dinner, and I have to be there. You both must call!"

"Give Grant my compliments when you see him to-night, and tell him that I am coming down to his office in the morning," said Eugene, when he put Cora into her carriage.

"I shall not see Grant; he does not call on me any more!"

"Why, are you not engaged to him?"

"Not now!"

"May I call on you then?"

"Certainly. You are my friend, and will be welcome at any time."

"May I call to-morrow evening?" he asked, at a venture.

"I have an engagement then; you may call the next."

Eugene bowed and left her, and went down to Grant Wardleigh's office, but he was not there. "It don't matter much," thought Eugene, "whether she sees him or not. I have had to bear all her tuants and commit all the crime, and I think deserve all the gain."

"Grant was not at his office, Estella," said Eugene, on his return. "I will go again in the morning. I have made an engagement with Cora for Thursday evening."

"You are progressing nicely; but do not call too often at first, for she may suspect your love, and put an end to it."

"What was she talking about when I came in?"

"About Grant Wardleigh. He never explained, nor would he let her explain, which is fortunate for us both."

"Well, Estella, it is doubtful whether I can get him here; he would give me no positive answer."

"How did he treat you?"

"Rather coldly. I don't suppose he ever will be the friend to me again that he has been."

"You ought not to expect it."

"Grant has come," said Eugene, tapping on Estella's door, that evening. "Make the most of it, for I don't think I can get him here again. He seems very despondent."

Estella went down into the parlor, and for the first time found Grant Wardleigh hard to entertain. He was quiet, and answered everything in monosyllables. Estella was almost in despair, but was determined to gain her point.

"Mr. Wardleigh," said Estella, "I am afraid you think I was aware of the engagement that existed between my cousin and Cora Benoir, when I congratulated you. Cora told me she was engaged to you, and I did not know it was otherwise until to-day; then Eugene told me."

"No, Estella, I never thought you knew of the engagement."

"I have often wondered why Cora told me what she did. She must have been afraid to tell me the truth, because she knew my mother was anxious that Eugene and I should marry. Who would have thought Cora would have told an untruth!"

"I would not," he replied, briefly, and all attempts were unavailing to make him speak of Cora, again!

"You are not going?" said Eugene, coming in, and finding Grant ready to depart.

"Yes, it's ten o'clock."

"I trust this is but the commencement of many pleasant evenings like this," said Estella.

"Thank you, I shall be pleased to call again."

"Well, Estella, how are you succeeding?" asked Eugene, after Grant had left.

"Very well, considering how full his heart is of Cora It will take him some time to live down his love."

CHAPTER XVII.

"But ties around this heart were spun
That would not, could not be undone."

"WHERE are you going, Cora?" asked Minnie.

"To see my seamstress, who is sick," said she filling a small basket full of delicacies to take along with her.

"You are looking more cheerful than usual."

"To do a kindly errand makes me cheerful."

"I thought perhaps you had seen Grant."

"No," said she, sadly.

"I would forget him, Cora."

"Oh, if it were possible!" thought Cora, as she walked down the street, "for my heart which was once full freighted with the fondest hopes woman ever cherished, now lies crushed and dying. Dreary indeed would be my lot, if I had but one hope, one aim; but there still remains for me the pleasure of making others happy, if I am not happy myself."

Her walk was soon ended, and going into the house, she found Grant Wardleigh talking to the seamstress about some work. For a moment her heart beat violently, and a faint flush spread over her face, then she bowed, and took the chair he offered her. Grant took up his hat and gloves to leave. As he passed Cora, the small seal he wore on his watch-chain became unfastened, and fell at her feet. She picked it up and gave it to him; as she did so, he glanced into her violet eyes, with their tender, pleading look. Oh, how he longed to take her in his arms, kiss away the look of grief, and crush down

the barrier the letters had raised between them, by telling her all. Then there arose before him Eugene's triumphant laugh as he gave him the letter, and Estella's confirmation of the engagement. He drew on his gloves and walked resolutely away, heedless of the disappointed look in her face. But as he walked home, the good angel came down and stirred the depths of his heart.

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured to himself, "I cannot believe that you have been untrue, cannot believe that your pure, open face hides deceit. This must all be some strange mistake, and if you are at the party to-night, I will know the truth from your own lips."

"You have got the blues again," said Minnie to Cora, just after she had returned, "and have seen Grant, I know. Come to the party to-night—the excitement will make you forget your trouble."

"I will go."

"That is right. I would not grieve for any one, no, not even for such a paragon as Grant."

"I declare, if there is not Grant Wardleigh, and he has not been to a party in an age," whispered Minnie to Cora at the party that night. "I must speak to him."

"Grant, what is the matter?" asked Minnie, tapping him on the arm with her fan. "You look as though you had lost your best friend."

"Did my face indeed look so doleful, as to have attracted your attention, Miss Minnie?" he asked, with a faint attempt at a smile.

"Yes, and I could guess the cause. You are jealous; Cora is proud, and you are both silly. Come, make it all up," and before Grant hardly knew it, she had led him to Cora's side, saying:

"This is your place," then she was off like a meteor flash.

"Grant had to smile in spite of himself, and he

offered Cora his arm, which she, with a look of surprise, took.

"I am much obliged to Minnie for what she has done," said Grant, "for I came here with the determination to know the truth. I cannot stand it any longer. I cannot believe you untrue, and yet——"

"Good evening, Grant," said Eugene Tracy, at his side, for he had been watching them, and was not going to let his prey be snatched away in that manner. "I am glad you concluded to come. Our hostess deserves great credit for drawing Diogenes away from his tub; don't you think so, Miss Cora?"

She merely bowed. Eugene Tracy's presence was unwelcome then. She wondered what Grant was going to say to her—would he explain? "He says that he cannot believe I am untrue. Has any one told him that I was untrue? All this she pondered over as she stood there. "No, no," she thought. "Estella cares too much for my happiness to injure me in any way."

"Cora, there is a bust of Clytie in the library that I wish to show yon. It was executed by a friend of mine now in Italy. Grant will excuse you, I know," said Eugene.

There was nothing for her to do but to go with Eugene; but if Grant had glanced into her face, he would have seen how it displeased her. As it was, he thought she preferred Eugene's society to his, and took that method to keep from confessing her deceit, and he walked moodily away, never thinking how unreasonable his thoughts were. Cora, after admiring the Clytie, came away, for she hoped Grant would finish the explanation that her heart was aching to know; but when she again entered the room, Grant had joined Estella, and during the rest of the evening he did not approach her.

"Grant came very near putting an end to our little

affair to-night; did you see them together?" said Eugene to Estella, after the party.

"Yes; it was Minnie's doing—I saw her bring him over to Cora, and was about to rush to the rescue myself, when you came. You don't think he told her anything?"

"No; I did not give him time. Cora flashed her blue eyes at me for my pains, and I have no doubt she would have preferred Grant's conversation to seeing a piece of marble."

"You must be careful and not give him such another opportunity," said Estella.

"And you must make him more suspicious, or he will have an understanding with her in spite of us."

"I wonder if he really cares for her yet?"

"I know that he does. Last week, while at the concert, when you and Cora came in, he grasped his opera-glass in a way that showed his feelings were aroused."

"If that is the case, Estella, are you not afraid you will never succeed in making him love you? You know

'It is better to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new!'"

"I can wait. He cannot always cling to Cora when he knows he cannot marry her. He but rarely speaks of her, and when he does, I infer he thinks she has been trying to flirt with him, and you know Grant can forgive anything better than deceit."

"Well, that is rich! The idea of her flirting! Why, she would not say anything she did not mean, under any circumstances. I call her Saint Agnes, all the time."

"Does she appear as indifferent toward you as ever?"

"One could hardly say that she is indifferent. She is very friendly, and sometimes her words make me think she regards me with even more than friendly interest, I hardly know what to think, but it is evident that she is very unhappy."

"Will Mr. Wardleigh call again to night?" asked Mrs. Brainard of Estella, the night after the party.

"Yes."

"Won't Eugene object to his calling so often?"

"We understand each other," she replied, coldly.

"I have reason to think," said Mrs. Brainard, looking at her sharply, "that you have not gotten over your penchant for Mr. Wardleigh. You are very silly, Estella, for he will never love you."

Estella smiled scornfully in reply, as she left the room, for she was as certain she would gain his love, as she was that she existed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Throb yet, oh, aching heart!
Still pulse the flagging current without cease;
When you a few more hours have played your part,
Comes peace."

"FATHER," said Cora, one morning," I am going to visit Mrs. Gray."

"Who is Mrs. Gray?"

"My old friend, Ida Nathan."

"What made you think of going there?" asked Minnie, after Mr. Benoir had left the room.

"The letter I received from Ida this morning, and I am feeling so low spirited that a visit will do me good."

"Any one that is so proud as you are, ought to feel low spirited. I declare, you and Grant put me out of all patience."

"What is the use of putting myself in a humiliating position for no purpose?"

"None," she replied, ironically.

It was no part of Minnie's nature to suffer long. She believed in the philosophy that

"For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy, or there is none;
If there is one, be sure to find it,
If there is none, never mind it."

No imaginary sorrow ever troubled her, and Cora's sorrow was half imaginary, she knew. It was provoking to see her drift along in this silent grief, when perhaps a few words would make all right, and she grew half angry at Cora for hushing her whenever she attemped to speak about it.

"I would not be surprised to see you silly enough to marry Eugene Tracy, in the end," said Minnie.

"Marry Eugene Tracy? never!"

"Then you are a flirt."

"Minnie!" said she, in an injured tone.

"Well, does it not look like it? You encourage him in his visits, and yet, say you would not marry him."

"He looks upon me only as a friend."

"Friend, nonsense! He thinks his coming will keep Grant away, and, in the meantime, he will have a chance of winning you himself."

"Grant is his most intimate friend, and he would not wrong him. He knows it would be vain to think of winning my love, for I have told him so, long ago."

"Suppose you have. As long as you let him call on you, he will hope."

"But he has not spoken of love this season."

"No, he will bide his time."

Cora had not thought of all this before. She supposed he had banished all such sentiments when she rejected him, and even now, when she looked back over the last few months, she could not see that he had been the least lover-like. She thought he had sought her society because it was unpleasant at his aunt's. She had told Grant she cared nothing for Eugene, and his coming could not keep him away.

"I am going to visit Mrs. Gray," said Cora, when Eugene came that evening.

"Shall you stay long?" he asked.

"Probably all the summer."

"Oh, Cora!" said he, with a disappointed look on his face, "you don't know how I shall miss you!"

"Of course, I shall expect you to miss me a little at first, but you will forget me before the season is over."

"You know better, Cora," said he, in a tone that she could not mistake."

"Where will you spend the summer?" she asked, pretending not to have noticed what he said.

"I do not know," he replied, briefly. He was angry to see Cora so indifferent in leaving him.

Cora then changed the subject, and gave him no opportunity of pressing his suit, even if he desired to.

* * * * * * *

"Grant, my dear fellow, what is the matter?" asked Gerald Lingle, coming into his office one day, and finding him with his head bowed on the table.

He raised his head with a weary look, and said:

"Perhaps I am grieving because you are a judge, while I, who have plodded along so patiently, am but a poor lawyer."

"That is not it," said Gerald. "Is it not something about Cora? Tell me, my friend, and let me help you."

"If it were anything you could help me in, you should know it," said Grant, sadly, thinking how useless it was to try to restore broken confidence and lost faith. False as he thought her, he could not help loving her. Eugene was so handsome, so fascinating, and Cora loved him once. Perhaps she had deceived herself in thinking her old love dead, and when she met him it revived. Thus he argued. "But oh, if she had only been honest, only had told me the truth, I would have given her up without an unkind thought."

"Where are your thoughts—in the clouds?" asked Gerald, as Grant sat gazing out of the window at a line of white, fleecy mist. "Ah, this accounts for it," said he, picking up a volume of Ruskin that lay on the table. "Do you know that Miss Cora leaves New York to-morrow?" asked Gerald, at length.

"No; where is she going?"

"To Princeton, to visit Mrs. Gray. I am going to call on her this evening; come, go with me."

"No, I thank you."

"As there is no prospect of getting you to consent to go with me, I may as well leave you," said Gerald.

As soon as he left the office Grant once more bowed his head on the table, and sat there until the daylight faded and the somber shadows of night gathered around him. Never had he felt so miserable or so alone. Bitter, indeed, had been the moment when he bade farewell to the loved ones, as they passed away from earth, but far more bitter to say farewell forever to hope and happiness, to know that the one he had trusted, confided in, was unworthy of his affections. Gerald thought him proud, unreasonable, he knew, but he did not know all, nor would he tell him. He chose to suffer alone, rather than by word or deed give others reason to think less of Cora.

"Grant, are you asleep?" asked Judge Glynn, coming into the office, and finding him sitting there in the dark. "It is seven o'clock; time you were going to supper, my boy."

Grant took his hat and left the office, but instead of going to the hotel, turned his steps in the direction of the avenue on which Cora lived, and the policeman on his beat, half an hour later, saw a tall, portly figure, with folded arms, pace up and down before a house that was brilliantly lighted, for, unknown to Cora, a gay party had assembled there to say good-bye. Grant watched the figures flit through the rooms, and once noticed Cora and

Eugene standing by one of the windows, as he broke a spray of ivy that climbed about it, and placed it in her hair. She smiled, and taking his arm, walked away. It was enough for the lonely watcher on the walk, and he hastened from the scene. Cora little thought that night of the suffering he was passing through; if she had, Grant would have awakened the next morning to find his fondest hopes realized, for she would not have closed her eyes until he had known the truth.

"If you get sick, or need me in any way, you must not fail to send for me," said Cora, a short time before she was to leave, addressing her father.

"You shall be notified in due time," said he, passing his hand caressingly over her hair.

While Cora was awaiting the train, a tall, muffled figure passed her, and when nearing her destination, she saw, sitting in the cars a few seats behind her, the same person that had attracted her attention at the depot. Looking into his face, as she arose to leave the car, she recognized Grant Wardleigh. Had he followed her as a spy, or because he cared for her, she wondered.

He caught hold of her dress as she was about to pass out of the door, and when she looked up in surprise, he held out his hand and said, "I have come to say good-bye."

"Was it necessary to come all this way to say it?" she asked, piqued at his strange behavior.

"No," and he abruptly turned and left her.

She repented her words as soon as spoken, but she had no time to recall them, for the conductor lifted her out on the platform, the bell rang, and the cars rattled off.

Grant strode back in the car, and sat down in the seat he had vacated. When they arrived at the next station, he got out; and instead of going back to New York, took the train for his home in Brighton.

His parents, surprised to see him, were alarmed at his pale face, but to their many questions he replied: "I am

not sick, only tired, and I thought that a few hours at home would do me good."

Old Aunt Chloe was delighted to find that Grant was home again, and asked why he had not brought Cora with him, as he had promised.

"I did not ask her to come, Chloe, and if I had, I suppose she would have refused."

Mrs. Wardleigh heard his reply, and thought she had discovered the cause of his pale face.

"I shall leave on the noon train," said Grant, the next morning.

"So soon?" asked she, sorrowfully.

When leaving, he took the path that led through the orchard and grove—the same that Cora and he had strolled up and down the summer before. Each word and look that he recalled smote him for doubting her; and yet, how could he help it, after seeing the fatal letter? He walked on through the graveyard, and leaned over the iron railing that inclosed the family burying-ground. Sad thoughts thronged around him as he stood there, looking on the mounds from whence the white shafts pointed heavenward, for all but he had gone, and to him existence had ceased to be enjoyable. Then he felt that it was not manly to be so unnerved, and recalled to his mind the words of the sage who said: "Only women and weak-minded men mourn over disappointed love." But he could not shake off this feeling of despondency where every object reminded him of Cora.

Grant resolved, as he went back on the train, that he would try no more to have an understanding with Cora; he would banish her from his thoughts, and give his whole mind and energies to his profession. How well he succeeded in this resolve remains to be told, but knowing the effect of this estrangement, you may guess.

CHAPTER XIX.

"To me there comes no happy day,
Though only what I sowed I reap."

SUMMER had come and was nearly gone, and Cora was still visiting her friend. Eugene did not go to any summer resort. He was tired of drifting here and there; tired of leading such an aimless life, and felt disgusted with himself and all the world, he said:

"I shall not live between hopes and fears any longer," said Eugene to Estella, one day. "I am going to see Cora, and know my fate."

"Don't be rash."

"If she does not love me now she never will. 'As ye sow, even so shall ye reap.' Estella, we have sown evil; how can we expect to reap good?"

"Don't moralize," said she, impatiently, "it is not your mission."

"What is my mission?"

"Whatever you excel in."

"Wickedness."

"True."

"But I am not contented with my mission, then; it has proved a burden."

"You bear it very philosophically, if it has. When do you propose going to Cora?"

"To-morrow, for I am in a hurry to know the truth. It is rumored at the club, Estella, that you are engaged to Grant Wardleigh. Is it so?"

"No; not engaged to him; but judging from his manner, I shall not be surprised to receive a proposal of marriage very soon."

Twelve o'clock the next day found Eugene speeding over hill and valley, *en route* for Princeton. Later, it was with feelings of sadness that he walked up the familiar

streets, and saw the walls of the old college rising out of the trees. Ah, how things had changed since he walked those streets a student!

As he approached the residence of Mrs. Gray, he saw Cora standing among the trees, arranging a bouquet.

She uttered a little cry, and said, in a tone that sounded like displeasure: "Why, Eugene, what brings you here?"

"You, of course; what else could?"

She turned away her face, and he could not see if his words had displeased her. After a moment's silence, she said:

"Come into the house. Ida will be delighted to see you, for I believe she once numbered you among her best friends."

"No, I do not wish to go in until I know my fate. Cora, you must know that I never relinquished the hope that you might love me."

"I thought that question had been answered, satisfactorily, some time ago," she replied.

"But you are not engaged to Grant, now?"

"No, yet I shall never cease loving him."

"Then you cannot care for me?" he asked, sadly.

"As a dear friend—nothing more. Why not be content?"

"Because I love, and need you, Cora. You could purify my nature, and help me lead a better life."

"No, I could not. That rests with you and God. Do not be angry, my friend. You know not how it pains me to refuse you; but you would not want a wife who could not love you. Banish me from your thoughts, if I can bring you nothing but sorrow," said she, kindly.

"Banish you from my thoughts! Ah! that is so easily said, but not so easily done," he replied, bitterly.

"You are not going?" asked she, laying her hand on his arm, as he moved away.

"Yes; why should I stay?"

She did not reply. "Remember, Eugene," she said at last, "that I am your true friend. No man ever had a truer one, and let us part as such."

He merely touched the hand she extended, then walked hastily away.

Cora was grieved to think she had offended him, and for the moment almost wished that she could love him.

Eugene strode angrily to his hotel. Angry because he had been drawn into a plan that had resulted in no good to himself, and mortified because he had been rejected.

"Fool that I have been!" he exclaimed, "I might have known Estella only planned this to benefit herself. I wish that not one of her hopes may be realized, and that she may live to suffer—suffer as I am suffering!" he cried.

He tried to hate Cora, but the pale, sweet face came before his mind—the face that had held naught but pleasant smiles and kind words for him, and he could not do it.

"She loved me once, and I trifled with her, never caring how my neglect might hurt her. It is but right that I should suffer now. What a weary life I have made Grant lead for a year! I will return and tell him all; let him hate me if he will. I shall go away then, where none will ever hear of me."

A little girl opposite his window commenced playing "Home, Sweet Home." It took him back to his youthful days. Memories of his father and mother clustered around him. "Oh, would to Heaven I were a boy again! I would give anything to be able to retrace my steps and stand here as pure as that child in heart and principle." He felt as if he could have wept bitter tears of grief and remorse for his wasted life. It is a sorrowful thing to stand face to face with one's own soul and know it to be

worthy of something so much higher and better, and yet find it merely a charnel-house, filled with the dead hopes and high aspirations of long ago.

At midnight Eugene was on the train homeward bound. Oh, that some good angel had told him to delay until the morning, for surely and swiftly he was going to meet his doom. The stars looked serenely down on the quiet beauty of the landscape over which the cars dashed, and the passengers were dozing in their seats, with no thought of the danger that awaited them, when suddenly there came a crash, the cars bounded, pitched forward, and amid shrieks and screams, went down, down to the bottom of a precipice, with dead, dying and wounded among the ruins of the train.

"You are seriously injured, and if you have any word to send to friends, better do so immediately," said a physician to Eugene Tracy, when he awakened and found himself almost crushed to death, in a farm-house, near where the accident happened.

"I have two friends I wish to send for," said he, faintly.

The doctor took their address, and asked what he should tell them.

"That I cannot live, and to come to me immediately."

"Shall I send a minister to you?"

Oh, the thoughts that crossed his mind as he lay there! The past, with all its sin, loomed up before him, making a hell of his heart. He would die! he shrieked aloud, and cursed God in his bitterness.

"Here is a telegram for you, Cora," said Mrs. Gray, tapping on her door the next morning.

She hastily went to the door, a vague fear possessing her, and her hands trembled so she could hardly tear it open.

"Oh, Ida, Eugene is dying!" she exclaimed.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"He was going home, and there was a collision. He has sent for me."

"May I ask, Cora, if he is more than a friend?"

"No, but I will not deny him this last request."

Cora did not arrive at the house where Eugene was until after Grant had. She was surprised to see him there, and merely bowing, she knelt down by Eugene's bed, gazed upon the face that looked as if Death had already set his seal there, and murmured: "My poor, dear friend!"

A smile passed over his face as she uttered these words.

"Don't touch me!" he exclaimed, in a tone that made her draw back, as she attempted to take his hand. "You would sooner touch the vilest wretch on earth than me, when you know all. Grant, come here and kneel by Cora; I want to confess what I have done, and make all the atonement possible."

Grant complied, and Eugene lay a moment with closed eyes, as if gathering courage to begin.

"Grant," said he, "I once made Cora believe that I was honorable and true, and strove by every art to make her love me, with no other purpose than to pass away time, and to vex Estella and my aunt. When I had gained it, and found that her father would soon return, and that I could trifle no longer, I left her to suffer, as only a loving, trusting nature like hers can. After four years I met her again, and learned to love her, but it was too late—you had won what I would have given everything to have possessed. She has forgiven me all, and pleaded for me to be a good, true man; and I went away resolved to keep the promise I had given her. But while at my grandmother's, the notes Cora had written to me years before, were placed in my hands. They tempted me—oh, you know not how strongly—and I yielded. I changed the dates, and when you came, put them in your way to arouse your suspicion; and succeeding in this, I

went still further, and induced you to read one, so that you might believe her untrue. You were jealous and proud; I knew you would not explain; and I have tried to keep you apart—poisoned your mind with hints, while I tried to win her love, but it was useless. Yesterday she again refused me, saying that she would never cease loving you. I left Cora with my heart full of anger, for home, but, you see, am here."

Cora was crying, but Grant gazed at him with a terrible look in his eyes.

"Oh, Grant, forgive me!" said he, pleadingly: "God only knows what suffering it has caused me."

But Grant did not reply, nor did the sternness pass from his face.

"Cora," said Eugene, his dark eyes resting upon her, "dare I ask you, whom I have twice injured, to forgive me?"

Malice could find no place in Cora's heart. She only saw before her her erring friend, whom she pitied but did not hate, and bending over him, she pressed a kiss of forgiveness on his brow.

A smile of grateful thanks passed over his face, but it changed to an expression of pain as he glanced at Grant.

"'But I say unto you: Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven,'" slowly repeated Cora. Then laying her hand softly on Grant's arm, she said: "Forgive him."

He hesitated a moment, and then said: "It has been a struggle, but I forgive you all."

"Thank God!" Eugene exclaimed, with a look of relief.

"Cora, will you forgive me?" asked Grant, turning to her with his frank, open face, full of grief and love.

She looked at him with tears glistening in her dark eyes, and for an answer, rested her head upon his breast and wept softly.

Eugene turned away his head, for it was torture to witness caresses that his own heart had longed for, and he groaned aloud.

"What is it?" asked Cora, bending over him.

"Nothing. Send the doctor to me, and leave us alone awhile, please."

"I will trouble you but this once, doctor. I want a dispatch sent to my cousin, Estella Brainard, of New York city. Tell her I was hurt in the accident—that Grant and Cora are with me and happy—and that I did not mention her. Tell her not to come to me, for it will be too late. Now, doctor, my mission on earth is ended."

"If you are friends of this young man," said the doctor, after a time, coming to the door, "you had better come in, for the end is very near."

They went in. Cora knelt at his side, as before. Grant and the doctor stood at the foot of the bed. He lay apparently lifeless. The doctor bent forward, laid his finger on his pulse, and whispered that it was growing fainter.

Cora gazed sorrowfully down into his face, for deeply as he had injured her, it filled her heart with grief to know that he was swiftly passing away.

Eugene opened his eyes, and saw the look of compassion on her face. "Pray for me," said he, almost inaudibly.

She sank down by his bed, and prayed, oh, so earnestly, that God would pardon him and take him to Himself. Then he closed his eyes, and lay like one asleep.

That evening, when the doctor sent the telegram that Eugene had dictated, Grant sent another, which read:

"Eugene is dead; we leave here at one o'clock."

Estella was in the library, writing, when the dispatches

were handed to her. She glanced at them, and then exclaimed like one in despair: "Lost to me forever!"

"Why, Estella, what are you doing?" asked Mrs. Brainard, coming into the room.

Estella handed her the dispatch from Grant.

"Eugene dead! There must be some mistake. What is Grant Wardleigh doing there?"

"I have another dispatch," said Estella, tearing it into pieces as she spoke. "It was from Eugene. He was coming home; there was a collision, and he was hurt. He said he could not live, and for us not to come to him, that it would only be too late. I suppose he telegraphed for Grant as soon as he was hurt. My dispatch must have been delayed, for they both came at the same time."

"That is what he has got for following a will-o'-the-wisp. He went to see Cora, I know. Well, his fortune is ours," said she, feigning no sorrow for his untimely death.

"The corpse will be here some time in the morning. You must make all the arrangements; I will see no one.'

Mrs. Brainard glanced at Estella in surprise. "Had she loved her cousin?" But before she could read her face, she was gone.

"His grandmother must be sent for," said Mrs. Brainard, to herself, and writing a message, caused it to be sent.

* * * * * * *

"If the love of the heart is blighted, it buddeth not again,
If that pleasant song is forgotten, it is to be learnt no more;
Yet often will thought look back and weep over early affection;
And the dim notes of that pleasant song will be heard as a reproachful spirit,
Mourning in Æolian strains over the desert of the heart."

Those lines came before Estella's mind, as she sat mute and motionless in her room. "The past holds nothing; the present nothing; the future nothing. Oh, my God, and I so young!" and the pent-up grief and remorse in her heart broke forth in great sobs. They were coming to-morrow; how could she meet them? How could she look in Cora's innocent face, hear her kind words of sympathy, when she had been a traitor? How could she look upon the cold face of the dead, for she felt that she had been an instrument in bringing him to an untimely death. She had goaded him on until, unprincipled though he was, his life had become a burden. She knew full well but for her this sin would never have been committed, and now he had gone, gone with his unrepented sins to meet his God.

"Estella, show that you have some sense. Cora and Grant have been here for some time. Why don't you come down? They think it strange that you have not looked at your cousin," said her mother, as she stood at the door the next morning, which Estella refused to open to any one.

Estella did not reply, but after her mother had gone, she went quietly down-stairs. Cora and Grant were standing by one of the windows as she entered the room, and when Cora saw her, she greeted her cordially, but sadly.

She explained Eugene's confession, that he had been mutually forgiven by herself and Grant, and ended by saying: "We are no longer estranged." Then she put her arms around Estella and kissed her.

Estella tore herself almost rudely away. She could not be hypocrite enough to receive the caresses of one whom in her heart she accused of robbing her of her idol, for she believed he would yet have loved her. She walked into the room where they had laid her cousin, and looked down on the face that had changed so terribly since she last saw it. The closed eyes and mute lips sent a shaft

of remorse to her very soul, which seemed to say: "Wretch, look ye! it is your work!"

Some one has said: "How hopeless the hour when we hear the dirge of bright anticipation, the death-knell of life-long hopes, the funeral chant of love and happiness; when an unseen mourner we stand by the grave of yearning desires and joyous ambition, for which the light of no resurrection can ever break, over whose green sod no sculptured monument can ever be erected, whose only epitaph, traced in letters of fire upon our hearts, is the bitter, hopeless, 'It might have been.'"

Estella felt all this as she stood there and saw, through an opposite door, Grant, with Cora looking up fondly into his face. She clinched her hands, mad with jealousy, and once more looking down upon the dead face, she exclaimed, bitterly:

"This one confession did not secure for you pardon. Why could you not leave me this one ray of happiness?" She looked up and saw her mother standing by her side, silently regarding her.

"Estella, are you crazy? What do you mean by such wild words?"

Estella gave her a smile that she could not analyze, and said: "Crazy? No, but I feel as though I could go crazy."

"I did not know you loved your cousin so well," said her mother.

She gave a low, mocking laugh. "Love him! Yes—as well as I did a serpent!" and passed from the room.

Mrs. Brainard was perplexed! She did not know what to make of Estella; it was so unusual for her to betray any emotion.

"Mrs. Brainard, his grandmother has come," said Hannah, at the door.

"They tell me that Eugene is dead," said she, coming into the room. "Why did you not send for me before he died?"

"We knew nothing about it until after he was dead," said Mrs. Brainard. "A terrible accident happened to the train he was on, and they brought him home dead. Oh, it is too dreadful to think about!" said she, raising the handkerchief to her eyes. "Come and see him."

His grandmother was not prepared to find him so changed, and it quite unnerved her. She bent over him and cried:

"Oh, my poor Eugene, I did not think I should ever look upon your dead face! did not think you would go before," and she passed her hand caressingly over his hair, and kissed the cold face tenderly.

"Are you not wearied with your journey? Let me get you some refreshments," said Mrs. Brainard.

She stood still as if she had not even heard her, and murmured: "Mary's child, the last of our race, and the only one in this wide world that should tie me here," and with feeble steps she followed Mrs. Brainard out of the room.

CHAPTER XX.

"And hope and peace and joy are gone,
* * * * * * *
I stand without them on the path of life.
What is there left to me?"

WHEN Estella returned from the funeral, she saw there was only one thing to do to deceive Minnie in her belief that she loved Grant Wardleigh, and had been complicated in Eugene's guilt to effect the estrangement—for that this was Minnie's belief she knew full well, from the sundry hints she had thrown out in her presence—and that one thing was to marry Mr. Claymore almost immediately, making Minnie think it had been an engagement of long standing. She would have cared but little

if Minnie alone suspected this, but she was afraid Gerald and Grant did also, and she would make any sacrifice, rather than have Grant convinced of the truth concerning this matter.

"Mother," said Estella, a week after, "if you will send for Mr. Claymore, I will see him."

"And accept him?" she asked in surprise, wondering what had come over Estella.

"And accept him," she replied coldly.

In response to the note that ran: "Estella has changed her mind, and will see you this evening," Mr. Claymore came.

Estella received him with studied politeness, and when his formal proposal was ended, she accepted him. No kiss or word of endearment sealed this betrothal, but they were as cold and seemingly as uninterested as though the contract had just been made for lands. Estella passed by her mother's room, for she knew she was there waiting to know the result of his call, but she had no heart to speak of it, and going on to her own room to retire, she took up a bottle labeled "Laudanum," poured a portion of it in a spoon, saying to herself as she did so: "This will bring oblivion for a night."

The next morning she comprehended what a life hers would be, mated to a man totally unlike her in tastes and feelings, but she had no disposition to recall her consent if she could have done so.

Mr. Claymore, fearful lest Estella would again change her mind, pleaded for an early marriage. To this she readily complied, and in a few weeks the invitations were out.

"Humph!" said Minnie to Cora, when she received hers, "Estella will never marry that old man for love."

"She surely will not marry him for money; for since Eugene died, she has plenty of her own."

"No; but she loves Grant Wardleigh, and will marry

Mr. Claymore to keep people from knowing that she is disappointed."

"What nonsense! Minnie," said Cora, yet she could not help thinking Estella had acted very strangely. And then what Eugene had said just before he died, came into her mind—that her old notes had been placed in his hands to tempt him. Could it have been Estella that had done it? and if so, what had been her motive? It was an enigma that she could not solve.

"I would really like to know, Cora, if you are really sorry that Eugene is dead?" said Minnie, presently.

"He wronged me, Minnie, I know, but he also loved me, which made him more easily led into temptation. The grave has covered his faults, and I have forgiven him all. I am truly sorry that one so young, so capable of making a good, noble man has gone so soon."

"Estella has been so cold and silent ever since."

"We cannot wonder at it, knowing what a shock his death must have been to her."

"She never told you that she intended to marry Mr. Claymore?"

"No, I have not been alone with her since Eugene died, and then Estella rarely speaks of anything concerning herself; but she and I are too old friends to stand on etiquette, and I shall go to see her this evening."

Cora found Estella seated in an easy chair, her head resting on her hand, and an unhappy look on her face.

"What is the matter, Estella?" asked Cora, sitting down by her side.

"Nothing, only I feel tired. Mother and I have been out shopping to-day," she replied, wearily.

"And you have been engaged this long while, and never told your best friend," said Cora, reproachfully.

"My dear Cora, I told no one, not even my mother. You received my cards?"

"Yes."

"I shall be married at home, and then visit several points of interest in New England. When are you and Minnie going to wed?"

"The first of October."

Cora did not stay long with Estella, for she seemed so constrained in her presence that it was a relief to get away.

It was a wedding like most other weddings. Lights flashed and gay music resounded through the lofty rooms. Estella, standing there in the presence of all, promised to love, honor and obey the man by her side. Oh, how her whole soul recoiled from the falseness of her vows! Was it a wonder that she almost swallowed a curse as she felt the chains of her bondage sink deeper into her soul, though outwardly she gave no sign of her suffering? The bridegroom, with a triumphant light in his gray eyes, received their congratulations with a radiant face, for although he did not love her, nor had made any pretensions that he did, yet he was very proud that he had such a beautiful wife. The bride was cold, almost haughty, some thought, and received all with calm indifference.

"Doesn't she act strangely?" whispered Minnie to Gerald. "She seems like a spirit—and look at her dress, not a spray of flowers nor an ornament, only that great diamond blazing on her hand."

"What change has come over Estella?" asked Minnie, as she stood among a bevy of girls that were putting on their wrappings in the cloak-room.

"I don't know; she is strangely quiet. Perhaps she regrets the step she has taken."

"Well, I do say she is a goose for marrying such an old man, when she could have married any gentleman in our set," said another.

"I don't believe she could," said Minnie, dryly.

"Oh, I did not think of the judge when I spoke," said the other, laughing.

"Was she not engaged to her cousin, at one time?"

"Yes; her mother said so."

"Poor, dear fellow! how handsome he was—and to meet with such a shocking death! I don't think she cared very much for him, to marry so soon."

"Come, Minnie," said Cora, who had been a silent listener, wrapping her white cloak about her, "father is waiting for us."

The guests had all departed. The flowers were drooping in their vases, the elegant mansion closed, and the inmates sleeping as quietly as though no unusual event had disturbed the routine of every-day life. All were at rest save one. She who should have been dizzy with bliss, was passing through a thousand tortures in the secret depths of her aching heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Though each young flower had died,
There was the root—strong living not the less
That all it yielded now was bitterness."

A WOMAN less firm, less determined, might have borne to see her hopes swept away with less struggle than Estella. With all her power she had striven to hide her feelings, but now, as she was married, the tension of her feelings gave way, and she returned home, only to be stricken down by the brain fever. Mr. Claymore, with all his pompousness, felt his heart warm toward his beautiful wife, as she lay there as helpless as a babe, her fair cheeks rouged with fever, and the great hazel eyes wandering about the room in a dreamy sort of way. He experienced something akin to sorrow when the physician drew him aside, and told him he was afraid she could not recover.

"Is there really no hope?" he asked.

"If she is not better by midnight, she cannot possibly live."

He turned away, and sat down by her bedside, keeping a silent watch until after the crisis had passed, and when the doctor said: "She will live," he bent over, and pressed his first kiss on her brow.

When Estella awoke to consciousness, and saw her mother, her husband, and the physician standing around her bed, she comprehended all in a moment, and looking up into the doctor's face, a mournful look in her eyes, she said in a voice that evinced nothing but utter despair:

"Oh, why did you not let me die?"

The doctor looked at her in surprise. "Let you die, dear lady! That is a strange question, truly. You ought to be thankful that your life is spared."

"Thankful for what—that I am spared to lead a hopeless, aimless life?" she asked bitterly.

"Yours cannot be a hopeless, aimless life, for you have friends and a husband that love you, and you should be happy."

"What a mockery! I shall never be happy," said she, drearily, thinking of the past.

The doctor could not comprehend her meaning, but her mother knew the cause of all her suffering; for in Estella's incoherent ravings she had again and again called aloud for Grant, and her mother both pitied and scorned her for her weakness. Mr. Claymore knew nothing about this, and Mrs. Brainard wisely refrained from telling him. Estella recovered slowly, for she had none of the vigor that hope always brings. No one could have been more considerate of her wants than her husband, and any one less cold than Estella could not have helped feeling kindly toward him, but she accepted all with calm indifference. Cora was a constant visitor at the house during her illness, and when she had fully recov-

ered, she came, bringing Grant with her. At the sight of his face, the old love revived again as warmly as ever, and the knowledge that she was married put no restraint upon her feelings. She felt that to see him stay there and see him marry Cora would be enough to make her go mad. That night she said to her husband, with something like tenderness in her voice:

"Please take me away from here; I am so tired of the city."

"Where do you want to go?" he asked.

"Any place, so it is near the sea."

"Shall we go to S——?"

"Yes, it will suit as well as any other."

Once at S——, she threw herself into the very vortex of fashionable dissipation, spending night after night in the ball-room, until her cheeks began to pale again, and her step to become slow. Her husband remonstrated with her, but she answered him back with scorn almost demoniacal: "She cared not for any one." She had only one aim, and that was to bury her past. But do as she would, Eugene's face as it lay in the coffin haunted her day and night, and her guilty conscience slept no more. People who saw her expressed but one opinion—that she was "chaste as an icicle, and every whit as cold." She rarely smiled, and when she did, it was but a mockery of a smile. Her husband at last seldom objected to anything she did, for he knew the diamonds glittering on her breast were no colder nor more dead than her heart.

The beach was her favorite resort, for she felt there was something in the wild waves and seething foam akin to her nature.

"Here is a letter from your mother," said her husband one evening, as he found her sitting there in the shadow of the rocks.

"Thank you," said she, taking the letter from him,

and tossing it over into the sea without breaking the seal.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"I do not wish to read anything from her pen," she said in answer to his look. She knew full well the letter contained the particulars of Cora's marriage that would take place in a few days, and she had no desire to hear it. While sitting there with the sea at her feet, the letter called up these lines of Tennyson, and made her feel their truth:

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea;
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

* * * * * * *

"But because this human love, though true and sweet,
Yours and mine,
Has been sent by Love more tender, more complete,
More divine,
That it leads our hearts at last to rest in Heaven,
Far above you,
Do I take thee as a gift that God has given,
And I love you!"

Mendelssohn's wedding march rang out loud and clear, and in all the splendor of white satin and orange blossoms, Grant and Cora, Minnie and Gerald were married. As well pleased as Mr. Benoir was with Cora's choice, it was with almost a breaking heart that he gave her away, for she had grown inexpressibly dear to him during the years that he had been alone. They spent a few days at Grant's old home, and Aunt Chloe went half wild with delight, for she said she knew Grant had nearly grieved himself to death about Miss Cora. Then they crossed the ocean for a European tour.

As the steamer was sailing up the Mersey, Minnie, who was standing by Cora's side, looking away to the city of Liverpool in view, said: "Is it not strange?"

"What strange, Minnie?"

"Why, that after all your sorrow and misunderstanding, you have glided into a haven at last."

"Yes, but should we live for all eternity, we can never make up for what we have lost."

Grant pressed the hand that lay in his, as he heard her words, but said nothing. What his thoughts were, only those who have passed through the same experience can tell.

"Estella, is it not time we were leaving here?" said her husband, coming into the room one day where he found her lying on a couch, the old hopeless look on her face.

"Yes; I am ready whenever you are."

She had prolonged her stay until this late so as to avoid being present at Cora's marriage, but now that she and Grant had gone, she felt that New York would be no more of a desert than S——, and she went back to do the honors of her stately mansion.

Oh, how she hated, loathed every one and everything about it. Life was to her a burden. She felt too wretched to live, too wicked to die. Men praised her rare beauty, and women were envious, and sighed when they thought of the grand panoply of fashion and wealth which surrounded her, but ah! if they had looked into her heart, they would have found it empty.

Mr. Claymore knew that in marrying Estella he had committed the greatest mistake of his life, for her will could not be crossed in anything. Matrimonial bliss had proved to be but a tread-mill to him.

Six months passed by, and then the bridal party returned to New York. Mr. Benoir said he was not willing to part with any of them, but Minnie declared she was aching to keep house, so the residence opposite was bought and furnished, then they settled down in perfect harmony and contentment.

* * * * * * *

Estella's conscience, which had awakened, slept no more, and as the days passed on, bringing with them their painful memories, she grew constantly more and more uneasy, and when the spring came, she too left the New World for the Old, hoping to forget all amid new scenes and associations. But go where she would, whether wending her way along the banks of the beautiful Rhine, or threading the mountain passes, or wandering among the wild glens and valleys of Switzerland, the old, restless longing was never quenched. She had sought peace, but there was no peace. She wondered, as she stood on a balcony in Florence, looking out on the soft, dreamy landscape, bathed in the golden rays of the sunlight, if this was the country she longed to see in her girlhood. She remembered the time when this very scene would have made her grow dizzy with delight, but now she experienced nothing but utter indifference. Oh, how that first wrong step had changed her whole course! But for that, she might have been leading an untroubled, if not a happy life, and Eugene have become a noble, useful man.

It is to be hoped that in her wanderings Estella may find the only antidote to the poison that is eating out her very heart, and that is, faith and trust in the God she has neglected all these long—long years.

[THE END.]

A GIRL'S FOLLY.

A SMALL, superior cottage of bright-red brick, sweet-scented woodbine trailing over its rustic porch, a green lawn before it surrounded by flowers, and a charming country landscape spreading out in the distance. Inside, in its small but very pretty parlor, on the red table-cover waited the tea-tray, with its cups and saucers. The window stood open to the still, warm autumn air, and the French porcelain clock on the mantel-piece was striking five.

A slender girl of some twenty years came in. She was very lovely, but her bright-blue eyes bore a sort of weary, or discontented look, and her bright brown hair was somewhat ruffled. She wore a print washing dress of black and white, neither very smooth nor very fresh, and a lace neck-collar, fastened with a bow of black ribbon. Glancing round the room, and seeing nobody in it, she went to the open window, stood there in a deep reverie, and then leaned out to pick a rose. Its thorns pricked her delicate fingers, and she let it fall with a pettish exclamation.

Mrs. Reece came in next. A middle-aged, faded woman of care, in a small widow's cap and neat black gown. She looked flushed and fatigued.

"Have you made tea, Alison?"

"No, mamma."

"Oh, you might have made it? I wish you would, child! I am very tired."

Alison turned from the window, brought the tea-caddy from a side-table, and put two caddy-spoonfuls of tea into

the metal teapot. Then she carried it out to the boiling water in the kitchen, and brought it in filled. On days dedicated to some special household work, the young servant had to be spared as much as possible. This was ironing-day, and Mrs. Reece had stood at the board herself, ironing what they called the fine things, which meant laces and muslins, and helping generally. She was not strong, and a little work tired her. But she sat down to pour out the tea as usual, Alison taking a seat which faced the window.

"Why have you not changed your frock this afternoon?" exclaimed Mrs. Reece, suddenly noticing that her daughter wore the cotton frock that she had put on in the morning. And it may as well be stated that at that time, many years ago now, the dresses worn by young ladies, whether cotton or silk, were universally called "frocks."

"Oh, I don't know," carelessly replied Alison. "It does not matter."

"Did you forget that Thomas Watkyn was coming?"

"Not at all," said Alison, in a slightly contemptuous tone, her fair face flushing rosy red, and her blue eyes roving outward to the distant green meadows, to the sheaves of the golden corn, and the already changing tints of the foliage. "I'm sure the frock is good enough for Thomas Watkyn! And I don't see why he need be dancing to our house so often, mamma."

"Alison, be silent. You are behaving ill, and you know it."

"I am very sorry you should think so, mother. I do not wish to behave ill to you."

"That is behaving ill—saying those last words; because you know well that I did not mean you were behaving ill to me, but to Thomas Watkyn."

Alison Reece pouted her cherry lips, and ate a whole slice of thin bread and butter before replying.

"Mamma, how particular you are!"

"I never thought you could behave so. Six months ago, you would not have believed it yourself."

"Would you please let me have a little more milk in my tea?"

"You treat Thomas Watkyn outrageously," continued Mrs. Reece, as she passed the milk jug. "One day you smile on him, draw him on—yes, you do, Alison; don't interrupt me—and the next day you will hardly speak to him a pleasant word. But he is worth more than that other; that foolish Vavasour, with whom you have been flirting lately."

"Worth more!" retorted Alison, resenting these charges, which she knew were all true, and having no other answer at hand.

"Yes; infinitely more. Compare a dandy fop like Vavasour with Thomas Watkyn! Alison, you must alter your behavior. You are engaged to young Watkyn, and——"

"There was no engagement," interrupted Alison.

"It is equivalent to one. He comes here openly to court you; you have, until lately, responded to it. Why! don't you see that he worships the very ground you tread on?"

A pretty blush and a conscious smile illumined the girl's face.

"I say things must not go on as they are going," repeated Mrs. Reece. "Either tell Thomas that you cannot marry him, and beg him not to come here; or else make up your mind to do so, and cease your silly flirtation with the other."

"It is not a silly flirtation," angrily replied Alison.

"Indeed I see not what else it can be."

"I don't flirt; he does not flirt. He calls here sometimes, and we talk a little; and—and—I'm sure there's nothing in that to make a fuss about."

"And how often do you meet him when you are out? and how often do I see him strolling with you about yonder fields? Alison, take care that in trying to grasp the shadow you do not lose the substance."

"What substance?" asked the young lady innocently.

"Thomas Watkyn. A union with him would be a very substantial one indeed; a thoroughly good settlement in life for you. Mr. Vavasour at best (looking at him in this light) is but a shadow. These aristocratic flirting fops rarely have marriage in their heads. The amusement of the moment; the talking sentimental nonsense with a silly girl: that is all they look after. Will you take another cup of tea?"

"Oh no, thank you. This lecture is as good as ten cups of tea."

"Then ring the bell."

Patty, the young servant, came in and carried away the tea-tray. Mrs. Reece went up-stairs to put away the clothes ironed that day, and Miss Reece went back to the open window, leaned against its side-frame, and fell into a reverie.

She had a pretty good notion herself that matters would not go on much longer; Thomas Watkyn would not let them. More than once he had said to her a few words; and she had laughed them off. He was a fine man, and a good man, and a well-educated man for those days; but he was a farmer. Alison had thought herself fortunate that he should choose her, for she was not of much account in the world, and could say with the milkmaid in the old song, My face is my fortune: and if she was not desperately in love with him, she liked him very much, esteemed and respected him.

But a stranger made his appearance in the place, one Reginald Vavasour, who had come to read with the clergyman, previous to passing some examination. A high-bred man of good family, there could be no doubt of

that, and a man of fascinating manners, given to take the female heart by storm. He had accidentally made the acquaintance of pretty Alison Reece, had talked a great deal of lazy nonsense to her for his own amusement, just to pass the time away during the intervals of his attendance in the Reverend Mr. Tarbey's study; and Alison was supremely fascinated. Beside that slender young aristocrat, whose clothes were of perfect cut, and whose easy manners (not to say insolent) were as perfect as his clothes, whose very drawl betrayed his conscious superiority to men of the rustic locality, no matter what their standing might be, what could plain, unpretending Thomas Watkyn be in Alison's sight? Nobody.

Yet he was good-looking in his way, this Thomas Watkyn. A well-grown, well-made, fine man, beside whom the other looked like a boy, with a calm, sensible face, and quiet, unobtrusive ways. But again—who could admire a homely face, its steady, thoughtful, kindly eyes, and its brown, old-fashioned whiskers, when there was another face over the next field, whose dark orbs were of a flashing brilliance, and whose curled-out black mustache was killing? Not silly, inexperienced, vain Alison Reece.

Leaning against the window-frame, Alison watched a tall straight figure coming across the meadows, and her brow went into a scowl. It was Thomas Watkyn: and she wondered what brought him so early this evening; she wished he would stay away for good. Or, if not for good—for something pricked her heart and conscience there—at least for a few weeks. She did care for Tom, and she knew it, and she supposed she should marry him some time. Unless indeed—sometimes Alison dreamed dreams of Mr. Vavasour appearing some fine morning to carry her off in a carriage and four, the horses and postboys displaying white favors. She had no true love for Mr. Vavasour; but she was very pretty, with all a pretty

girl's vanity, and his admiration of her was just so much subtle incense.

A thought of vexation crossed her mind, as Mr. Watkyn came in at the gate, that she had not changed her frock as usual. Some kind of perverse obstinacy had caused her not to do it, *because* she knew that he would be there that evening and that Mr. Vavasour would not. She walked out to the rustic porch awaiting his approach: and she grew more vexed still as she saw his keen, honest gray eyes scanning the untidy dress in mute surprise.

"Good-evening, Alison."

"Good-evening," she replied, meeting his offered hand. "You are come early."

"I must leave early. I have but a few minutes to give you."

"It was scarcely necessary to come at all, was it?"

"I knew you would be expecting me."

"Oh, not particularly!" replied Miss Alison, tossing her curls back to express indifference.

"But I will come to-morrow, Alison, about this hour. I want to have some conversation with you, and——"

"To lecture me, pray?"

"No; that is over. However, I will not enter upon it now. My uncle came in this afternoon from Barceter, and as he leaves us again early to-morrow, I must not be away long this evening."

"Your father is at home, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"You were not here yesterday evening?"

"I stayed away purposely. Would you have cared to see me had I come?"

"I can't say whether I should or not. You have not been very pleasant with me of late, Tom."

"Not as I once was, perhaps; how can I be? But I do not think I have made myself unpleasant."

"We never hardly get a laugh from you. You have grown graver than a judge."

"Have I not had cause?"

"Cause!" she lightly repeated. "What cause?"

"Alison, this pretense of indifference does not become you. I say that I do not care to enter upon matters now. If I did, I might recall the doings of only the last two days to your memory, and ask you whether they have or have not held cause."

"Well?"

"Take Sunday. In the morning you scarcely *looked* at me as we came out of church; in the afternoon, when I would have joined you and walked home with you, you threw me over with supreme scorn and went away side by side with Vavasour. And in the evening you were pacing the meadows with him."

"It was no harm. He was not eating me."

"Take yesterday," continued Mr. Watkyn, his face, his gentle voice full of the deepest pain. "He had holiday, it must be supposed, from his studies, and he and you were roaming about together nearly the whole of the live-long day."

"And he came in and took a cup of tea with me and my mother afterward," answered Alison, with saucy, laughing insolence. "Mamma thinks him charming."

"He is an idle, heartless——"

"Well, why do you stop?"

"I was going to say—vagabond. And in one sense he is."

"He comes of a race who can afford to be idle. *He* does not have to till the ground by the sweat of his brow. He was born with his bread-and-cheese provided for him."

"With a silver spoon in his mouth," added Mr. Watkyn, affecting a lightness he did not feel, for her contemptuous tone tried him. "Well, good-evening, Alison."

"Oh, good-evening, if you are going."

He stood looking at her, and their eyes met. Alison caught the shadow of pain in his, and in her own there arose a remorseful pity: she had the grace to feel ashamed of herself. Her lips broke into a tender smile; a pink flush shone in her dimpled cheeks.

"You are very silly, Thomas."

"Am I?" he returned, holding her hand lovingly in his. "Fare you well until to-morrow evening, my dearest."

"There! Your dearest! And just now you were ready to call me hard names!"

"Until to-morrow," he repeated with a smile, as he quitted her.

Alison got a perfumed note the next morning from Mr. Vavasour: gilt-edged paper, crest on the seal. It told her that he was to be so "gloriously busy" that day, he feared he should not have time to call at the cottage; but would she meet him at the willow walk at dusk. And it ended: "Your faithful Reginald Vavasour."

The vain expectations of Miss Alison Reece bubbled up aloft; her face and heart were alike in a glow. "Your faithful Reginald Vavasour!" she repeated to herself. "It *must* mean that he intends to be faithful to me for life. And what a grand, beautiful name Reginald Vavasour is! Compare it with the mean old commonplace one, Tom Watkyn!"

Tea was over, and Alison, all in readiness for the interview with Mr. Watkyn, was steeling her heart against it and against him who was coming to hold it with her. She had changed her frock to-day, and wore a fresh, bright colored muslin, blue ribbons at the neck and wrists, and a blue knot in her hair.

She waited impatiently; she wanted the interview over and done with, that she might be off to keep that other with Mr. Vavasour. But Thomas was late.

Pacing the garden-path in the rays of the fading sun,

she stood looking over the little iron entrance gate, her blue eyes roving hither and thither in search of one whom she could not see. Unconsciously she broke out into the verse of a homely song.

"Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Dear, dear, what can the matter be,
Oh dear, what can the matter be,
Johnny's so long at the fair!
He promised to buy me a bunch of sweet posies,
A bunch of green mosses, a bunch of pink roses,
He promised to bring me a knot of blue ribbons
To tie up my bonny brown hair."

The hum of the last words was dying away on the air when the well-known form of Thomas Watkyn came into view. He wore his usual dark-blue evening frock coat and quiet waistcoat; he dressed well always when his day's work was over, but not in the fashionable attire of fashionable Mr. Vavasour.

"Good-evening, Alison," he said, as he reached the gate. "What a lovely evening it is!"

Removing his hat, he gazed up at the sapphire sky, action and countenance alike full of reverence: and Alison, who had not been taking any particular notice before, looked around her, her face softening at the splendor of nature's glory.

"What a glorious sunset!" he continued, his voice taking a hushed tone. "Glorious, glorious!"

"How solemnly you speak, Thomas!"

"I am feeling solemn. I have been feeling so ever since I came out; but I don't know why. Unless it is that heavenly scene that's making me so."

"It is very grand," she said, fixing her eyes on the bank of golden clouds in the western sky, where the sun was just slipping down behind the purple hill-tops in the distance, like a ball of ruby flame. Tiny bits of foam-like clouds flecked the limpid blue of the heavens, a warm, golden glow gilded the earth, freshened and vivified with

a past shower. The musical twitter of birds going to their rest filled the woodlands; and, as Alison looked, a strange feeling of awe stole into her heart, for the glory that lay around seemed more than earthly.

"There are moments," he said, in a dreamy manner, "when I fancy these sunsets must be given to us as a faint reflex—though, I suppose, that's the wrong word—of what we shall find in heaven; given to us by God to turn our thoughts and hopes toward it. Oh, Alison! it is more than beautiful!"

The ruby flame was changing to a soft and brilliant rose-color, inexpressibly lovely. It was indeed a rather remarkable sunset; one not often vouchsafed to human eye.

"You make quite sure of going to Heaven, Tom!" she exclaimed, in a flippant tone. For she wanted to ward off all serious conversation, lest he should begin to lecture.

Thomas Watkyn turned his eyes upon her, surprise, if not reproof, in their depths. "I hope I am," he answered, "under God."

"Young people do not often think of these things."

"The young die as well as the old, child; remember that."

"Won't you come in, Thomas?" she asked, in a softened voice, as they presently strolled up the path, and he halted in the porch.

"Not this evening, Alison. What I have to say I will say here."

Alison flushed to the roots of her wavy hair, and moved a step or two away from him.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the blazing western sky, "that bank of golden clouds is changing to crimson now."

He bent forward, for he had already sat down, and looked again at the gorgeous panorama.

"Yes, it is, as I say, a glorious sunset. We may never see another like it on this side of eternity," he added, dreamily, seeming to lose himself in solemn thoughts.

Alison laughed—her little musical laugh that had often set his pulses beating wildly. "You are always looking at the dark side of things, Tom. I hope we shall yet watch many a sunset together."

"Do you really, Alison?"

"Why, of course we must see the sunsets if we live," she returned, in a hard, matter-of-fact tone. "As we are neighbors, we may likely see some of them in company."

"That was all, was it? Sit down, Alison."

"I prefer to stand."

Nevertheless, Mr. Watkyn drew her somewhat peremptorily to his side and made her sit down on the bench. "What I want to say to you, Alison, is about young Vavasour."

"Oh, indeed!" she retorted.

"I do not like to see you make yourself a simpleton with that man; I will not see it; for, if you continue to do it, I shall say farewell to you, and not trouble this side of our grounds again."

Alison's face turned white; a habit it had when she was startled or very angry; and the remaining softness faded out of her heart, just as the golden glow was beginning to fade out of the western sky.

"Simpleton!—do you call me? Thank you."

"It is nothing less," he returned. "A short while, and this man will be leaving the place forever; leaving you. You will feel vexed then, Alison, at having made your intimacy with him so conspicuous."

"He will not be leaving," she retorted. "When he does leave, it will only be to come back again."

Her companion shook his head. "No, that is not likely. Yesterday Mr. Tarbey called at the farm: in talk-

ing with my father, he mentioned incidentally that young Vavasour was only to be with him this one term. The fellow may not have anything especially bad in him; I should not wish to imply that; but he is idle and heartless, and, in pretending to make love to you, Alison, he is but amusing himself and fooling you."

"How dare you say he is making love to me?"

"I say he is pretending to do it. Alison, you must know it to be so—if you would but speak the candid truth."

"Very well, then! Pray, what if he is?"

"Only this: That you cannot continue to listen to him and keep me in your train. It must be one or the other of us, Alison, from this night. You must choose between us."

"Then I choose him," she said, wrathfully rising.

"Do you *mean* it?" asked Mr. Watkyn, rising in his turn.

The girl did not answer. Her chest was heaving with agitation; Thomas Watkyn's gray eyes took a tender light as they gazed at the pretty, changing, uncertain face.

"Alison," he said, and his voice was wonderfully considerate, "I have known you from childhood; I have loved you all your life. Twelve months ago there arose an understanding between us that you would be my wife; until recently I never supposed that you could have any other thought. But you have filled my breast with cruel fears; *tortured* it, my dear; and I cannot bear them longer. You must be to me what you used to be, or give me up."

Alison's eyes grew sullen. Why could not this Tom Watkyn let her alone? She did not altogether want to break with him. What harm was she doing in talking to Reginald Vavasour? Reginald was ten times the

gentleman that he was!—and his voice had a sweet, soft lisp!—and he wore a diamond ring on his white hand!

"Oh, my dear—my best and dearest—give up this folly! Let things be with us as they used to be! *Don't* you care for me?"

"No," she replied to him, in her cross and contrary spirit; conscious all the while of a latent wish that Mr. Vavasour had been buried in the sea before coming to disturb the peace. "*No!*"

"Then you decline to marry me, Alison? You have not loved me as I love you?"

The sad, passionate fervor nearly scared her breath away; the heartfelt sorrow, all too plain, touched her with a qualm. But she was in an obstinate mood.

"Mr. Vavasour does not hurt you. I wonder you should concern yourself with him!"

"No trifling," sternly spoke Thomas Watkyn. "I tell you it must be him or me."

She would not answer.

"Will you give him up, Alison, from this night?" he pleaded.

"No." What inward spirit of evil prompted her to speak that short, sullen word, Alison never knew. But it was spoken.

"Very well."

For long afterward, the pain and pathos in those two short words haunted her like a wail from the grave. Thomas stood before her, calm and self-possessed.

"I will never trouble you again, Alison," he said, quietly. "Will you kiss me once—ere we say farewell forever?"

She felt awed at the sternness, the reality that was stealing upon their interview, and trembled at the thought of losing him. But she did not believe it would come to that in the end, and she was too proud and willful to take back her answer unsolicited.

With a playful air, half saucy, half defiant, she shyly held up her slightly red lips, while he kissed her with a long, lingering kiss, such as we give the dead.

"Good-bye," he said, huskily. He strode away, leaving her standing in the glow of the sunset, a wild, scared look on her young face.

"He will turn back," she whispered to herself. "Surely —surely!—for I could not bear to lose him." But Mr. Watkyn went straight on to the gate.

"Thomas!" she called out. "Thomas!"

He turned then. "What is it?" he asked.

Perhaps she had it in her mind to humble herself to him—who knows? She did nothing of the kind. A moment's pause, possibly of indecision; and then she produced a note from within the folds of her frock.

"May I ask you to do me a little favor, Thomas—for the last time?"

"What is it?" he repeated.

"If you would not very much mind going home by the hill, and would leave this note at Miss Ford's. I particularly wish her to have it this evening."

He paused for an instant, not replying. She went on hurriedly.

"I see that it is disagreeable to you. I have offended you too much."

"Not that," he answered, holding out his hand for the note. "But I can hardly spare the time for the long way this evening, as I have to call at Killick's for my father. However——" he said no more, but took the note.

"Good-bye, Thomas."

"Good-bye for aye. God be with you!"

"What a solemn mood he is in, the stupid fellow!" commented she. "But I *am* glad he took the note! I shall be safe now."

Miss Alison Reece was a clever young lady. The

direct and near way to Mr. Watkyn's home would lead him past the willow walk. She had devised this impromptu note to her dressmaker in the afternoon to prevent his taking that usual route. Had he seen young Vavasour cooling his heels within the precincts of the willow walk he would inevitably suspect he was waiting to keep a lover's tryst.

Alison leaned over the gate and watched him as he walked away, watched him take the lane that led to the route she had wished, and disappear. She stood there until the gold in the clouds had changed to crimson, the crimson to purple, that spread itself like a royal mantle over the western hills. White mists began to settle on the brooks that but a moment ago had reflected the gorgeous rays of the setting sun. Somehow it seemed to make her shiver, and she crept up to her own room with a strange sense of loss at her heart.

Mrs. Reece had gone out after tea to sit with a sick neighbor, and Alison devoutly hoped she would not be coming home yet, or there might be a difficulty in getting away to keep her appointment. It was nearly time to be starting; at least, she might as well go at once, and then she should be safe from her mother. Putting on her hat, she ran down-stairs, and opened the kitchen door.

"Patty, if mamma comes in and asks for me, tell her I am only strolling about a bit this lovely evening. I shall be in directly."

But the loveliness of the evening had gone. Somewhat to Alison's surprise, the white mist had increased so greatly as to obscure everything but itself. "How quickly it has come on!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Vavasour was waiting for her, and they paced for a few minutes the willow walk together. But for a very few: the young man said he was pressed for time: he had "heaps" of packing to do, not having touched it yet, and he was going away in the morning.

"Going away!" exclaimed Alison.

"Yes—and be shot to it!" said he. "I got a letter this morning recalling me home. My mother's ill, is ordered to Nice, and she wants me to accompany her. Fate is cruel to us, dear Miss Reece."

"But — you will be coming back here!" cried the startled Alison.

"I'm sure I don't know whether I shall be coming back here ever—or whether I may find myself banished to the remotest regions of Siberia," drawled the dandy, twirling one end of his mustache. "Nothing seems certain in this sublunary world, except uncertain changes. Old Tarbey was quite knocked down with the news. I wrote to ask you to be good enough to meet me here, knowing I should not have a minute all day to get down to your place—to tell you of it, and to say good-bye."

There was a matter-of-course carelessness in his voice and manner that grated terribly on Alison; her pride rose to the surface.

"Well, I suppose you will be glad to go, Mr. Vavasour!"

"Glad? Ah, I don't know about that. Glad to escape Tarbey and his grinding: immensely sorry to leave *you*. Wish you were going with me!"

"You are too kind. I will not hinder you any longer; and I must be going home too. Good-night; and good-bye."

Mr. Vavasour took her hand and held it. "Good-bye, dear Miss Reece," he said. "I shall often think of you, and of our pleasant meetings. You will let me take a farewell kiss."

He bent his face to hers. "How dare you, sir?" she exclaimed, starting back from him. "Kiss me, indeed! and here! Until this night I had taken you for a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," he said, laughingly; "I meant

no harm. Hulloa, what a mist it is!" he broke off, as they came to the end of the walk, and the open field beyond it. "One can hardly see ten yards before. I must see you home."

"No, no, no!" cried Alison, vehemently. "I know my way perfectly—better than you do—I shall go alone. You will have enough to do to get back to the Parsonage; take care you don't miss the path. Good-bye, sir."

She flew from him across the field and was lost in the mist. He took the opposite path.

"And so that's the last of Reignald Vavasour," thought Alison. "It serves me right. What a simpleton I have been!—as Thomas called me. How I hope mamma has not got home!"

The mist seemed to grow more dense every minute, and Alison really found her own gate with some difficulty. Her bonnet had not been put away above a minute when Mrs. Reece came in.

"Such a dreadful mist!" she observed to Alison; "I don't think I ever saw such a one. It came on suddenly after the most lovely sunset. Quiet a remarkable sunset. I hope you noticed it, child."

"Thomas Watkyn took care I should do that, mamma. He called it divine."

"Indeed it looked nothing less," replied Mrs. Reece. "I am glad you have had Thomas here."

Alison complained of a headache and went up to bed; she was afraid of being questioned. If the evening could come over again, she would treat Thomas Watkyn differently. She felt a little ashamed of herself; she felt a little uneasy.

"But I will make it up to him," she sighed, as she laid her head upon her pillow. "He will be sure to let me; he is so good, and he loves me truly."

Alison awoke betimes, and to a vague sense of uneasiness. It was a fine morning, the mist all cleared away.

As she stood at the window, the rising sun, lifting himself majestically in the east, tinted her cheeks with a rose-red flush and threw down on the green meadows floods of a golden, glowing light, while the songs of thrushes and larks broke out from every hedge and coppice.

"We must make the damson jam to-day," observed Mrs. Reece to her, as they rose from breakfast. "And if you would only wash up these breakfast things, Alison, while Patty goes about her other work, I should soon have the kitchen table clear and might begin it."

"Oh, very well," answered the girl, cheerfully. For she had been taking herself to task for her past behavior, and meant to turn over a new leaf. You shall have the table clear directly, mother."

She was busy in the kitchen, when she heard her mother open the front door and some one come in. "It is that chattering Mrs. Bennett!" thought she, as she dried the teaspoons.

"Alison! come here," called her mother, in a quick voice.

She went to the parlor just as she was; her sleeves turned back at the wrists, a large brown-holland apron on. Very pretty she looked with it all. But it was not Mrs. Bennett who sat with her mother; it was a venerable, white-haired old gentleman—Mr. Watkyn the elder.

"I am come to ask about Thomas," said he. "I believe he came here last night, Miss Alison; at what time did he leave you?"

A prevision struck her with a sort of terror, that something was wrong. "He left quite early," she faltered.

"Well, he has never come home."

"Not come home!" she said, with a whitening face.

"I sat up till one o'clock, and then I thought the mist must have kept him, that he had stayed at some friend's house; I knew not what to think; and that he would be

home the first thing this morning. But we have not seen him, and I cannot hear of him."

Mrs. Reece was impressed with the frightened, guilty look that Alison could not keep out of her countenance, and began to feel uneasy. "Cannot you tell what time it was when he left you?" she demanded, sternly.

"It was before dusk; it was just after sunset, before the mist came on. It must have been near seven o'clock."

"Which road did he take?" pursued Mrs. Reece. And very reluctantly Alison answered, for she foresaw it would bring on further questioning.

"The long way—round by the hill."

"Round by the hill!" echoed Mr. Watkyn, in alarmed surprise. "Why did he take that way?"

Alison flushed and paled alternately; her lips were trembling. The fear creeping upon her was—that he and young Vavasour had met and quarreled. Perhaps fought—and injured one another fatally. In these dread moments of suspense, the mind is apt to conjure up far-fetched and unlikely thoughts."

"I asked him to go round that way," she replied, in a timid tone; "I wanted him to leave a note for me at the dressmaker's."

Old Mr. Watkyn sank into a chair, putting up his hands before his troubled face. "I see it all!" he breathed, faintly: "he must have fallen down the Scar."

Alison uttered a scream of horror.

"Deceived by the mist, he must have walked too near its edge," continued the old man. "Heaven grant that it may not be so! but—I fear it. Was he mad?—to attempt to cross the plateau on such a night!"

Catching up his hat, Mr. Watkyn went out swiftly. Mrs. Reece grasped her daughter's hands. They were icy-cold.

"Alison, what passed between you and Thomas last night?"

"Don't ask me, mother! Let me follow Mr. Watkyn; I cannot rest indoors. Oh, it cannot, cannot be as he fears!"

"Not one step until you tell me what passed," said the mother firmly. "There's more in all this than meets the eye."

"He asked me to—give up talking to Mr. Vavasour."

"And you refused. Well?"

"He told me I must choose between them," continued Alison, bursting into tears. "Oh, mother, it was all folly, all my temper; he could not see that, and when he went away, he said he went for good."

Mrs. Reece drew in her thin lips sternly. She stood thinking.

"And what does it mean about your giving him a note for the dressmaker? I do not understand. You had nothing to write about."

The girl got her hands free and flung them before her face to deaden the sobs. But Mrs. Reece was a resolute mother at times, and she extorted the confession. Alison had improvised the note, and sent Thomas round the long way to deliver it, and so keep him from passing by the Willow walk.

"Oh, child, child!" moaned the dismayed woman. "If he has indeed fallen over the Scar, it is you who will have given him his death."

And it proved to be so. In taking the two mile round between the cottage and the farm, a high and perpendicular precipice, called the Scar, had to be passed. The tableland or plateau, on the top was wide and a perfectly safe road by daylight, since a traveler could keep as far from the unprotected edge as he pleased. But on a dark night or in a thick fog it was most dangerous. Deceived by the mist of the previous night, Thomas Watkyn must have drawn near the edge unwittingly, and fallen over it. There he lay, on the sharp rocks, when the poor father

and others went to look for him, his death-like face upturned to the blue sky.

"Speak to me, Thomas! speak to me!" wailed Alison, quite beside herself with remorse and grief, as she knelt by him, wringing her hands. "Oh, Thomas, speak to me! I loved you all the while."

But Thomas neither spoke nor moved. The voice that had nothing but tender words for her was silenced now; the heart she had so grieved might never beat in joy or sorrow again.

No person had seen or spoken with him after quitting her the previous night, save the dressmaker, little industrious Miss Ford. She had answered his knock herself, she related, and he put the note into her hands, saying Miss Reece had asked him to leave it in passing. "What a thick mist it is that has come on," he remarked to her in his pleasant, chatty way. "Ah, it is indeed, sir" she answered, and shut her door as he walked away.

For many weeks Alison Reece lay ill with brain fever, hovering between life and death. Some people said it was the shock that made her ill and took her senses away; others thought she must have loved the poor young man to distraction; no one, save her mother, knew it was the memory of her last interview with him, and the scheming to send him on the route that led to his accident, that had well-nigh killed her. But the young are strong in their tenacity of life, and she grew better by slow degrees.

One warm April afternoon, when the winter months had given place to spring, Allison, leaning on the arm of her mother, went to sit in the porch. She was very feeble yet. It was the first time she had sat there since that memorable evening with her ill-fated lover. There she remained, thinking and dreaming. They could not persuade her to come in, so wrapped her in a warm shawl.

Sunset came on; was almost as beautiful, curious, per-

haps, that it should be so, as the one he and she had watched together more than six months before. The brilliant beams shone like molten gold in the glowing west, the blue sky around was flecked with pink and amethyst. Alison's eyes were fixed on the lovely scene with an enraptured gaze, her lips slightly parting with emotion.

"Alison, what are you thinking of?"

"Of *him*, mother. Of his happiness. He is *living* in all that glorious beauty. I think there must have been an unconscious prevision in his mind, by what he said that evening as we watched it, that he should soon be there. Oh, mother, I wish I was going to him! I wish I could be with him to-morrow!"

The mother paused; she felt inclined to say something, but feared the agitation it might cause.

"Well, well, child, you are getting better," she presently answered.

"Yes, I do get better," sighed the girl. "I suppose it pleased God that I should."

"Time soothes all things, Alison. In time you will be strong again, and able to fulfill life's various duties with a zest. Trials are good—oh so good!—for the soul. But for meeting with them, we might never learn the way to Heaven."

Alison did not answer. Her feeble hands were clasped in silent prayer, her face was lifted to the glories of the evening sky.

"It was at the same sunset hour, an evening or two later, that Alison, who was picking up strength daily, strolled away to the church-yard. She wanted to look for a newly-made grave in that corner where so many of the Watkyns lay buried.

She could not see it; the same gravestones that were there before were there now; there was no fresh one.

"Perhaps they opened the old vault for him," thought Alison, as she sat down on the bench just inside the gate, for she was too weak to walk back again without a rest.

The sun was going down to-night without any loveliness; just a crimson ball, which seemed to give a red light to the atmosphere, and to light up redly the face of a pale, tottering man, who was coming up to the gate by help of a stick. He halted when he reached it. Alison turned sick and faint with all manner of emotions as she gazed at him, fright being uppermost.

"Alison!"

"Thomas!"

He held out his hand; he came inside; his pale, sad face wore for her its old sweet expression.

"Oh, Thomas, I thought you were dead," she burst forth, in a storm of sobs. "I came here to look for your grave! I thought I had killed you."

"They thought I was dead at first; they thought for a long while that I should die," he answered, as he sat down beside her, keeping her hand in his. "But the skillful medical men have raised me up, under God. I hope in time to be strong and well again."

"Can you ever forgive me?" she wailed, bitter, painful tears falling down her cheeks like rain. "I shall never forgive myself."

"No? Then you must atone to me, Alison, instead. Be all the more loving to me during our future lives. We must pass them together, my dear."

"Do you mean it—still?" she gasped. "Oh, Thomas! how good and true you are! If I can only be a little bit worthy of you!"

They walked home slowly, arm in arm. Neither could walk fast yet. Mrs. Reece came to the porch to meet them. God is full of mercy, she thought.

"I did not tell her, Thomas," she said; "she was so

dreadfully low when she came out of the fever. I meant to tell her to-night."

"I have told her myself; it was best so," answered Thomas Watkyn.

[THE END.]

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