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*By Marion Harland.*

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# TRUE AS STEEL.

A Novel.

BY

MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF

"ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "NEMESIS," "MOSS SIDE," "MIRIAM," "EMPTY  
HEART," "HELEN GARDNER," "SUNNYBANK," "HUSBANDS AND HOMES,"  
"RUBY'S HUSBAND," "PHEMIE'S TEMPTATION," "AT LAST," ETC.



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"What was in my thought?

To be your slave, your help, your toy, your tool  
To be your love? I never thought of that.  
To give you love—still less. I gave you love?  
I think I did not give you anything;  
I was but only yours—upon my knees,  
All yours, in soul and body, in head and heart.

. . . . .

Ay, and as I live,

I should have died so, crushing in my hand  
This rose of love, the wasp inside and all—  
Ignoring ever to my soul and you  
Both rose and pain—except for this great loss,  
This great despair.

. . . . .

I hoped this feeble fumbling at life's knot  
Might end concisely,—but I failed to die,  
As formerly I failed to live, and thus  
Grew willing, having tried all other ways,  
To try just God's.

*AURORA LEIGH.*

to

THE DEAR FRIEND  
WHOM I HEREBY THANK  
FOR  
THE GERM OF THIS STORY,  
I DEDICATE IT.

*Marion Harland.*

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# TRUE AS STEEL.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HELENA AND HERMIA.

**V**IOLET! Violet Hayne! do you know that it is almost sunset, and that you are not dressed for supper. You have been asleep almost two hours.”  
“I wish it had been twenty-two! This has been the longest day I ever spent, and of course to-morrow will be absolutely endless. The sun is setting clear, isn't it? That is a good sign for to-morrow.”

“The day of days to you!” said the first speaker, with a suppressed sigh. “I have been thinking, while you slept, that you ought to be the happiest woman upon earth. And”—with sudden fervor—“it is my daily, hourly prayer that you may be, dear!”

Violet shook her brown hair over her shoulders, preparatory to combing it, held up a long, thick lock in the sunlight, and smiled at the effect in the glass.

“I am pretty well satisfied, generally. But you are much mistaken, if you think there are no crooks and kinks in my lot. I was almost distracted, this morning, when I saw how horribly awkward the lace looked on my new dress. I should have cried my eyes out if you hadn't happened to come over in the nick of time. It is perfectly lovely, now. You are a jewel of a friend, Had-die, and a genius, if ever there was one. I should be lost without you.”

She passed her hand caressingly over the bowed head of her companion, and smoothed yet more affectionately the fleecy flounces of the dress the latter was laying out upon the bed—the work of her busy afternoon. There was no immediate reply. The seamstress bent yet lower over the robe, adjusting each fold with care; pulling puff and quilling into shape, and pinching into crimped gathers the lace she had sewed on. Violet went back to her mirror, humming a merry tune.

She was the beauty of three counties, the principal heiress of one. An orphan from her infancy, she had found a home in the family of her guardian, Judge Humphreys, of Riverview, the finest plantation in the neighborhood. He had three sons, all older than the pretty two-year-old girl bequeathed to his care by his dearest friend, Albert Hayne. The Judge would have loved and cared for her as for his own, had she had no other claim than her parentage upon his heart and conscience. As it was, she was welcomed by himself and wife as a gift from Heaven, in answer to their oft-repeated and as yet fruitless prayer for a daughter. From the day she entered the homestead, love and fondling in unlimited measure had been her portion. At school she was also a

favorite. Her easy temper, which no amount of indulgence could render irritable or sulky; her prodigality of smiles, sweet words, and pocket-money; her lovely face, and coaxing, kittenly ways, captivated teachers and school-fellows. That she won no prizes, despite the partiality of her instructors, and maintained, even by the aid of their convenient blindness and open promptings, an indifferent place in her classes, in no wise injured her popularity, or lowered her self-esteem. There was a rebellion of the entire senior department, when a flinty-hearted barbarian, who was too short-sighted to note how exquisite was her complexion, how bewitching her smile, how deep and eloquent were her eyes, outraged the proprieties and usages of the Institute by administering to her a stinging rebuke in the recitation-room, one morning, during her last year at school.

The lesson was upon Sacred History, and Violet, seated as usual near the fag-end of the long row of girls, was startled into rosier loveliness by the professor's address to herself, quite out of her turn.

"Miss Hayne! what is a miracle?"

Violet stared at him in gentle reproach; glanced up and down the line in appeal and bewilderment; then unsealed her cleft rosebud of a mouth, to say, smiling with child-like grace and trust in his clemency: "I am sure I cannot tell, Mr. Arles! I never did altogether understand the subject."

The professor, who had been connected with the school but two months, and never saw his pupils out of class, snarled as he would have done at a homely charity scholar.

"As well as you understand any subject, I imagine!

To give you an example illustrative of the question: it would be a miracle if you were ever to recite a perfect, or even tolerable lesson!"

There was a sympathy-meeting in behalf of the wounded dove, after school; and certain generous and daring spirits were bent upon inditing a petition to the principal for the removal of the obnoxious savage; but Violet entreated that this might not be.

"He can't hurt *me*, you know, girls; and, after all, he is an old bachelor, and doesn't know any better—poor old soul! I don't want any investigation or horrid fuss. It would be an awful nuisance!"

She loved herself and comfort too dearly to spoil her smooth forehead, muddy her skin, or weaken her eyes, by over-study, or to take seriously to heart the consequences of her indolence. She became a passable musician (almost), the key-board being a fine stage for the display of fairy fingers and sparkling rings; and sentimental songs, warbled in her fresh, although thin little voice, to an accompaniment of languishing, or roguish glances, were a means of fascination and conquest she could not resist the temptation to acquire. She read nothing after she left school, except a very occasional novel—generally, I am ashamed to say, one recommended in a whisper, by some sophisticated associate, as "very naughty." Not that Violet had a proclivity for impurity in the abstract or concrete; but she was mildly curious to hear or read about things people made a mystery of; which could not be talked of to gentlemen, and were discussed in matronly conclave, when "the girls" were out of the room. That she was not enthusiastic in the pursuit of this kind of forbidden fruit may be gathered from the fact that

Bulwer's "Alice" was a month's work, and she had not energy enough left to read the sequel, "Ernest Maltravers." She perused the major part of "Mysteries of Paris" over the fire in her locked bedroom, one winter, and reached "Finis" by spring. She delved without concealment, but groaningly in spirit, in "*Les Misérables*"—the translation, of course—from Christmas to Christmas, skipping judiciously when the page looked too close and metaphysical. Indeed, she did not scruple to confide to her bosom companion, Hadassah Todd, the confession that she would have fainted and fallen by the way before she gained the middle of the first volume, had not the books been a present from Shelby Humphreys.

"And I was awfully afraid he would ask me some question about some part I hadn't read. But it nearly wore me out!"

Hadassah bought the book for herself, in paper binding—although Violet kindly offered to lend her her handsome copy, "when she should be through with the plaguy thing"—and devoured it in three days and as many nights, neglecting eating and sleeping, while the fate of grand, ill-starred Valjean was unknown. Her rage for printed paper dated from her fifth year, and was unabated when she had passed her nineteenth. A tyro in the study of the affinities of human nature would have cited this bibliomania as one of the many reasons why the intimacy between the two girls was phenomenal.

Hadassah Todd was the daughter of a Connecticut store-keeper who had removed to Kentucky at the age of eighteen. His alliance with a second cousin of the Humphreys was the one tie uniting the Todds with the



Riverview household, which was recognized by right-minded and rightly-taught neighbors. Judge Humphreys had been very kind to his cousin, Octavia, in her impecunious singlehood, never grudging her a seat at his table, and in his drawing-room, and often reminding his good-natured spouse that it was "time this and that half-worn silk, and almost-as-good-as-new cloak, was passed over to the poor girl. It shall never be said that I turned my back upon any one in whose veins runs the real Humphreys blood. And Octavia *is* a Humphreys, by both father and mother's side." He and his clansmen opposed her fancy for the good-looking "haberdasher"—so they called him—with might and main, convening more than one assembly of the elect to expostulate and warn the headstrong woman, who would not let this, her first *bonâ-fide* offer of marriage—albeit she had dwelt in the trodden ways of spinsterhood eight-and-twenty autumns—slip through her fingers without a struggle. She struggled to such purpose, that her kinspeople, sinking from outspoken fury into sulky mutterings, and then into non-interference, at length yielded a consent under protest. They took up a subscription among uncles and cousins to buy her a wedding outfit, suitable to her changed rank—"neat, strong and serviceable,"—thus ran the recommendation of the Ladies Humphreys; allowed her to be married from Riverview—the oldest homestead of the tribe, and had never in any company, however aristocratic, denied her right to speak of or to them as blood-relatives. Nothing could have been handsomer on their part, or better adapted to soften the hardness of the bed she had made for herself, and upon which it was adjudged but just by

all her friends she should lie for the remainder of her wretched existence.

Seven children were the fruit of what the clique royal invariably styled "poor Octavia's unfortunate marriage." Hadassah—named for her father's mother—was the eldest, and his favorite. He was a man of excellent natural abilities, much energy, upright principles, and a fair share of ambition to rise in the world. He had bowed his neck to the yoke conjugal, submissively, if not abjectly, in wedding Octavia Humphreys in the face of the opposition of all her family. In making himself her earthly all-in-all, he had assumed responsibilities, incurred penalties which would have crushed the independence out of ninety-nine in one hundred husbands. He had had a temper of his own, that matched hers in fire, when he wooed her, but time and wedlock had wrought a marvelous change. Tame he could never be, but he had mellowed in manner and spirit. Hadassah thought him the embodiment of manly virtues, while he reciprocated her admiration, and loved her best of all living creatures. Painfully, even morbidly, conscious of the defects in his early education, he resolved that his offspring should not meet life at a disadvantage on this account, and Hadassah's early developed passion for learning, her active mind and resolute character, promised success to his efforts to secure the benefits he craved for her and for her juniors. When she was fourteen, he astonished to anger some of the patrician patrons of the "store at the Cross Roads;" surprised yet gratified the Humphreys tribe, by sending his daughter to an expensive "Young Ladies Seminary" in Louisville; and, at the same time, subscribed liberally toward the establishment of a good private school near his own house.

A year later, Violet Hayne entered the same seminary, and was placed, by Mrs. Judge Humphreys' request, in Hadassah's dormitory.

"The darling will feel less homesick, if she has a familiar face near her at night," said the worthy adopted mother. "And since the rules of the school will not permit her to take a maid along, really Hadassah is the best substitute that can be procured. I told dear Violet not to hesitate to call upon her when she wanted mending, and that sort of thing done. Hadassah has been trained to make herself useful with that great houseful of children."

Hadassah made herself so useful, not "in the matter of mending and that sort of thing" only, but in general contributions to her pretty comrade's ease of the flesh, and in particular deliverances from the tougher parts of her daily tasks, that their friendship abode in strength through the wear and tear of school rivalries and quarrels; remained an assured fact when they returned to their respective homes, prepared to "enter society." The store-keeper's daughter came back to him after her graduation, with three prize medals—to wit, those awarded for Latin, French, and *belles lettres*—jingling about her neck, and in her trunk a valuable rosewood writing-desk, the reward given for the best composition. The proud father, weighing out moist sugar and measuring molasses by the single pound and quart, that afternoon, had a strange, dreamy light in his eyes, said but little, and that in a subdued, absent-minded way. He was picturing his idol's future—the brilliant career he was so simple-minded, with all his hard, practical sense, as to believe was predicted by her scholastic honors. And the affectionate regard of Violet

Hayne! That was a stepping-stone, the value of which could not be exaggerated. Every man has his weakness, and that of this shrewd, freeborn Yankee was a longing to enter, of himself, or by his children, as his representatives, the higher circle that ruled with oligarchical sway the region which he had made his home. He had heard and said, all his life, that "all men were created free and equal," and believed it for certain until his removal to Kentucky. His perceptions were acute, his sensibilities delicate, and both helped to teach him the fallacy of his early creed; indoctrinated him in the dogma that he was of different and coarser clay from that of the Humphreys, Marshalls, Sherrards, and Shelbys, whose slaves were among the best patrons of the "Cross Roads Store," and that his success in business depended largely upon his recognition of this truth. He was twenty-three when his erect carriage, new broadcloth coat, and fine, gray eyes attracted the notice of sentimental Octavia Humphreys, to whom he one Sabbath resigned his seat at a thronged "protracted meeting." She lost her heart at sight; and set her wits to work to devise means for notifying him of the interesting event. She found them with little trouble, and had as little in kindling responsive fire in the breast of the flattered youth. His marriage had bettered his social condition, but not to the extent of making him a "member in good and regular standing" of the aristocratic clique. His wife's relations patronized and tolerated him, while their pity of her was undisguised. He was still "Todd the Yankee store-keeper," and as such must live and die. "Gentlemen are born, not made," said the Humphreys' "Book of Common Sense and Religion;" and "poor Octavia's" husband must not expect to be an

exception to the rule established by centuries of honorable precedent.

But his Hadassah had blood, intellect, education, and opportunity. Judge Humphreys had himself suggested that the two girls should return home, at the end of their final school term, in the Riverview carriage, and when the handsome equipage, with coachman, outrider, and maid in attendance upon the heiress and her friend, stopped at the door of Mr. Todd's house, to restore the latter to her parents' arms, Violet put her pretty head out of the window to shake hands with them, and said many sweet things of her grief at parting with her "dearest Haddie," her intention to have her at Riverview at least half the time, and of the honors she had won at the examination.

"I should hate her, if I did not love her so devotedly," she concluded, "for I have nothing to show for my three years' work except a trunkful of trumpery keepsakes from the school-girls. But we can't all be gifted and literary, you know, Mr. Todd. And I am as proud of darling Haddie's triumph as you can be."

This was more honest than the like declarations in similar circumstances usually are. She was not jealous of her friend's proficiency in such useless accomplishments as composition and foreign languages.

"I haven't any talents," she would say to her crowd of admirers, with the loveliest humility compatible with any share in the depravity consequent upon Adam's transgression, "and Haddie is so gifted! Do you know, Mr. Marshall, I think we are not half proud enough of her? She is an honor to any county. If people won't find it out for themselves, I mean to tell them, if she is my dear-



est bosom friend. It is a shame for her to be hidden in that miserable 'Cross Roads,' among that crew of dirty-faced children. I have set my heart upon marrying her off nicely. People shan't despise her because she is neither rich nor handsome, and her father is from Connecticut. That isn't her fault, you know. Whoever slights her"—this with a pout that pretended to be vicious, but was divine instead—"will have to quarrel with *me!*"

She strengthened her protestations of attachment by invitations, oft and urgent, to Hadassah, to spend a day, a night, a week at Riverview, excusing herself from return visits of like length by saying, frankly, "You see, dearie, I can't have you all to myself there, as I can in this big house, with next to nobody in it. Your mother feels hurt if we shut ourselves up for a confidential talk in that tiny bower of yours upstairs, and the children are forever wanting you to do something for them. Then, it does you good to run away from 'every cumbering care' for a bit of a holiday."

With that she would kiss the grateful recipient of her benefits, and set her down to making up collars, undersleeves, bows of ribbon, lace caps, or some other item of finery for the want of which she was "positively perishing," but which could be entrusted to no fingers but "darling Haddie's, who was so tasteful and clever, while she—Violet—was a regular stupid about all sorts of sewing."

Hadassah took it all as a matter of course, served her beautiful idol with glad diligence. She fell into the habit of thinking and speaking of Riverview as her second home, and notwithstanding her love for her father, was always more happy there than in the humbler abode opposite the "store." Host and hostess treated their cousin's

child the more kindly that they too found her willing, active, and industrious, and therefore useful in many ways, and the servants were more respectful than a poor relation had a right to expect. Violet, in the energy of her partiality and sincere admiration of her confidante's talents, had yet said that she was not handsome, and nobody else thought her pretty, or in any way personally attractive, excepting her father and the Judge's youngest son, who had stoutly maintained, from her early girlhood, that "she would be a splendid creature some day, if she had half a chance." A few of the more discriminating of Violet's visitors now and then spoke of her face as "intelligent." It was, and like most intelligent countenances, irregular in feature. Her forehead was square, and more prominent in the upper than the lower part; her dark-gray eyes were deep set under heavy lids, that gave her a peculiar air of intense thoughtfulness when she was not smiling or animated in speech. She had little or no color unless excited, and her figure was unremarkable as her physiognomy. Few cared to watch the response of glance and gesture, the marvellous awakening of every lineament to the touched heart or mind, when these were reached by loving or skilful hand. The eyes widened and gleamed into glory, the pale cheek took on a mantle of girlish bloom, and the mouth—the best point in her face—was moved into such curves and tremors as were better worth studying by one who regarded the human visage as a mirror of the soul than was Violet's faultless beauty.

But the mirror was set in a dingy casing, and Violet remained queen of the county—intellect, gallantry, wealth, and avarice bowing side by side at her shrine. Hers was a fair, moon-like loveliness, although she was only by

courtesy called a blonde. Her hair and eyes were dark, the latter clear, soft hazel, of the shape and hue so effective in appeal or wonderment, and had been likened so many times to those of the celebrated "dear gazelle," that she knew six or eight lines of *Lalla Rookh* by heart—a novel situation for her with respect to any poet. The lashes were long and curling; her eyebrows were arched; her nose straight Grecian; her upper lip a bow, wreathed with scarlet; her lower, twin cherries deftly joined, and her complexion was unexceptionable as the rest of the picture. She was herself a trifle tired of the comparisons of "rose-o'ershadowed lilies," and "strawberries smothered in cream."

"Doesn't she look sweet enough to eat?" a bucolic adorer had once exclaimed in the agony of admiration wrought by her appearance at a large ball.

She overheard the incautious remark, and, so far from resenting the odd tribute to her charms, laughed, and looked sweeter than ever; while Maxwell Humphreys, the third son alluded to just now, on whose arm she leaned, grew black as a midnight thunder-cloud, and would have liked, but for the fear of annoying her, to tap the booby over the skull with sufficient force to impress upon him the propriety of choosing more delicate forms of expression for the future. And yet he had described her more aptly than had scores of more refined youths in quires of Bath post and hundreds of rhymes, more or less bad. She attracted all styles and classes of men—the vicious, with the high-minded and good. Sylph-like she looked, but never ethereal; tender and winning, not majestically pure. She did not carry with her that indefinable, but not to be mistaken, atmosphere of innocence which is a guard

to her who is encircled by it, before which passion blushes at its own presumption, and evil is cowed. Men swore over their wine-cups that she was an angel; mingled her praises with those of the favorite race-horse in the pauses between the games at the card-table or faro-bank; passed, without awe, or self-rebuke, from the utterance of her name, and discussion of her most "telling" looks and ways, to talk that was not convenient for mixed company. She was fair to entrancement, but she was very flesh and blood—one of the daughters of men, after all.

There stole over the large, limpid eyes a mist of thoughtfulness almost pensive, as she looped and bound up the shining rivulets of hair, securing the superstructure in its place, when complete, by a blue ribbon.

"You see"—she broke the stillness of the chamber with accents like slowly-distilled honey—"I had *so* set my heart upon looking my best to-morrow evening! It seemed to me"—pathetically—"that I *did* have the right to outshine the other girls at my coming-out party. Anna Sherrard told me, confidentially, that Josie Galt had her dress made in the city by the same person who got mine up, (and I hope I do her injustice!) but I couldn't help suspecting, when I saw how awfully mine was botched, that the sly creature had something to do with it. If so, won't she feel queer when she sees me in it?"

"A very improbable idea," said Hadassah, sensibly. "What earthly interest could she have in attempting the trick, supposing, and that is preposterous, that the dress-maker would become her accomplice?"

Violet shook her head, and looked as wise as an owl, as mournful as a dove.

"Ah, my child! You have no conception to what lengths jealousy will drive a woman. There is so much wickedness in the world! You needn't pretend not to know that Josie Galt is over head and ears in love with Max!"

Hadassah was leaning against the frame of the western window, and the flicker upon her cheek may have been the reflection from the burning horizon.

"Need she like you less on that account?" she asked.

"What a dear old goosie you are, Haddie! That one question shows you were never in love. Of course she 'need *hate* me' on that account! I am as amiable as most people, but if I suspected any one—even you—of trying to steal my beau away from me, or taking a fancy to the man I wanted to catch, I would scratch her eyes out!"

She made a feline dab with one soft hand at Hadassah's face, and looked as much like a downy, white kitten playing with a ball, as a beautiful woman could.

"The attempt would be useless," rejoined Hadassah, without a smile at the mimicry. She was quite colorless, and her eyes were fixed with a sort of dreary steadiness upon the distant hills. "It is almost fearful to be loved as your betrothed worships you."

"It *is* pleasant—that is, almost always—and *so* romantic," assented Violet, arraying herself in a white muslin dotted with blue, and never removing her regards from the mirror, while she hooked it up, and pinned the white-and-blue knot of ribbon fastening the lace collar. "To think that I was his first love, and he mine; and how long our courtship has lasted—ever since I was five, and he eight; and how pleased uncle and auntie are at the



match! It will be a pretty little story to tell to my children—if we ever have any—” she continued, with never the suspicion of a blush. “Poor, dear Max! I have given him some awful frights, though, and mercy knows how many sleepless nights, with my flirtations. When he was at home last Christmas, I really thought I should have to break with him for good and all, he was so unreasonable about Shelby’s attentions to me. He actually was ready to fight his own brother.”

“It was unkind and dishonorable in Shelby,” observed the other, very gravely. “He knows how quick Max’s temper is, and how he loves you. I have noticed, often, that he takes malicious pleasure in tormenting his brother in his cold-blooded way.”

“Cold-blooded! You don’t know him!” said Violet, smiling significantly. “You should hear him talk to me sometimes. *Entre nous*, my dear, it is as much as I can do to keep him at a proper distance. If the truth were known, he is as crazy after me as any of the rest of them, Max not excepted. And you wouldn’t expect it from Shelby, he is so cool and sarcastic. There is something to be proud of in bringing down game like that. But don’t hint it, if you love me! Max would murder him if he dreamed that he dared talk love to me.”

“He is even meaner than I thought!” Hadassah answered, her eyes aflame, and voice stern. “If he had his deserts, he would be whipped by the hangman, then have his false tongue slit. How can you listen to him? how endure his presence? My flesh creeps whenever he comes near me!”

Violet began to whimper. Her tears were like her blood—slow and cool—but her snivel was artistic, and

introduced into tender scenes, wrought tremendously upon her betrothed, not to mention the "rest of them."

"You are cruel to scold me for what I can't help! I've told you it wouldn't do to complain to Max. The Humphreys stop at nothing when their blood is up. What harm is it if Shelby chooses to waste his breath in making love to me?"

"You spoke as if you liked it," said Hadassah, not yet mollified.

"I do!" boldly. "Every woman likes to be courted, although prudes won't confess it. There is nothing else that gives me such pleasant excitement. It would be dull times with me if I didn't get five or six offers a year. I had eight once in as many months. That was lively work, I tell you."

Hadassah was less shocked than she would have been had she not been used to hearing kindred sentiments from the coral lips, red and smiling as a baby's.

"I don't believe you, dear," she said, with a feint of good-humored chiding. "But I don't like to hear you talk in that strain. It seems strange to me that a woman can listen with toleration, much less with complacency, to love-words from any one except the man who has won her heart. The very idea makes me recoil in spiritual and physical repulsion."

"That is heroics!" returned Violet, learnedly, "and metaphysics. You say so because you never had a proposal. I think it is *splendid*. If I had my way, every gentleman I know should offer me his hand and heart, and be ready to cut his throat because I refused him. They do get so delightfully miserable sometimes, and say such wild, wicked things, it quite thrills me all over. And it

puts you into such a grand humor with yourself, to hear them praising you and vowing that the world will be a desert to them until their dying day, and calling you their guiding star, and their good angel, and all that! I often wonder how I am to get along when I am married without this kind of amusement."

"Have you ever suggested that difficulty to Max?" asked Hadassah, dryly.

"Do you take me for a ninny? If you knew him as I do, you wouldn't hint at such a thing. I don't deny to him that I have proposals by the hundred, but I pretend that I cannot avoid them—that the horrid creatures will presume upon my amiability, and take politeness for encouragement. It is a clever trick to tell him this much, for it keeps him a little uneasy all the while, and anxious to please me. He ought to feel flattered by the court paid to me, for of course I mean to marry him some day. Everybody says I couldn't do better."

Hadassah did not shake off the arm laid about her waist as Violet joined her at the window, but she drew in one slow, hard breath, then set her teeth, a close guard upon her tongue.

"He is Uncle's pet of all his children," continued Violet, who was never so talkative upon any other subject as when herself and her adorers were upon the tapis. "Besides, he has his Uncle Maxwell's fortune; and auntie says Riverview will go to him at his father's death. He is handsome, and smart, and kind-hearted, and I love him as well as I could any *one* man. It pleases me mightily to see how the other girls envy me, and how indifferent he is to them. He likes you better than he does any woman except myself. That is because he knows I am so devoted

to you. He says you have in your composition the materials for a fine woman. I suppose that is the reason he calls you 'Queenie' sometimes."

"No! It was at first a play upon my name," interrupted Hadassah, hastily. "It was the Jewish name of Queen Esther."

"Oh! I don't mind how fond he is of you, you dear matter-of-fact old thing!" returned the serene beauty, squeezing the waist she held; "I'm too sure of him and of you. I felt ever so proud of him, last week, when the lawyers all dined here. They drank his health in the best wine uncle has, and congratulated his parents upon Max's having done so well in college, and prophesied that he would step into his father's shoes before he is forty. 'Mrs. Judge Humphreys' would sound nicely—wouldn't it? Only, most distinguished men do get so fat and red-faced?"

Even at this absurdity Hadassah smile was sickly.

"They will hardly get home before the middle of the day, to-morrow, I suppose?" she said with affected carelessness.

"I hope not indeed! They ought not to be here until late in the afternoon. It would be a horrid bore to have to sit in the library with a stupid man for hours and hours, while I was in a fidget to be upstairs with my dress, and the other girls, getting ready for and talking about the party. It is so warm, too, in the middle of the day, and Max will be fooling with my hand all the time, and it gets so hot and sticky! and he pulls my hair down, trying to kiss me!"

Hadassah moved away impatiently. Violet often repelled and displeased her nowadays. Was it that she was

coarser in thought and speech than she used to be, or that Hadassah herself had become painfully sensitive ?

“ Let us go down into the porch ! ” she said, abruptly. “ The room is close, I cannot breathe comfortably. The breeze is dying away ! ”

Violet gave a farewell peep into the mirror.

“ I look well this evening, ” she said, frankly. “ What a pity there is nobody to see me ! ”





## CHAPTER II.

### THE BOAST OF TO-MORROW.

**J**UDGE HUMPHREYS sat upon the front piazza, which was wide and long, with a flat roof upheld by heavy columns. Directly before the main entrance of the house, that he might get the benefit of the draught through the hall, the lord of Riverview lolled in his arm-chair, and smoked the pipe of musing contentment. He was a fine specimen of the cultivated Kentuckian. Portly in figure, yet not corpulent, his massive head betokened breadth and strength of intellect. The features were not classically moulded, but were manly and comely, and while usually expressive of benevolence, as well as decision, had a certain cast that justified Violet's declaration—"The Humphreys stop at nothing when their blood is up." There had been in his life fiery and long-lived heats of passion, which had helped age in whitening the thick hair. Both of the girls had seen the lips that now smiled at their approach locked in a narrow, livid line, his eyes blaze until they seemed to scintillate living sparks, and his forehead blacken and throb with the furious rush

of the Humphreys' blood, when his will was crossed, or his sense of right or fitness offended.

His meditations might well be pleasant in this fragrant eventide. His estate, broad, fertile, and unencumbered by a dollar of debt, was spread before him—a goodly panorama. He enjoyed the ungrudged possession of the highest honors the district of which his native county formed a part could bestow upon him. He might have been in Congress had he wished it. He preferred to dwell among and to preside over his own people, and in the position to which they had called him he was acting well his part in his day and generation. The wife of his youth was the loving companion of his declining years, and the parental affection which was perhaps the strongest sentiment of his nature, unless it were his devotion to integrity and stainless honor, and his pride in his unshadowed reputation, was abundantly gratified in the career of his sons. Morris, the eldest, and his father's namesake, was a physician in Louisville, with a fast increasing practice; but his visits to the homestead were regular and frequent in spite of professional and family cares. Shelby, the "mother's boy" of the trio, was, according to the record in the family Bible, twenty-three years of age. In knowledge of the world, in imperturbability of demeanor, in distrust of mankind in general, and in thorough confidence in himself, he was fifty, and upward. He had achieved a fair reputation for scholarship and a higher for sagacity and keenness of perception, and was, said everybody, sure to make his way in life, whatever might become of the others.

Maxwell was eighteen months younger—the handsomest, gayest, and most brilliant youth in the Humphreys clan,

and I should understate, rather than exaggerate, the truth, if I were to say, the most popular. His companions of his own sex were not envious of his success in love, or of the honors he had gained in a Northern college. "Max" was welcome to all the good Fortune might bestow upon him, "for a better fellow never lived." Far and near had spread the news that he stood at the head of his class in the crowded and renowned institution the Kentucky country people considered was distinguished by his graduation there, and the party to be given at the homestead to-morrow was in especial celebration of the event.

The Judge was thinking of him and his triumphs, more than of all other themes, terrene or celestial, as the sun went down behind the blue and golden hills beyond the river; renewing his own youth in his sympathy with his favorite's aspirations and triumphs, until his eye was moist, his complexion ruddied by the hurrying blood that sought to keep time with Max's pulses. Not that he had ever doubted the boy's abilities or principles. He had sent him to the far Northern college, because it was hoary with years and honors; because some of the greatest men America had ever produced had graduated there; because the grade of scholarship was higher than in any other, and because he meant that his son should distinguish himself against all odds, at the outset of the career he believed would cover his already honorable house and name with imperishable glory. All this he had predestined, and had not much of it already come to pass? Would not the rest follow in due order and time?

Violet had never seemed so beautiful before as when she floated by him in her filmy robes, her half-moon brow touched by a last sunbeam, that rested there for an instant



like a blessing; her cooing voice reminding him of the dear welcome Maxwell would have from her heart and lips. He longed to take the girl, who had made his darling so happy, in his arms, and tell her 'twixt smiles and tears how he loved her better than if she had been born his daughter, and to thank Heaven that the child of the dead friend, who had been to him as a brother, was to be Maxwell's wife. But he was a grave and decorous judge, and scenes were not in his line, even if there had been no spectators to be amazed by such an outbreak of excited feeling.

So he pulled away at his waning pipe, and said, cheerily:

"Our young gentlemen are having fine travelling weather. They will spend to-night with Morris, I suppose, unless their marching orders hurry them on in this direction. How about that, Vio?"

"I am sure I wouldn't have them hurry, sir. They ought to be in their best looks and spirits to-morrow evening, and travelling all night is awfully trying to the eyes, and makes one sallow as a pumpkin."

The Judge was as much her slave as was the most abject of her followers. He espied wit in her pertness, grace in her lazy speech. It is not above once in a century that a man under ninety can deliberately pronounce a woman with such lips, eyes, and bust, as were among Violet's claims to notice, a goose in the guise of an angel.

"Do you insinuate, sauce-box, that our collegians ever give a thought to the effect of sleeplessness upon their beauty? What would have become of the Latin salutatory if one of them had played the coxcomb to that extent?"

"Max never cared enough for appearances," said Vio-

let, regretfully. "I dare say come he will back to us a bilious, long-haired fright, his eyes as big as saucers, and his bones rattling as he walks. I had rather have a little more flesh, and sleep, and comfort generally. In some things Shelby is the most sensible of the two." (Violet's indifference to the minor moralities of grammar as of orthography, was unconquerable.) "He dresses in excellent taste, always looks as if he had just stepped out of a handbox, and has the knack of saying witty things in a cool, careless way everybody admires, but nobody can imitate. He would cut his brother out everywhere—especially with the ladies—if Max had not been made so handsome in the beginning, that all his odd ways can't spoil him entirely."

The Judge crossed and uncrossed his legs uneasily.

"Shelby is a long-headed, steady boy. He has walked in a straighter, smoother road, thus far, than my harum-scarum Maxwell, with whom sinning and being found out have generally gone hand-in-hand. But I am mistaken if the elder brother is ever heard of in the world as the younger will be. These wild colts are unruly sometimes, but it is 'game' blood, not viciousness, that makes them caper, and pull hard on the bit. They settle down into most valuable roadsters, when they have had their fling. Max will begin to 'brush his coat o' mornings,' after a year or so. But we won't draw comparisons! Each of the lads is admirable in his way. I would stake my life upon the honor and word of either. I trust they will acquit themselves as well in the open field as they have done in the parade-ground."

"Do you really mean that they shall work in the field,

like common farmers?" asked literal Violet, in sincere consternation.

The Judge burst out laughing.

"You are an impertinent minx, to make sport of my paternal solicitude. I am glad there will be somebody to keep you in order after to-day."

He said nothing to Hadassah all this time, although in the girls' promenade up and down the piazza her dress touched his feet at every other turn. But when he would have arisen to get his tobacco-box from a shelf above his head, she stepped forward to forestall him, and held it while he filled his pipe. He nodded his acknowledgments, sucking vigorously at the mouthpiece as he did so, and let her return the box to its place without further notice. He was renowned for his old-fashioned gallantry, and scrupulous in the exercise of this to his wife and his ward; but the storekeeper's offspring was not supposed to expect distinguishing attention. If questioned upon the subject, he would have denied in the first flush of indignation the imputation of disrespect, even in seeming, to any daughter of Eve. If put into the witness-box of conscience, he would have explained his motives and conduct satisfactorily—to himself.

"The child is not used to ceremony in her own house, you see. Her father is a well-meaning man—a respectable and valuable citizen in his way; but confound it, sir! they haven't time to heed the 'small sweet courtesies' in their scuffling life. Almost half a score of children, and a delicate wife (a relative of our family, by the way. That accounts for this girl's visits to Riverview), do not help one in the practice of the amenities so dear to high-

ly-bred women. Too much etiquette and punctilio here would only spoil her for her everyday sphere."

I once heard a millionaire urge the like objection to giving the children in an orphan asylum molasses with their daily bread. "There might," he prudently observed, "arise contingencies in their future lives when it would be impossible for them to obtain molasses. Was it wise to pamper their appetites?"

Hadassah was not blind to the peculiarities of the treatment she received in the home of her mother's kinsman. She noted, and she felt all, even to the negligent nod over the rekindling pipe. If Violet had tendered the trifling service, it would have been accepted with courtly deprecation and expressions of profound gratitude. The guardian would have stood up and bowed over the lily hand that held the box, and not suffered her to stretch her slight muscles to restore it to the ledge. And seeing and feeling all this, she likewise comprehended the causes of the difference in the Judge's demeanor to her and to her friend; why Mrs. Humphreys, with all her kindly, patronizing ways, did not scruple to make a convenience of her. Hers was not a servile spirit. She was prouder than Violet, as her sensibilities were ten-fold more acute. But she dearly loved Riverview. Changed though her rank was by her mother's marriage with a nobody, these were her ancestral halls, and the present owner was her blood-relative. The luxury and liveliness of the life she saw there pleased her fancy and natural love for all that was elegant and refined, and her own home was not alluring in the contrast. From one, at least, of the Humphreys family she had the gentle, watchful attention due to a cousin and an equal—not the meagre notice for which

inferiors are expected to be grateful. The old place would have been paradise to her if only for the associations with him that haunted every room, and beautified every nook of the grounds.

"What a tease you are!" she said in a low voice to Violet when they reached the upper end of the porch. "You know as well as your uncle and I do, that Maxwell is immeasurably his brother's superior. What pleasure can you find in pretending to think the contrary?"

"There is no pretence in the case!" asserted the other, wilfully. "If it wasn't that Max is richer—and for some other things—I'd soon show you how much in earnest I am. As it is, I can play a merrier tune upon two strings than upon one."

They faced the public road into which the avenue in front of the house opened, and she checked her laugh at her own witticism to lean forward eagerly over the railing, strained her lovely eyes to peer through the vista of forest poplars hanging low over the drive.

"Somebody is coming!" she ejaculated, breathlessly. A second later—"As sure as I live, it is a gentleman on horseback!" face and form vivified by expectant delight. "O Haddie!"—this aside—"wasn't it providential that I put on this dress!"

"A gentleman on horseback!" repeated the Judge, ironically. "A remarkable occurrence, truly! If my memory serves me aright, however, the like has been known before in this day and region."

Hadassah's glance, at first indifferent, became a fixed gaze upon the approaching traveller; her face paled perceptibly. The avenue was dusty, the shade dense at this hour, and the rider was within a hundred yards of the

house, when she exclaimed in a low tone of ill-suppressed horror, "It is Shelby! and alone!"

"Impossible!" But the pipe dropped from the speaker's hand, and he stepped hurriedly forward to the edge of the piazza, where Violet stood, not forgetting to assume her most graceful *pose*, in her flurry of childish wonder, and curiosity, unmixed by the dread that sapped the vitality in the parent's heart and frame.

To Hadassah the calm of earth and sky was no longer the peace of hope, but a bodeful stillness, as the horseman drew nearer, riding with his head upon his breast, and hat slouched forward—not looking up or onward when he alighted at the gate; not lifting his eyes until his father met him at the foot of the steps—hands shaking as with palsy, outstretched to clutch his—upon his face the gloom of a great fear he could not name.

"What does this mean?" he said, clearing his throat, that the husky whisper might be audible. "Where is my boy?"





## CHAPTER III.

### THE SHADOW ON THE ROAD.

**T**HE flush of the June twilight had given place to purple dusk below, and starry darks above, when Mr. Todd, on his way home from a business jaunt through the country—he was his own collector—drove up to the door of Riverview for his daughter.

She ran out to him as he alighted, but not before his quick eye had taken in, through the open windows, all the details of a scene going on within the lighted drawing-room. Mrs. Humphreys, a pretty old lady, who wore black-silk gowns and lace caps on all occasions, except when she was in bed, and whose delicate features and mild eyes made her look like a slightly secularized Quakeress, sat in her cushioned chair, with her handkerchief to her face, swinging to and fro with measured motion, as the Irish women “keen” over their dead. Violet Hayne knelt, or crouched, at her feet, her face hidden in the matron’s lap, apparently in an abandonment of woe, her hair unbound and rippling below her waist, over shoulders and back, enhancing the whiteness of her dress, and the one round arm that broke through the waves to

support her head. On the hearth rug, confronting his wife, a porphyry pillar in rigidity and gloom, was Judge Humphreys. His frowning gaze passed over the mourning women to a picture above the mother's head, on which the lamplight shone brightly. It was Maxwell's portrait, taken during his last vacation, and a wonderfully faithful likeness. Shelby was near his father—nearer to Violet—so close that he bent and laid his hand upon her head, as if enforcing some point in his harangue. His low, even tones, but not his words, were audible to the spectator. He was evidently arguing respectfully with the angry parent.

The inopportune visitor would have hesitated to announce his coming after beholding these signs of affliction or dissension in the household, even if Hadassah had not hindered his progress.

"Don't come in!" she whispered, earnestly. "I am all ready. They won't notice that I have not said 'good-by.' I will tell you all about it on the road."

"Bad news?" queried Mr. Todd in the same key.

"Lies!" said the girl vehemently, hurrying down the steps. "Dastardly, abominable lies! Come!"

She sprang into the buggy, the approach of which had been almost soundless upon the thick layer of tan-bark with which the drive was covered. Their meeting, the low dialogue, and their departure were alike unobserved by those within the house. Mr. Todd was in his seat and gathering up the reins, when Hadassah pointed past him at the illuminated tableau.

"I think Satan in the garden, 'squat at the ear of Eve,' looked like that," she uttered in the sibilant accents of concentrated rage and distrust. "The comparison would



be unflattering to any of the serpent-kind now known to naturalists."

Mr. Todd liked to hear her "put things strongly," as he expressed it. In any phase or mood she was perfect to him. He was seldom enthusiastic, himself, in aught except his attachment for her; but her fervent outbreaks of emotion, her animated narrations, her satire and invective when her inner nature was fairly aroused, were, in his estimation, the acme of human eloquence; and to every turn of expression that evinced originality or a liberal education, he lent a delighted ear. To him she was *herself*, without reserve or fear—herself—and always at her best, because she was free to act and speak as she pleased.

"You are hard upon him!" he laughed, guardedly, looking, as she meant him to do, at the second son of the house.

Tall, fair-headed, graceful, and invariably carefully dressed, he was not a despicable figure to most observers, and, at the distance from which father and daughter regarded him, the cold, crafty eye, the heavily moulded lips, and wide, sensual nostrils were less perceptible than they had been to Hadassah when she sat at the supper-table with him and his father, an hour earlier. Neither Mrs. Humphreys nor Violet had appeared at the meal, and the Judge did not touch plate or food—never spoke, and hardly moved in his chair. But Shelby had partaken with real relish and seeming indifference of the dainties made ready for him after his journey, and Hadassah forced down a few mouthfuls chokingly, in Arab-like aversion to the undertaking, while the new-comer was her *vis-à-vis*.

"O that I were a man!" she gasped now, as they passed from the yard into the avenue. "He should not have things all his own way there to-night."

"What is the matter?" her father questioned, with absolute confidence that he would hear all she knew.

"That creature—" Hadassah nodded backward—"I suppose he calls himself a man—got home this evening at sundown, having pushed on from Louisville upon a hired horse, without stopping. His object—I give the story as I had it from Mrs. Humphreys, to whom the Judge repeated it after his private interview with Shelby—was to prepare the family for the evil tidings the mail would bring them in another day. According to him, a party of lawless students got up a frolic in the town on the very eve of Commencement Day. The effigy of an unpopular professor, steeped in turpentine, was hung to a lamp-post and set on fire. Several drinking saloons were entered forcibly, and after helping themselves to all they wanted, the rioters threw bottles, dishes, etc., into the street, staved whiskey barrels in the gutters, and lighting the liquor, danced by the blue flame, like evil spirits, or Indians on the war-path. A house caught fire from a torch hurled upon the roof, and the crowd of half-drunk-en boys tried to hinder the firemen from extinguishing it. The police mustered in force, and there was a fight with the rioters. Several policemen were badly hurt, but they dispersed the mob and arrested four or five students. One of them, when interrogated, confessed that Maxwell Humphreys was the ringleader in the outrage, and this story was corroborated by several citizens who professed to know him well. They even described his disguise—a red flannel shirt, black trousers, a red cap surmounted by

black horns, a black mask with a fiery red beard under it—the popular impersonation of the devil. The police, upon learning this, went at once to the college buildings in search of the offender. In the hall leading to Maxwell's room, they found the mask and cap, where they had been dropped or thrown away by the fugitive. His pursuers were almost at his door when it was opened cautiously, and a girl darted out. They caught her, and Max coming to her rescue as she screamed, knocked down a constable, and fought like a lion until overpowered by numbers. Then hearing for the first time what was the charge against him, he offered to go quietly with the officers of the law, and tell all he knew about the riot, if they would not molest the girl, whom the bystanders recognized as a pretty dressmaker from the town. They let her go, and carried Max before a magistrate early in the morning. His confession was merely to the effect that he had fallen in with the band of students in their march through the streets and joined them, more curious than mischievous, being ignorant of their intentions. He had helped pull down a fence and a sign or two, and had cheered with the rest when the obnoxious professor's effigy was raised; but as the tumult increased, had left the crowd and gone back to college by the most direct route. His only disguise had been a small black velvet mask, which he chanced to have in his pocket. This he showed to the court. The young woman whom the officers had met at the door of his room had come there by mistake. He had never seen her before to his knowledge. He was not the person she expected to see. He believed her statement to this effect—but this had nothing to do with his defence.

“When his story was done—‘an able and plausible one,’ says his affectionate brother—a constable laid upon the magistrate’s table a photograph of the girl, a pack of cards, a revolver and a box of loaded dice—all of which had been taken from a secret drawer of his writing table.”

“That looked ugly!” interjected Mr. Todd.

In his interest in the story, he had let the reins lie loosely upon the horse’s back, and the weary animal had brought them at a quiet walk to the far outer gate of the plantation. Here, his master alighted to undo the heavy wooden latch. Hadassah had spoken with labored calmness until now, bent, it would seem, upon an impartial recapitulation of the case to herself, no less than to avoid misstatement to her father. But this interruption was the uplifting of a flood-gate.

“Ugly! yes, but not for Max, except in the eyes of men determined to believe him guilty!” she cried, in sudden passion. “It showed that his enemies were cunning and unscrupulous, and—may Heaven judge me if I wrong him!—but I believe that Shelby Humphreys, if he did not connive at his brother’s disgrace, could have cleared him if he would. At any rate, he need not have sneaked home, without waiting for the injured boy, to make his ruin complete, to harden his father’s heart against him, and to bolt the doors of his home in his face!”

“The Judge is very angry, then?”

Mr. Todd had to tug hard at the clumsy fastening, and Hadassah’s voice rang out sharply clear as she raised it in reply.

“He is absurdly—wickedly angry! He vows that he

will kick Maxwell out of the house, should he dare to show himself there; that henceforward he is no son of his. When Shelby's soft, hypocritical voice talked of 'suspending opinion until further developments should criminate or clear the poor fellow,' his father bade him 'hold his tongue! The loaded dice would be enough for me without the weight of other evidence, of his utter baseness,' he said. 'I would not hear him in his own defence, were he standing where you are now! Why should I tempt him to load his soul with more lies? I would horsewhip him out of my gates as I would a stray dog!'

"Father, it *hurt* me to hear all this! I would not believe such charges against Maxwell, if they were sworn to by a million false-hearted, false-faced brothers. And so I told Mrs. Humphreys."

"That was rather bold—wasn't it?" ventured Mr. Todd, climbing back to his seat, as the gate clanged to.

"The change of diet should do her good!" retorted Hadassah, with a bitter laugh. "Yes! I said, 'I, for one held fast to my faith in Max's honor and truth, no matter how well Shelby's story might hang together.' It sickened me that she offered no opposition to it beyond a pailful of tears, and a score of 'Who would have thought its?' and 'dear mes!' and 'poor mes!' and 'poor dear Violets!' without a word deprecatory of her husband's sentence of banishment. 'Shelby is the soul of truth, dear!' she answered me. 'His word is as good as any other man's oath! I've always had my fears about Maxwell! *Now*, his father begins to see that my judgment of character is entitled to respect!' One would really have thought she found satisfaction in the disgrace that had fallen upon her youngest son!"

“ You are excited, my daughter ! ”

But at heart he was as proud of her as if she had been Jeanne of Arc. The upper edge of the moon's disc was slowly rising above the hills, and he stole a look of intensest admiration at her speaking face, noble in its indignant sympathy with the wronged.

“ Where is the poor fellow, now ? ” he continued. “ He ought to try and clear himself in the eyes of his family, if he is innocent.”

“ He *is* innocent ! Don't say ‘ *if* ! ’ I wish I were as certain of salvation, as I am that he cannot do a mean or vile deed. He is in a Northern jail, awaiting trial for burglary and arson, and under the ban of more degrading suspicions. He refused to see his anxious brother, or to send any message by him to their father. His trial comes off in ten days.”

“ Money will do much in the courts of so-called justice,” said Mr. Todd, sententiously. “ And the judge is rich.”

“ There will be no attempt to suborn judge or jury in this case. Judge Humphreys said to-night, in my hearing, ‘ that Maxwell might rot in the State Prison for twenty years before he would spend a dollar to shield him from the consequences of his villany.’ Then you should have heard Shelby's pretence of pleading for the ‘ misguided young man.’ His reminders to his father of the ‘ heat of youthful blood ’ and the ‘ temptations of college-life ! ’ and all that sort of thing ! Ugh ! I could have struck him in the face to stop his whining ! ”

“ My child ! ”

“ I know I am violent—maybe coarse in my expressions, father ! But when I think it all over, I am wild with

anger and dread. The sacrifice of such a life is fearful ! And yesterday—only this afternoon—they were so proud of his talents, seemed to love him dearly and truly, as he deserved to be loved ; and now to cut him adrift utterly—him who never did mortal man or woman harm—”

Her hurried speech broke up in a stormy flood of tears.

“ There ! there ! ” uttered her father, in unfeigned consternation. “ You are nervous to-night, dear, and agitated, as is but natural, by the story of your old play-fellow’s trouble. It is sad enough, but many another man, as talented and well-connected, has fallen through his own folly, and never been able to hold up his head again. These are melancholy lessons in human nature, but we get more accustomed to them as we grow older—”

“ Ah ! ”

It was not a scream, but a low, stifled exclamation betraying a greater depth of alarm, that stayed his prosing consolation, and Hadassah started violently, then shrank closely to his side. Involuntarily, he checked his horse, when she snatched the whip and struck the astonished creature a blow so keen and unexpected, that he bounded forward with a snort of fear. Before Mr. Todd could regain control of him, they were several hundred yards farther on their journey—the horse was still trotting as on a quarter race, and Hadassah laughing hysterically.

“ Don’t stop him, please ! ” she gasped between her bursts of merriment. “ I am not quite demented, but I was startled out of my wits. Father,” sobering down into coherence, “ a man walked down the hill behind us ! I saw his shadow.”

“Are you sure?”

Mr. Todd was sorely amazed by her behavior this evening. She was strangely unlike his clear-headed, brave counsellor and friend, who had never fainted, or had a nervous paroxysm, or done aught else that was not wise and commendable.

“It was perhaps a tree-shadow, or a passing cloud, or night-hawk, that deceived you,” he added persuasively.

“It was a man’s shadow! I saw it plainly. It fell obliquely across the road, and the upper part was projected beyond the hind wheels upon the white sand. He wore a slouched hat, and his head was bent forward as if listening to us. He must have been near enough to hear every word, for, when I exclaimed, he vanished instantly, and, glancing over my shoulder, I saw that the road was empty. It gave me a shock. Yet I am not easily frightened.”

“It was odd!” Whether she were mistaken or not, the observation was a safe one. “We will say nothing of it to mother. She would be full of fancies of highwaymen and assassination for months to come.”

“You are right.” Hadassah laughed—still nervously—looking back over the route, half-rising, and steadying herself by her father’s shoulder that she might have a better view. “We have distanced my highwayman finely. I almost wish we had stopped to search for him instead. After all, it was probably an eavesdropping negro, or some one who wanted to play us a trick.”

She shivered as with cold, pulling her light shawl about her shoulders, and hardly spoke again until they reached home.





## CHAPTER IV.

“BLOOD WILL TELL.”

MRS. TODD, a gaunt matron with an undue allowance of neck, and an aristocratic nose—the “Humphreys’ feature,” on which she especially prided herself—sat in her chamber upon the first floor of the rambling frame-house opposite the “Cross Roads” store. With one foot she rocked the cradle in which slept the “baby,” a fretful, unwholesome-looking two-year-old. Her right hand held a purple-covered novel, dog-eared and dirty from the many fingers through which it had passed. In the left was a half-lemon, which she dipped from time to time in a cup of sugar on the candle-stand beside her. And while she sucked at the tart confection, and read at her book, and rocked at her baby, she hummed somewhat discursively at the air of a popular love-song to hush the child, on whose sticky face divers flies, attracted by the light of the two candles, were rioting. The mother’s *déshabille* was a dimity night-gown and a cotton night-cap without a border. She did not look like a Sybarite, but she loved bodily ease, sought

pleasure, and hated trouble with all her heart, soul, and strength. Confectionery and light literature were among her favorite delights. The hours devoted to the consumption of these outnumbered those given to the cares entailed by her household.

Time was when what her husband's Northern kinspeople would have called her "shiftless ways" were the talk of the neighborhood, but since Hadassah had grown to womanhood, there was a marked improvement in the dwelling, and the administration of domestic affairs. The girl's energy pervaded every department, excepting her mother's individual habits of dress and luxury. Hadassah's stirring housewifery; her tutelage of the servants, and the authority she assumed over the younger children; the innovations to which she obtained her father's sanction; the money he expended at her instigation upon repairs and new furniture, and the implied rebuke in all this of the former *régime*, were a jagged thorn in Mrs. Todd's side. "Let well enough alone," was the rule by which she had lived in peace and respectability for forty-seven years, and it was late in the day for her to be taught opposing philosophy by a pert school-girl. Moreover, the father's partiality for this one of his children irked the mother unreasonably. Her affection for her husband retained little of its early fervor, but had grown peevishly exacting as the years went by. Naturally jealous in disposition, she demanded respect and devotion the more importunately as she ceased to exert herself to win these.

"Hadassah manages you as I never could. You worship her as you never did me when I was in my prime—much less now. She is the rising, I am the setting sun,"

she would bewail herself to her lord in the hearing of their offspring, not ashamed to get up a party in her favor, whose watchword was resistance to what she regarded as the powers that were, but should not have been.

There was little affection between mother and daughter at this date, and still less forbearance exercised toward one another, although open quarrels, thanks to Hadassah's good sense, were more rare than formerly. Full as was her mind of other things, Hadassah's forehead puckered disapprovingly at the aspect of the apartment and its one waking occupant.

"Where is Elena, mother?" she asked, shortly, beginning to pick up and fold the scattered clothing lying around in heaps, out of which three children had stepped after undressing themselves, prior to their retirement to the adjoining chamber. "She promised to see to the children for me to-day, or I should have stayed at home."

"Louise Kemp was over this afternoon, and insisted upon her going home with her to spend the night," was the careless answer.

"They seem to have become very intimate of late," remarked Hadassah, pulling open a drawer to get clean garments for the baby's morning wear. "Do you regard the Kemps as desirable associates for one so young and of so facile a temper as Elena?"

"Really I have never taken the matter into consideration," rejoined Mrs. Todd, snuffing the candles and taking up the lemon she had laid down with a lick of the fingers at the entrance of her husband and eldest-born.

Some of her mother's habits were absolute torture to the latter. Her greed, or, as Hadassah stigmatized it to herself, "her lust for sweets," of all kinds, the more

cloying and poisonous the better, had begotten in the daughter an aversion to them, and she would wince visibly when told that she inherited her literary proclivities from this one of her parents.

"If my intellect were as strong and my judgment as admirable as my father's, I should be more than satisfied," she was wont to reply pointedly to the intended compliment, whereat the thorough-bred Humphreys feature would sniff disdainfully.

Her family was Mrs. Todd's tower of strength; her main vantage-ground in governing her husband, was his veneration for blue blood, and acknowledgment of the prerogatives belonging to the same—a common weakness, by the way, with men who have sprung from the ranks, yet lived long in neighborhoods ruled by an oligarchy. Even Hadassah was not stout enough in her republicanism to combat the lady's pretensions to superiority by virtue of the charmed phrase, "*née* Humphreys." Her father's foible in this regard was hers, also, in almost equal measure. Something of the divinity that hedged Claudius of Denmark, because of his brotherhood in blood to true royalty, albeit he, a dissolute fratricide, had no right to purple, title, or crown,—fence<sup>d</sup> in for her the "old families" of the county and State. In her many visits to Riverview, and at the parties she attended in company with Violet Hayne, the "haberdasher's daughter" never passed that pale in her thoughts, or forgot, however much she may have wished to do so, that the majority of those she met there were formed of finer clay than were her father's children. The while, with queer inconsistency, she respected him as she did not her

lady-mother, or the haughtiest Castilian of the favored class.

"Junius Kemp is at home now," she resumed, when she could curb her temper. "He is very wild. Have you heard that he was suspended twice for drunkenness during his last college term? He makes no secret of his fancy for Elena. She is too young to be talked to about such things, even if he were a fit associate for her."

"Elena might do worse than to marry early in life," replied Mrs. Todd, turning a leaf in her pamphlet. "And Junius Kemp is not the first student who has been expelled from college for disorderly conduct."

She had not taken her eyes from the book, and sucked contentedly at the lemon she had refilled with sugar, apparently unconscious of the effect of her "double-header." The husband she had selected in the wane of her charms dropped his honest eyes apprehensively to the face that crimsoned hotly at the allusion to disgraced collegians. Leaving the victress in possession of the field, they went about their respective pursuits—Hadassah to give orders for breakfast, and pay a visit of inspection to the slumbering juniors; Mr. Todd to see that his one clerk was in the store for the night, and to receive the day's report.

The two met in the hall on the father's return, and would have parted until the morning with a silent kiss.

"Good-night, mother!" said Hadassah from the chamber-door.

"Are you going upstairs already?" The reader looked surprised. "I shall not be able to retire for at least two hours to come. I promised Humphreys that his pantaloons should be mended by morning. I can't

divine how he manages to tear them so often and so frightfully. I have had everything on my hands to-day. Not that that is anything unusual for me! Only I used to be so silly as to hope that when my daughters were grown, they would help me bear my burdens. The chimera has faded, like the rest of my happy dreams of loving appreciation and support. Don't let me keep you a moment from your bed, Miss Todd! This crosspatch of a child has not let me touch a needle to-night. But the prevailing idea in this household is, that it does not hurt me to go without rest and recreation. I can sit up until daybreak and mend *the things!* I wish I had never been born into this miserable world!”

Like Mrs. Maunder Leslie in “My Novel,” she had a streak of Mountyfidget blood in her, manifesting itself in moments of excitement or irritation by a blustering show of industry; by hasty spits of declamation, or when the occasion seemed to warrant the use of the engine—and these times were not few, however fit she may have deemed them—in a waterspout of weak, hot tears that reduced her husband to distracted speechlessness, and angered Hadassah into filial impiety, approximating blasphemy. Fairly aroused now, the injured woman dashed the exhausted lemon rind out of the window; nearly overturned the cradle in her rush to the washstand, and cleansed her bony, veinous hands vigorously, plashing the soap-suds to the right and left.

“It is all I am good for in the estimation of yourself and your father!” she spluttered, the salt drops coming up in a jet, as if propelled by a hydraulic ram. “To bring squalling children into this wretched world, and patch their clothes after they are here! I have no con-

genial companions, no sympathy, no sphere! While others, less nobly born, disport themselves in society, and enjoy social and intellectual pursuits, I must stay at home—a domestic drudge! to be sneered at and dictated to by those who should reverence me, if only for my family, and what I once was, before I sank into a despicable nonentity—a sort of upper servant at best. In reality, a grovelling maid-of-all-work! I wish I were dead and buried!"

Which was the usual *sequitur* to her jeremiads.

"I shall mend these, mother!" Hadassah's face was set in still, cold contempt that told nothing of the deadly heart- nausea under which she was fit to faint. "I am not sleepy or tired—am ready to do anything else that has been left undone in my absence." She had the torn, muddy trousers upon her arm, and eluded, by a quick undulation of her lithe form, her mother's clutch at them. "I am always willing to help you whenever I can."

"I had rather you did nothing than to offer assistance in that insufferably patronizing way!" cried Mrs. Todd, tearfully furious. "Your haughty spirit will have a fall some day. What right have you to act as if I were a spoiled, mindless idiot, and you a dignified duchess? The time will come when you will repent the cup of humiliation you now delight to hold to your mother's lips. What have I ever done that Heaven should afflict me with such ungrateful children? When I remember all I have borne for them—"

The channels of speech were closed by the play of water and steam.

"I did not mean to offend you, and I am not ungrateful," returned Hadassah, yet more quietly. "Juliette

has torn the gathers out of her skirt, as usual, I see. I will take that, too. Good-night, again."

She cast a mute, loving glance at her father, whose firm mouth was drawn pitifully with pain, while his eyes had in them a dry, patient despair she best knew how to interpret—then went upstairs.

"But for him! but for him!" she said wearily, seating herself to begin her homely task. "What an abode for his old age after his years of toil and self-denial. It seems to me, sometimes, that I shall go crazy if I stay here. Yet I cannot desert him. This marriage was the one mistake of his life. Are there any happy homes upon this earth, I wonder? What a hateful, hollow thing existence is, at the best!"

She worked fast and hard in her heat of rebellion and misanthropy. Her chamber was in a wing of the house, above the parlor. Indeed, the only staircase by which it was accessible ran directly down into the state apartment—a freak of architectural or domestic fancy too often seen in the West and South to be called singular. These two rooms composed Hadassah's suite, and they had been refurnished since her graduation. In the lower were her books arranged in neat cases; her piano, writing-desk, and the broad, low lounge she had ordered from a neighboring carpenter, stuffed with her own hands, and with her father's assistance, covered with blue and buff chintz; a corner divan from the same manufactory; white curtains looped back with blue ribbons; a round stand with a blue merino cloth, worked with buff silk, and half-a-dozen cane-seated chairs, including two light rockers. There were no paintings upon the wall, but several good engravings, and over the mantel a single crayon head



drawn by Hadassah herself. "Greek Athlete" was written upon the back, and under this name it had received the prize given on Commencement Day for "best original sketch."

"There is something in that picture that reminds me of Max! I think you might make *me* a present of it," Violet had said more than once while her room-mate wrought at her *chef d'œuvre*.

"It is a birth-day present for my father," was the composed rejoinder.

He, too, had noted and remarked upon the resemblance Violet had detected, and Hadassah had answered lightly that she had thought of her cousin while she sketched.

"I wished to make it as noble and comely as possible," added she, "and I have seen few handsomer men than Max."

The parlor floor was covered with straw matting; the atmosphere was cool, and fragrant with flower-scent from the antique china bowl of lilies and roses that crowned the centre-table, and the tiny glass of mignonette, renewed every morning, which stood on the mantel directly beneath the crayon picture.

Mrs. Todd regarded this business of refurnishment with high-bred scorn.

"Cottage and home-made furniture has a shabby-genteel look," she did not scruple to say to the busy pair of amateur upholsterers. "If I cannot replenish my house with solid, handsome articles, I will let it go bare. And in so unpretending an establishment as ours, there should be no show-place—no room too nice to be used by all the family. It is a vulgar, Yankee custom. I, for one, shall never feel comfortable in here, Hadassah. Not

that *that* can be an object with you. But you asked for my opinion, and I must speak frankly, if at all. The place has a cheap, tawdry air to my taste."

After this free expression of her sentiments, she let the father and daughter have their cosy bower to themselves, except when there were visitors. They passed, on an average, five evenings out of seven there; she busy with her needlework, while he read aloud, or talked with her of what they had studied together; consulted her about business and family matters, and listened to her sensible and sprightly speech as to the dicta of an oracle. It was the one restful nook in his home, and he enjoyed it to the full.

The upper room, in which she now sat, was even more simple in its appointments, yet had the nameless air of purity and refinement, which is never more pleasant than when felt in a young maiden's bed-chamber. The draped dressing-table and glass above it; the spotless coverlet of the bed; the one easy-chair, also white, with the foot-cushion before it, and a reading-table at the left elbow; the crayon sketches, in straw and cone frames upon the walls—were what any lady of modest means in the surrounding country might have collected in her dormitory. Yet few except Hadassah Todd did. There was something pathetic in these signs of the girl's longing after the beauty and grace that had so little expression in her outer life. She was ashamed of her home, her mother, her sisters and brothers; conscious, sometimes to awkwardness, of the imperfections of her own dress and belongings. She had little time to spend upon personal adornment; and yet, since her father could not afford to pay the bills of town-dressmakers, she must manufacture

gowns, mantles, and the like for herself. She had meant to retouch the party-dress Violet's needs and her mother's demands had granted her but scanty leisure to prepare, but there would be no time for this now.

And to-night she was too distraught, too full of carking care, to be annoyed by such a trifle. What mattered it how she looked? If the choice had been given her, she would have preferred to mend Humphreys' muddy trousers and Juliette's torn and greasy calico frock to handling muslin and lace. She had no heart for pretty frivolities, and her fingers must be busy with something until the fever was worked down somewhat. The begloomed eyes, the trench of suffering parting the brows, were not evidences of disrelish of her employment.

It was eleven o'clock when she began the repairs. Twelve sounded as she beat off the dried mud from the boy's garment, folded and laid it upon Juliette's, and set away her work-basket. Then she extinguished the lamp, and, wheeling the easy-chair to the window, leaned back with a long, struggling sigh.

"If mine were the right I would walk every mile of the way to be with him now, to watch under his prison window that he might know he had one friend. O Heaven! but this is very hard to bear! Everything seems giving way under my feet at once."

The night was very lovely without, with a cloudless moon in the zenith, and still shadows of house and trees upon the turf of the yard. It was not entirely to please his daughter that Mr. Todd kept inclosures, buildings, and garden in good order. Twenty years of a slatternly wife, and Western free-and-easiness could not eradicate his Connecticut ideas of order and neatness. But personally

he cared little for the flower-fringes that edged his squares of vegetables. These were Hadassah's bantlings. She could see her clumps of roses—white and pink—and smell them as the dew pressed heavily on their hearts; the shut buds of her day-lilies asleep upon the tall stalks, and the snowy parallelograms of candy-tuft and feather-few. She knew the whereabouts of the honeysuckle that yielded the spiciest breath of the incense arising in slow, unseen waves to her window; could count the few milk-white cones upon the stately young magnolia by the garden gate. She noticed these things in a dull, mechanical way, as matters that ought to interest her; to relieve, in some poor and imperfect degree, the feverish aching of eyes and heart. As listlessly, she bent over the window-sill to train some wandering sprays of the climbing rose that ran up to the eaves—was just saying to herself as if she were some one else, "How fast it grows!" when her eyes dropped casually to the magnolia, and she saw under its wide tent of shadow the figure of a man looking up at her!

With a smothered exclamation she receded a step within the obscurity of the room, and apparently divining the cause of the movement, the intruder advanced to an open space where the moon shone most clearly, and removed his hat with a gesture of courteous appeal. In action, form, and features she recognized Maxwell Humphreys.



## CHAPTER V.

FOR HIS SAKE.

**A** DOOR opened from the parlor into a small side porch, and in this the old playfellows met when Hadassah had hurried down in breathless eagerness to receive the unlooked-for guest.

“Is it really your living self?” she said, clasping in both of hers the hand Maxwell extended, and feeling in the midst of her agitation how hot and tremulous it was. “I ran down, half fearing lest I should find your appearance to have been a trick of my own fancy. You are sure that you are flesh and blood?”

“It is the jail-bird and the disinherited son!” he said, with harsh abruptness. “I wonder you are not disappointed at the discovery that I am not a ghost. How can you bring yourself to take me by the hand? You should hound me off the premises, as I heard you say to-night my father would do, if I showed my head in the house where I was born.”

“Come in!” Hadassah drew him gently over the threshold. “I will prove to you that you have other friends besides myself, who will believe no evil of you

until the shameful story is confirmed by your own lips. It *was* you, then, whose shadow frightened me so terribly on our way home? The most startling feature in the apparition was its resemblance to you. There is no one stirring in the house except ourselves"—seeing him glance apprehensively around the room. "But I will call Father; he will be delighted to see you."

"I doubt it; he spoke of my guilt as a foregone conclusion. Call no one! I ought not to be here," said Maxwell, with the same affected roughness of tone and style. "But I was loitering about the Riverview gate to-night, in doubt how to announce my arrival to those who I knew must have already heard Shelby's account of my late misdemeanors, and I overheard you say that my parents believed the worst they had been told. Then, I followed you stealthily, to learn whatever else I could. I was a dishonorable sneak for doing it, you will think, if you do not say; but when one's character is ruined, he ceases to be squeamish, and I was not far from insanity just then. For a while, I meant to discover myself to you, but your father's arguments changed my purpose. I had already walked fifteen miles since three o'clock, having left the stage at Ashville, but I did not know I was tired while I listened to your story. I learned from it that my mother disowns me also. That did not surprise me so much, for she always loved Shelby best of all her children. You said nothing of Violet's verdict. I am here to hear my sentence in full. You used to be truth itself, Hadassah. Tell me, what does she think of me? Is she faithful in the fire of this trial? Can she listen to these monstrous lies with patience? She cannot believe them."

“I will tell you everything, and how much you have still to hope for, when you have rested a little while. You are so tired, you can hardly stand—poor fellow!” coaxed Hadassah, striking a light, and shutting the outer door.

As the lamp kindled, she saw that he had sunk upon the sofa, as if his limbs refused to support him, but his stare of agonized inquiry gave earnest life to the face otherwise so changed.

“Don’t keep me in suspense,” he said, chokingly. “A man can suffer death but once.”

She knelt before him—the proud girl whom men called distant and prudish—and laid her hands upon his, chafed the tense fingers gently, as a sister might.

“It is not strange that our poor little Violet should be shocked and frightened, Max. She is timid, and new to the wickedness of the world. And if your father, who is accustomed to weigh and sift evidence, found no flaw in Shelby’s story, you should not be hard upon your mother or Violet.”

“He has the cunning of Judas, I know. Yet *you* disbelieved him. Had I not heard you say so, I would not have come to you. What hindered them from trusting me as well?”

He was too much engrossed in his own misery to mark the painful flush that swept from neck to forehead of his champion, and her answer was prompt and direct.

“They like Shelby, and have confidence in him. Your mother’s partiality blinds her, of course, and her opinion has some weight with her adopted child. By and by, when the shock is over, they will see things in a different light. I dislike and distrust your brother. I always did

from a child. The fact that this improbable tale came from him would have made me question its truth."

"So she believed it all!" groaned the unhappy boy, dropping his face into his hands. "The rest was as nothing to this!"

Hadassah attempted no verbal consolation. The half had not been told him, and she was too truthful to soothe him with denial of what he had guessed. Violet had not challenged the truth of one circumstance of Shelby's clever narrative; had received, without wavering, the account of her betrothed's utter unworthiness. In rehearsing it to Hadassah, she had wept plentifully and volubly.

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," she said, sopping her tears with her third dry handkerchief. "A low-lived dressmaker, and a Yankee at that! If that is a specimen of his lordship's taste, he need not trouble himself to come near me again. I should like to box his ears and to pull her hair—the vulgar minx! I am the most unfortunate girl alive. If all this had not come out until after my party, I shouldn't have minded it so much. But everybody will be staring at and pitying me. I can think just how that hateful Galt girl will sneer and giggle. If they imagine I am going to wear the willow for a single day, they are mistaken. If I can bring Shelby to the point, I'll be engaged again before a soul of them arrives, and let everybody know it. I always said he loved me better than Max did, and now I am certain of it."

Ample allowance was to be made for the exaggeration of passion and mortification, but with all her partiality for her beautiful comrade, Hadassah could not but see that the wound to Violet's vanity was more grievous than that



to her heart; was obliged to admit the probability that she would seek to cover this at the earliest possible moment. Knowing this, she could say nothing more. She would not add to Maxwell's anguish by intimating her fears, or mock him by empty words of cheer. Slipping noiselessly from the room, she went upstairs for her basket of keys, and returned to the parlor after five minutes' absence, with a tray, on which was set out in tempting array, cold chicken, bread and butter, cake and wine—practical comfort of the kind that seems shockingly prosaic when described in romance, unless it be when Miss Wetherell's Fleda or Faith spends three-fourths of her time in getting up omelettes, hashed chicken and potato-puffs for the delectation of Messrs. Carleton and Linden. In real life, such consolation is more inspiring and to the point than a duodecimo volume of sympathetic blank verse, or a butt full of such sweet rain as is given out by melting eyes—the aqueducts of brimming hearts.

Maxwell sat in the same place, his head between his hands. He had not missed his hostess, and looked up impatiently when she accosted him.

“Max, you must eat something. It will do you good. I will take no denial,” as he shook his head. “You are not fit for thought or action while you are exhausted physically. When did you eat last?”

“This morning on the cars. You don't ask me how I got out of jail.”

“I will hear all that after a while. You are my prisoner now, and must obey orders. Come out here!”

The faintest phantom of a smile hovered about his mouth at her tone of playful authority, and he arose to obey the summons.

"Queenie, still!" he said, following her into the porch, where stood in order upon the bench a basin of clear, cold water, soap, and towels.

"You look better," was her encouraging remark on his reappearance in the parlor. "Now, put on this dressing-gown and these slippers. You will be far more comfortable."

"I must go in a little while," he objected.

She stamped her foot in mock pettishness. "Obey!" she said, and he submitted, drawing a deep sigh of relief as he drew his swollen feet out of his boots and thrust them into the old slippers. Then he sat down to the repast she had provided. Youthful appetite is seldom totally destroyed or cheated long by misery. After the first difficult mouthful was swallowed, the lost relish for nourishing food returned to the fasting body, and when Hadassah returned from an improvised errand to the upper room, she was almost satisfied with the justice done to her prescription.

"This is all wrong," he said, as she removed the tray. "I have no further business in this region. Your family will be compromised if it is known that you have sheltered me. Your goodness to me is the first ray of light that has crossed my soul to-day. But I will not presume upon it. I will go, now."

"Nonsense!" retorted Hadassah, good-humoredly. "In the first place, we, as a family, are independent of ostracism from any quarter—are a law unto ourselves. In the second, nobody will find fault with us for showing courtesy to an old friend. Thirdly, lastly, and most positively, here you stay until morning. You can sleep upon the sofa, and you will be the stronger and wiser man for ex-

ercising a little common sense, which should always lean to the side of self-preservation. Moreover, I have a thousand questions to ask. Now that the material man is more at his ease, tell me the truth of this affair, Max, or so much of it as you are willing I should hear. I ask it, because I want to help you if I can. My sympathy and good wishes are already yours."

He did not look like seducer, rioter, or gamester in turning his frank face full toward her and the lamp. Violet had called him handsome, and he was; with finely cut features, and the higher intellectual beauty it is a mistake to imagine is admired only by intellectual people. He was haggard now, and ten years of such prosperous, busy life as his father had planned for him would not have left the marks the events of half that number of days had carved on brow and lips; but his eyes were clear; their glance straight and brave. The Athlete beneath which he stood did not wear a more unabashed front.

"I am willing, even anxious that nothing should be kept back from you, which may go to prove that your generous defence of me was not founded upon the sand. I never made any pretensions to saintship, as I needn't tell you, but I declare solemnly that neither you nor any other woman need blush to listen to the record of my college life. I have made one at wine and card parties, when there was a fair prospect of having good company, and a jovial evening. Three, may be four times, I have been mixed up in Calathumpian bands and other erratic expeditions. But serenading some overbearing tutor, or newly-married professor, and pulling down a few signs, gates, or fences, have been the worst of my enormities.

Foolish and puerile offences, all of them, but they have been in vogue among wild boys from time immemorial. The defence I made before the magistrate, when arraigned as a participant in the late riot, was truthful in every particular. It is nevertheless true, that the ringleader bore a certain resemblance in height, carriage, and voice to myself; and several of the students reluctantly admitted that he answered to my name when addressed by those who supposed me to be the chief of the gang. This was one of the circumstances which, as your father stated to-night, made my case look "ugly." Fortunately for me, I fell in with a young citizen of the town, on my way back to college, one to whom I had once rendered a slight service, exaggerated by his gratitude into an important benefit. We walked several blocks in company—up to the very steps of the college, indeed, and while we stood talking upon the campus, the bell in the great tower above us tolled twelve, and was answered by the church-clocks in the town. This was the hour at which the disguised ringleader was urging on his followers to interference with the firemen, and resistance to the police. We were too far off to hear the hubbub of the mob, but the clangor of the fire-bells reached us. We parted with some remark upon the alarm, my companion saying, carelessly, "It is most likely a false alarm; I see no light." I paid no attention to the striking of the hour, or forgot the trifling incident, if I did. Not so, my friend. A sudden and severe headache kept him away from the commencement exercises, but late in the forenoon the news reached him of my disgrace. He dragged himself out of bed, went to the faculty, then to the magistrate who had examined me, and through a lawyer, of-

ferred his evidence of an alibi. It was received very cautiously, but when his father, a merchant of wealth and high character, proposed to become my bondsman, the Justice consented to take bail for my appearance at a higher court which is to sit in ten days' time.

"Burglary and arson!" he repeated, walking up and down the room, his head bent, his hands behind him; and the dreary sarcasm of his tone sent a chill to the listener's heart. "I heard you repeat the charges against me to your father in your wayside talk. A pleasant phrase, is it not? One that tempts the accused to roll it as a sweet morsel under his tongue! You added that neither judge nor jury would be suborned in my behalf. I do not think they can convict me in the face of such positive testimony to my innocence, as the solitary witness for the defence can bring; but the world is full of injustice yet more gross.

"As to the story about the girl," he added, after a moment's hesitation, coloring, and avoiding the other's eye; "it isn't a matter that ought to be talked over with you. Yet I don't see, either, why I should hesitate to speak of my share in it. I had been in my room, maybe twenty minutes, and was reading over the Latin oration I expected to deliver on the morrow, when there came a tap at the door. I said, 'Come in!' without rising from my chair, or looking around, supposing it was one of the students. My study-lamp had a thick shade over it, and the poor thing did not discover her mistake until she aroused me by putting her hand upon my shoulder, and bursting into tears.

"Don't be angry," she said, piteously. "But I heard you were going away to-morrow, and I could not help coming just this once. I was afraid we might never meet

again. And it has been so long since you were at our house !’

“ When I started up and spoke, she nearly fainted with fright at the blunder she had made. I got her a glass of water, and tried to re-assure her, but she was so distracted with terror and shame, she would hardly listen to my promise that no one should hear of her visit, from me. Her only thought, when she came to her senses, was how to get away unseen by anybody else, and as quickly as she could.

“ ‘ But it is not safe for you to be out alone at this hour,’ I said. ‘ Let me see you home. I am engaged to be married to a young girl in my own home, far away. For her sake, believe that I will treat you with all care and respect.’

“ She cried harder than ever at that, but she would not hear of my going with her. She had an ‘ aunt living near the college-buildings, and she would run over there.’ Before I could remonstrate further, she was off ; and just outside the room met the party who were looking for me. I said as little as I could about her in court, and that only to shield her. A touch of pitch more or less could not hurt me. With my professors, and my college-mates—and it seems in what was my home—my reputation for truth and honor is gone forever, or until the real sinner shall confess his guilt. And that will never be on this side of eternity !”

He threw himself into a chair, as if wearied by the recital.

“ You know who he is, then ?” Hadassah took him up quickly.

“ I have not said so. Whatever may be my suspicions, and they are strong and damning to my apprehension, my lips are sealed by more considerations than one.”

“That is an overstrained sense of honor. You should throw your scruples to the wind, and give him up to the punishment he deserves, if he were your own brother.”

Maxwell was silent, leaning forward with his elbows upon his knees, his hands clasped loosely and hanging between them, his hair falling over his forehead. He was beaten down and hopeless, yet Hadassah detected the thrill and shiver that answered her last daring sentence.

“Max,” she said, moving nearer to him, and speaking very low, “you cannot injure Shelby in my esteem by admitting that you doubt him as I do. I have long known that he was envious of your popularity at home and abroad. I know—no one better—what a foul heart lies under his specious exterior. I guessed at your secret and his, when I watched him to-night, as he went over and over his carefully studied tale to your father, and affected to plead with him for you. You roomed together, did you not?”

“No; his dormitory adjoined mine, but there was no fireplace in it, and we made mine our common sitting-room last winter. Lately we have been very little together. I had my pursuits—he, his.”

“So it would seem,” scornfully. “He could have hidden the picture and dice in that drawer without your knowledge, I suppose?”

“I did not know there was a secret drawer in the table. It was a cumbrous affair we picked up at auction a year ago. I don’t believe whoever secreted these articles did so with the deliberate intention of injuring me, but only because it was a snug hiding-place. However that may have been, the effect was the same as if he had sworn away my character. I came home intending to fight for it—but let it go. What difference does it make?”

“What do you mean to do next?” asked Hadassah, after a painful pause.

The gloomy listlessness that had succeeded to his grief at the certainty of his betrothed's distrust of him was so foreign to his temperament and habit, she was puzzled how to deal with it.

“I shall return immediately to—— to meet my trial. My journey has been worse than useless. I have only my word and the second-hand statement of one man's evidence to oppose to the clever representation of my calumniator. I know him and myself too well to risk a personal encounter. He is all subtlety—I am all fire. If I am convicted of the crimes attributed to me—and I do not conceal from you or myself the fact that the circumstantial evidence against me is strong—a term in the State prison will hide me for a while. If I am acquitted of such offences as the written law takes cognizance of, and yet compelled to lie under the stigma cast upon my honor by the discovery of the articles secreted in my table-drawer, I shall enlist the next day. Bullets and grape-shot are making self-destruction an easy matter down in Mexico. And the manifest inexpediency of my living to cumber the earth and blot the family record cannot be concealed, even by you, my sole advocate.”

The bitter smile heightened, not relieved, the settled sadness of his face.

“Live to right yourself,” said the girl, impressively. “To right yourself and to punish the wrong-doer! I *am* your friend, Max, and I never proved it more surely than by telling you now that I am disappointed in you. I had not thought you one to sit down tamely under slander and insult. If the case were mine, I should never have a



moment of peace or rest until I found it—not in the grave—that is the coward's resort; but in restoration to my lawful position in my home; in the downfall of my enemies and the satisfaction of the few, tried and true, whose sympathies had been all mine in the day of my misfortune. Give up! Die without justice and revenge! It is unmanly—pitiful, Max! Unworthy of a Humphreys—especially unworthy of you! You will feel as I do about this to-morrow. Now you are worn out, and need sleep more than advice.”

“I must not be found here in the morning, Hadassah! You cannot understand how I dread the catechising and pity, the thinly veiled doubts of those who must hear my story. I had rather sleep in the woods, a log for my pillow and the sky for a roof, than meet your father and mother, kind as they have always been. And what your mother knows, my father will hear without fail and speedily. You cannot comprehend what this terrible *hunted* feeling is—the consciousness that, if brought to bay, I shall turn and rend somebody!”

“Your nervous system has been cruelly overtaxed. Try and forget everything for a few hours, except that you are sleepy and safe. I will see that you are off early, before any of the family are awake. This is my territory; but to make you doubly secure, I will lock the dining-room door, the only one that communicates with the other part of the house. Here is a shawl, which you must throw over your shoulders when you lie down. Good-night! Sleep without dreaming, and leave everything else to me!”

While she talked, she had beaten up the cushions of the lounge, fastened the outer door, and set the bowl of

flowers in the hall between the parlor and dining-room, lest the fragrance should be unpleasantly powerful. The fearless innocence, yet maidenly modesty, with which she arranged the details for his concealment and comfort, the unspoken fervor of her unselfish devotion to him whom his nearest of kin were condemning as a Pariah, and conspiring to thrust over the edge of the ruin on which he was toppling, impressed Maxwell, dizzied though he was by bodily fatigue and mental torture.

He caught her hand when she would have left him, and bent to kiss it, with his old-time grace, but with a reverence he had never felt before in the presence of anything cast in mortal mould.

"It is the hand of a true woman," he said with earnest emphasis, while his eyes glistened and glowed. "You have been more than a ministering angel to me, Queenie! cousin! sister! When I forget or am ungrateful for your offices to me this night, may *my* right hand forget its cunning!"

He was sleeping soundly when she stole down the stairs, fifteen minutes later, startled by the fancy that she heard steps in the yard, and a door open and shut. "Had he gone, after all?" said her leaping heart, and she knew nothing more until she stood by the lounge on which he lay, saw his quiet face and closed eyelids in a broad ray of moonlight streaming through a loose slat of the shutters. His breathing was full and regular—the deep, long respiration of one overwearied by physical exertion. With a mental ejaculation of thanksgiving, Hadassah crept back to her chamber, and without rekindling her lamp, lest the lighted window should attract the gaze of other waking eyes than her own, wrapped herself in a

shawl, dressed as she was, and resumed her watch at the south-easterly casement into which the moonlight was pouring. The whitest, most solemn radiance she had ever beheld was the illumination in which she held her solitary vigil.

For sleep came not near her eyelids during the few hours that remained of the night. She must be vigilant in behalf of the slumberer below in other ways than by preventing the night-watches, that dawn might not betray him to less kindly observers. Thinking, planning, hoping for him seemed natural to her as if it had always been her duty. She had thrown herself, heart and soul, into his cause, and all the ingenuity, as all the force of a strong mind and will, were engaged in the scheme for his rehabilitation.

Now and then she moved or murmured, in excitement, not weariness.

“The LORD do so to me, and more also, if I swerve by so much as a hairsbreadth from the work!” she said, once, lifting her hand in the energy of her vow.

And, again, “It is my right. He called me ‘*Sister!*’”

Hadassah Todd was so far from perfect, and in after days erred so grievously in judgment and in deed, her passions so often took the lead, for the time, of conscience, that I would fain dwell tenderly and fondly upon the events of this remarkable night; when all that was lovely and true in the womanhood she was sometimes inclined to undervalue, was brought out under the warmth of one overmastering emotion. She did not, to herself, disguise the interest she felt in Maxwell under the specious names of cousinly or sisterly affection. She loved him with

ardor surpassing her attachment for Violet, for her father, mother, sisters, and brothers, combined. Could she, indeed, have taken his place at the bar of justice, sustained in his stead the weight of unmerited obloquy that bowed his haughty spirit, she would have made the exchange without a moment's hesitation. His happiness was worth all she could pay for it. Worth the second crucifixion of her own heart; the overthrow of the perilously sweet and unwarrantable desires, and half-hopes, unfledged and disowned, but fluttering mightily for light and liberty, that had rushed into mutiny against reason, and what she had schooled herself for four years to regard as the right—at what? The touch of bearded lips upon her hand, the glance of dark, earnest eyes, the trembling music of his murmured thanks.

Crucifixion it would be, anguish prolonged and cruel; yet would she not go back from the self-imposed task. He loved Violet, and he should have that for which he longed. Within the past twenty-four hours, Hadassah had seen, as with eyes unsealed from some strange, necromantic anointment, the glaring incongruities of the alliance she, in common with the host of relatives and acquaintances who had watched the inception and unfolding of the alliance, was used to pronounce "altogether suitable." She had battled with the perception as treasonable to her friend; argued angrily within herself that she was growing meanly envious, false to Violet, and to the loyal instincts their friendship should have fostered.

"He would never marry me, if he were heart-free," she had said honestly. "When we were three children together, playing in the garden and orchard, it was into Violet's apron that the prettiest flowers and finest fruit

were dropped. All goodly things drift toward her by a sort of natural and inevitable gravitation. Who am I, that I should hope to gain them, even if she should reject them? If I thought that I could ever be so basely presumptuous as to be jealous of Maxwell's love for her, I would go out and hang myself, like the false disciple I should be."

But for all that, there was something stirring in her breast that made her latest visit to Riverview a continuous conflict. Max's name was upon Violet's tongue every other moment, and the joyful hum of expectancy in the household had, to Hadassah's perception, the same sound for a key-note. "He is coming! he is coming!" was the glad refrain of hearts, whose right to love him and find bliss in his presence was acknowledged, the while there sighed through hers the sad relative minor of the same—"He is coming, but not to me!"

She fought the same fight in the hushed hours betwixt midnight and daybreak. Her heart, deep, strong, and brave, went out to him in his desolation as it had not done when he was the admired Joseph of his father's house—gay, and radiant with health, joy, and hope—the blessed triumvirate that often attend the young, seldom the aged. The spirited, handsome boy had ever been to her the embodiment of her highest ideal of manhood; but he was tenfold her hero now. She would give him back his bride, and his home; help him to stand firm in the consciousness of his integrity, and to cover his foe with shame. Then, no matter what became of her! She would have in her gray, homely life, at least one proud and sacred remembrance of temptation slain, and duty done by the help of a love strong enough to master Self.

Maxwell was still sleeping when she went downstairs in the earliest dawn. The scattered locks were thrown back from his temples and cheeks, making an ebony framework for his pale face, bronzed in the lower part, as were his hands, by exposure to the sun and wind in cricket-matches and boat-races. One arm was flung above his head on the pillow, and the loose sleeve of the dressing-gown had slipped down, exposing a slender wrist with sharply developed muscles, tough as whip-cord, elastic as tempered steel. His features were tranquil; his lips relaxed from the tense misery that had contorted them in the conversation of last night. Despite the thick mustache that shaded the upper lip, he looked so young, so like an innocent boy dreaming of the morrow's sports, that Hadassah's compassion had in it a singular strain of motherliness, tempting her to tuck the covering more snugly about his shoulders, and leave him to his untroubled visions, with a whispered prayer that he might always be as sinless and care-free. She could not, for some moments, prevail upon herself to disturb him. While he lay thus, guarded by her love, he belonged to her more than to those she had resolved should reclaim him before another day had passed. She might never have the right again to call him her own, even in this unsatisfactory sense. To arouse him was to break the spell, to hasten their parting, and meant for him a renewal of trial.

"Who knows but it would be better for him, as for me, if he should never awake?" she mused, with an odd sensation that was not quite horror, yet which thrilled her as with prophetic foreboding. Then she said, half aloud, "God help him!" and stooped to his ear.

"Max!" she whispered, "it is time you were gone!"

Awake! It is I—Hadassah! Don't you know where you are?" for he glared at her, bewildered and incredulous, as the lamp she held shone into his heavy eyes. "You have had a fine nap, and will be a new man when you have washed the sleep out of your wits. Here are water and towels. While you are making your toilet I will put up your dinner."

She vanished into the dining-room, returning presently with a small hand-basket.

"Now you must let me unfold my plan for the day's operations," she chirped cheerfully, unbolting the shutters, extinguishing the lamp, and flitting about him like a bird of good omen, allowing him not one instant for gloomy retrospection. "I am thinking of taking up diplomacy as a profession, I am so pleased with my fancy sketch of the marvels I mean to perform."

Her scheme was condensed into a few words, and these were quickly spoken in her decided, off-hand style, that infused confidence into the least sanguine. Maxwell, instead of trusting to the logic of events to change his father's mind, was "to collar Fate," so she put it merrily, "and teach her to gang his gait." He must write a letter, explaining upon what grounds he had been released, and, furthermore, declaring his innocence of the (to Judge Humphreys' apprehension) graver offences laid to his charge. This letter should bear the date of two days back, and purport to have been penned in the college town from which he had lately come.

"He will be upon the offensively-defensive at once, should he suspect that you are so near home," Hadassah went on, rapidly. "But his wrath will effervesce into comparative good-humor by the time he has finished his

answer, which will be directed to you at college. Father is postmaster; but I make up the mail as often as he does; and you may be sure your envelope will be gotten up artistically, with a blotted postmark, that may mean any place or none, and look well mail-worn before your father sees it. I can intercept his reply with the utmost ease, should he not fall into my plans so far as to make me his mail-carrier. He usually does this when I am coming home from Riverview. They call my work-bag "U. S. M." over there. I count largely upon the effect of your handwriting upon him. I have seen him gloat over the superscription of your envelopes, as he might, thirty years ago, have looked at your mother's miniature. He needed no other cordial than one of these on the day of its arrival. He loves you truly at the bottom of his heart; and this letter is the plummet which is to sound its depths. Write, also, a few lines to Violet, asking her to suspend her opinion until you can talk with her face to face. Here are pen, ink, and paper; and time flies!"

Maxwell listened attentively, with a grave, pertinent word of inquiry or comment here and there, and seating himself with a bow of silent acquiescence in her views, fell to work. His nerves were firmer, his brain clearer, if his hopes were not higher, for the refreshment of rest and food; and he dashed off the notes in the free, bold characters which Hadassah had reminded him were such a goodly sight in his father's eyes.

"I shall deliver these by eleven o'clock to-day," she said, sealing them. "I promised to go over as early as that to help your mother. By night you shall have an answer from Violet, at least; and I am confident I can learn through her, or your mother, what is the purport of



your father's. Should all go as I hope and expect it will, we may attempt a *coup d'état* in the form of your premature arrival. But my mind is not quite clear on that point. Lest the report of your being in the neighborhood should mar all, you had better keep yourself well in ambush until evening. But at nine o'clock—it is hardly dark until then—be in the grape arbor—"the pleached walk"—at the bottom of the garden, and wait until I come, or until you hear from me. Perhaps"—with a weird smile, bright, yet mournful, he did not understand—"I may not come alone. Or, I may send a substitute who I know will be acceptable."

"You make me almost hopeful," said the young man catching the inspiration of her resolute spirit, and reviving under her crisp accents and business-like manner, as he had not after the draught of old wine she had poured out for him over night. "I can but lose all if I risk all. Things cannot be much worse with me than they are now."

"That is true." The remark was encouraging, not desponding. "And I have a presentiment that you will win all—lose nothing. Take this prophecy as the 'joy that cometh in the morning.' Here is your basket, and yonder"—opening the porch door—"is the first glimpse of Aurora's pink fingers. Long, but not over slender they are, for a goddess! Now you are just ten years old; and I, your respected governess, am provisioning you for a day's holiday in the woods. Don't tear your clothes or eat poison berries; and"—still jocularly—"don't stay out too late, or I shall be uneasy. Good-by! Go through the orchard, and you cannot be seen from the servant's quar-

ters, or the store. At nine o'clock—remember! and wait until I come!”

The sweet dewiness of the morning bathed her hot eyes with coolness, while she watched him stride down the garden-walk, vault over the paling at the lower end, and wave his hat to her in the yet gray distance.

“He is only a boy,” she said again to herself, “with a boy’s impulses, and swift transitions from despair to expectation.”

So many, many years younger than herself, who had lived a half century since yesterday morning!

“Prosperity is his birthright,” continued her thoughts. “Am I the poorer for helping him regain it? For setting his face toward the sunshine?”

A sudden breath of wind, like a long human sigh, shook the clematis and honeysuckle above her head, and set the hoary aspen-leaves to quivering. Now that the excitement-of her visitor’s presence was over, her limbs were weak and numb, and she shuddered in the fresh breeze as at the touch of frost.

“I must set all to rights, then force myself to sleep,” she reflected, going into the parlor, close and dismal, after the rosy mist of the rising day, and sickly with the odor of the extinguished lamp.

She believed this was what caused her to grow so deadly faint—this, and the wakeful night she had passed.

“To bed, and to sleep!” she repeated, when she had removed all signs of the recent occupancy of the lower room. “I have much to do—more to suffer before this time to-morrow.”

She did not dream how much.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THRICE-WARNED.

**H**FF—are you?” demanded Mrs. Todd, glancing over the top of her novel, but continuing to nibble at a peppermint “lollypop,” while she answered Hadassah’s query—“Is there anything you would like me to do for you before I go, Mother?”

“No. That is, I do not seek to interfere with your enjoyment. But I shall be glad when all this fuss is over. I have heard of nothing else for a month, and you have been absolutely valueless to me since it was first spoken of. Not that you ever trouble me with your confidences. In *my* day, it was considered that a mother had a right to a knowledge of her daughter’s concerns. It is no secret to you, I presume, this that Elena has just been telling about Maxwell Humphreys’ escapade. She only heard a rumor of it from the Kemps, but she came directly to me with it, dear child! I do not aspire to the dignity of being your counsellor, Hadassah, but let me remind you that it is well to cast the beam out of your own eye before picking at the mote in your sister’s. In view of your intimacy with one very disreputable college student, who, from

all I can gather, is rake, incendiary, and gambler, an anomalous blot upon the escutcheon of a noble house, it hardly becomes you to criticise your sister because she is civil to Junius Kemp, her friend's brother. I do trust you will be warned by this experience to be more sparing of your denunciations of her conduct in future, as well as of your strictures upon other people and subjects I could mention."

Up went the book at a readable angle, and down plunged the right hand into her pocket for another lollypop. Master Baby, sitting on the floor at her feet, was pulling away at a third, with his well-trained powers of suction, a ruddy rill of stickiness trickling down each side of his cherubic chin into his bosom. The name of this interesting infant was Edward Dunallan. He was thin and sallow, and afflicted with chronic teething. "Nothing keeps him quiet and out of mischief like candy," his mother would say, when his much-tried eldest sister suggested the association of this diet with his nocturnal colic and the steady depletion of the bottle of fennel brandy, which was Mrs. Todd's panacea for all infantile ills.

"I have had eight children, and you have had none!" was the incontrovertible rejoinder to these impertinent dissuasives.

Hadassah turned from the door she had reached by the time her mother had delivered the opening clause of her lecture. She looked unfeignedly amazed and deeply annoyed.

"I do not in the least understand what you are driving at, Mother," she said, in her most incisive accents. "I can see no analogy between my friendship for Maxwell,

who is my cousin, and Elena's encouragement of Junius Kemp's officious gallantries. The one is a gentleman born and bred; the other a presumptuous upstart, whom all the colleges in the land cannot refine. I don't know what tale the Kemps have told Elena, and do not care to hear it. But this I do say, it is not fair to accuse, upon hearsay, any one until he has had a chance of self-defence. Much less is it kind or sensible to condemn, upon the authority of a flying rumor, one whom we have long known and trusted. Until this affair is thoroughly sifted, I decline to discuss Maxwell's conduct with you or any one else."

The soiled covers of the pamphlet fluttered and rustled in Mrs. Todd's hand, and her voice was broken and husky with displeasure or peppermint, but she maintained her lofty moral stand.

"I have already distinctly stated, Hadassah, that I have said all I meant to upon this excessively disagreeable subject. I am fully aware that I am regarded, by your father and yourself, in the light of a semi-imbecile, but I am neither so purblind nor so demented as you suppose me to be. I deemed it my duty, as a parent, to drop a warning word, but without the remotest hope that it would turn you aside in your imprudent career. Your headstrong conceit of your superior wisdom, your wilfulness, and your overbearing temper have been the bane of my life. It will be well for you, if, having broken your mother's heart, these do not blast your own reputation—seal your final misery."

"In the name of common sense," cried the poor girl, pricked almost to madness by the unprovoked hail of spiteful arrows, "what have I been doing now? If you

disapproved of my attending Violet Hayne's party, or visiting her so often, why did you not speak of it before? I do not mean to be disrespectful, Mother, but your reproofs are so many riddles to me."

"I leave it to your conscience to solve them," said the lady, majestically. "As to my objecting to your pleasures—seeking to mar your happiness in any manner or shape, whatsoever, I repel the insinuation. Regard for my children's welfare has ever been the ruling principle of my conduct. The day may come when you will wish you had consulted and obeyed a parent who has borne and sacrificed so much for you. Not"—with a tremendous lunge upon the hydraulic lever, answered by an obedient spurt from either eye—"that I ever expect to behold that hour, myself; I shall undoubtedly be dead and buried before it arrives. But you will remember my admonition with tears of vain repentance when it is too late."

Mr. Todd, entering to bid his spouse "good-day"—being bound upon another collecting expedition—was judiciously blind to the salt water on her face, ignoring it the more easily since his kiss was imprinted upon her forehead, in preference to the syrupy lips. Deaf he was, likewise, to the gulping sob that followed him to the door. Without speaking, he put Hadassah into the buggy, at the back of which the small trunk, containing her party-dress, was strapped, and drove away. But at the bend of the road that hid him from his wife's window, he looked kindly into the darkly troubled visage beside him.

"Anything new, dear?"

"With Mother, do you mean, sir? Nothing more than usual, I believe. I never please her. But I don't mean

to be disagreeably dictatorial, Father, however unfortunate my manner may be. Only things do go so at odds and ends at our house—and all over the world, for that matter!”

“Then we are no worse off than other people,” said her father, pleasantly, although his sigh answered hers. “I wish matters were different in some respects with us—more for your sake than mine. A man gets used to what he has borne for twenty years. Not”—correcting himself with the chivalric forbearance he ever displayed toward his weak and querulous wife—“not that your mother does not do all that a woman, reared as she was, could in her circumstances. She married me against the wishes of her friends. That is a bitter drop that often enlarges itself until it fills the cup of domestic life. Then, again, she had to work hard in former days, and the toil was of the kind she had been taught to consider degrading. This preyed upon her spirits more than you can imagine. Her health is far from firm, and often when she seems peevish she is suffering.”

“She would suffer less if she ate less rubbish and went to bed in good season, instead of sitting up reading until after midnight!” said Hadassah ungraciously, her own trial of temper still fresh upon her. “Her spirits, too, would be more even, her tone of thought less morbid, if she did not devour such heaps of indifferent novels. Elena brought home twelve or fourteen with her to-day from the Kemps. That is one reason Mother sanctions her intimacy with them. They buy many trashy books, and take several sensational periodicals, which they lend freely. Constant study of such must produce mental dyspepsia,

and by overheating the imagination render everyday life stale and distasteful.”

Mr. Todd did not speak again directly. There were sorrowful depths in his honest gray eyes, and for an instant stern lines about his chin. But not even this well-beloved child had ever heard him censure the woman he had married, manifold as were her failings.

“I have tried to reason her out of the habits you speak of, my child, because I feared they injured her health. But she says, and truly, that she has little recreation and scarcely any congenial society, and that so long as she can forget trouble and privation in her books, it would be selfishly unkind in me to deny her the solace. She was told before she married me that Northern men made hard, exacting husbands, who overloaded their wives with servile labor, but she would not give me up. It has been my daily, hourly effort, to atone to her for whatever injury her marriage may have caused her, to make her happy and contented with her lowly lot. I wish I had succeeded better. It is not her fault that I have not.”

“Father,” exclaimed the impetuous girl, “you shame me and my wicked, hasty temper! You are the best, noblest man in creation! I will try to be more patient, more amiable. I am sorry I was cross to Mother, but I am all out of tune to-day, somehow. I will ask her pardon when I go home to-morrow.”

“There is no need of that. ‘Let sleeping dogs lie,’ is a wise saying. I know it is not pleasant for young people to walk with gravel-stones in their shoes, but there is no shoe that does not pinch the wearer somewhere. There may be, there *are* uglier skeletons, and harder to hide, in other and grander houses than ours.”



How often in the days and years that followed did Haddassah recall that saying! Always with the memory of the clear, warm June noon strong upon her, the shady road along which they drove slowly, the smell of wild thyme and brook-mint, and other fragrant grasses, as the wheels crushed the wayside herbage, even the bebies of yellow butterflies that whirled up like animated buttercups from the damp spots in the highway, to settle down upon like inviting patches a little way ahead. Always, too, with a return of the choking heartache that came with the longing to confide to this true, safe counsellor, all that had passed during the hours when he believed her to be sleeping in quiet security. Sometimes with wild, unavailing weeping—"If I had spoken then? But now—"

For she put by the impulse. The secret was Maxwell's, not hers; and he would brook guidance from no one else—had peremptorily refused to see or communicate with Mr. Todd. Furthermore, she could not deny herself the best boon Fate held out to her—the consciousness that he owed all of earthly welfare and blessing to her, and was grateful for the gift. Her scheme had been thoughtfully matured, and with natural partiality for her offspring, she foresaw nothing but success.

"The Judge has slept off some of his passion, I hope," she said, composedly, as they neared the gate of River-view, "and Mrs. Humphreys cried her eyes dry."

Her father smiled rather uneasily.

"I trust so, indeed! But Judge Humphreys is very stubborn, an uncomfortable man to deal with when his quills are erect. There have been feuds in the family which have outlasted the lives of those with whom they originated; and unless I am mistaken in Shelby's dis-

position, he will not be loath to keep this one alive. It is my belief that he has long been jealous of his younger brother, although he tried to hide the feeling. Mrs. Humphreys is an amiable woman and an affectionate mother, but she has no independence of character or moral courage. She will take her cue from husband and son. And your friend Violet is too gentle and timid to oppose them single-handed. I am most sorry for her—next to poor Maxwell, who is reaping the bitter harvest of youthful folly.”

“Father!” Hadassah turned herself partly around to face him. “A woman who dare not stand up by and for him she loves, against father, mother, kindred, the universe, is not worthy to become a true man’s wife! If Violet should let Max go at this juncture, she deserves to lose him forever.”

“She is very tender-hearted and very tractable to her guardian,” responded Mr. Todd, leniently. “No doubt she relies implicitly upon his representations, is guided solely by him in this as in other matters. For her sake I hope matters will not go hard with the boy. The mind recoils at the thought of sorrow falling upon one so young and lovely.”

For the first time in her life, Hadassah was intolerant of—felt aggrieved by the tenderness her elderly, sensible father, like all other men in the community, felt and expressed for the gazelle-eyed blonde.

“He ought to be superior to the fascinations of mere external beauty,” she said, inly and irate, forgetting that she would have applauded the softness as natural and beautiful a week ago.

“Are you going in?” she asked, when they stopped at the porch steps.

“Not to-day, I think. The family are busy, and otherwise indisposed to see company.”

He said it in an undertone, and Hadassah saw that he did not regret the expediency of declining to enter the ancient halls. He liked to be invited with his wife—the Judge’s cousin, who wore her best silk and most languid manner on such occasions—to state dining days and family festivals at the homestead, albeit they were a species of splendid torture. He was exultant in his daughter’s position as friend of the house, but it was an ordeal to make a voluntary call upon the great people. They patronized him, and conscious as he was that he was not, like them, to the manor born, the Connecticut sturdiness did not take kindly to patronage, even from patrician relatives. He could not say farewell to Hadassah quite naturally in the shadow of the august portico.

“I shall send or come for you to-morrow,” he said with the constrained smile it hurt her pride in him to see, because she divined its cause. “I hope you will have a pleasant party. Present my regards to the Judge and Mrs. Humphreys—also to Miss Violet, and make my apologies for not calling just now. Take care of yourself, my child, and”—sinking his voice cautiously—“do not let your affectionate heart betray you into over-zealous partisanship.”

She put her arms around his neck, and laid her cheek to his, in the broad light of day, and on the aristocratic doorstep.

“Dear Father, I had rather go back and stay with you forever!” she cried, in a gush of unaccountable fond-

ness and yearning. "I am never safe or happy away from you."

The homely dwelling that owned him as master seemed such a secure and peaceful shelter as she stood there, with Maxwell's letters to his father and his betrothed rustling in her bosom against the honorable breast that had been her resting-place and shield from her babyhood. Was the straight, open path the only right one? Was she doing evil that good might come? Sowing deceit in the hope that righteousness would spring up?

Her father undid her embrace with some trepidation, while he was pleased and moved by her ardor of affection.

"That would never do. It is my wish that you should mingle with your young friends and be happy."

He kissed her fondly, and glancing back from the gate, waved a second adieu to the figure standing alone upon the porch, gazing after him. As she answered the salute, a large dog, part mastiff, part bloodhound, stalked out to her from the rear piazza, through the hall. He was a ferocious-looking creature, with a dark-grayish body, tawny breast, and black, murderous head, but Hadassah stooped to pat Maxwell's favorite with a murmur of endearment.

"Poor Leo! good Leo!" and with a childish fancy, she whispered in his ear—"Your master is coming, old fellow! Are you not glad?"

Leo rolled up his eyes, slavered and whined, and vouchsafed further manifestations of attachment by rubbing his big head against her clean lawn dress, and offering his dusty paw. She was still caressing him when a lazy step echoed upon the oaken floor within, and the friends—dumb and human—stood on the defensive. With her

fingers linked in Leo's collar, Hadassah bowed coldly to Shelby Humphreys' debonair greeting.

"Good-morning, my fair cousin! Why are you standing out here, with your trunk at your feet, like a wayfarer and a stranger? How did you get up the avenue without being signalled by the Eboe sentinels?"

He rang the door bell as he spoke, and on the instant appearance of a spry negro footman, pointed to Hadassah's trunk with the imperious air that ever contrasted unfavorably with Maxwell's good-humored grace to his inferiors.

"Here! you, sir! take that upstairs, and ask your mistress if Miss Hadassah may come straight to her room? My mother is far from well," he continued, returning to the smooth suavity Hadassah held in supreme disgust. "I look to you to comfort her under the sorrow that is breaking her loving heart. She was very fond of poor Max. I never dreaded anything else as I did bringing the sad news home."

"Why did you bring it, then?" interrogated Hadassah, brusquely, fixing her disdainful eyes on his—dull as lead, yet crafty in their very lack of expression. "Had the case been reversed, he would have stayed by you, not retreated ignominiously, without striking a blow in your defence."

At the height of his astonishment at the audacious attack, the elder brother did not change countenance. Sleek and complacent, he replied, as if her stinging words were so many rose-leaves.

"There was no one convenient for me to 'strike!'" smiling indulgence of her heat. "And had there been, I should still have sought to do the boy the truer service of

hastening home to seek my father's help and advice. That I have been disappointed in my expectation that he would interpose in Max's behalf, may prove my judgment to have been in error, but my motive was pure all the same."

"Pure malignity!" thought Hadassah, and her contemptuous half-smile said as much to the looker-on.

"Will you never have faith in me again, Hadassah?" He advanced a step, and spoke more softly. "Can it be that the mad passion of a boy, awkwardly expressed, is never to be forgotten or forgiven? Does an offence three years old still separate us by a wall of ice? If I could but induce you to listen to my apology—"

"Don't touch me! Stand back!" she said in a fierce whisper, every feature instinct with anger and abhorrence. "Forgiven! not if a thousand years had passed since you outraged the laws of hospitality and decency, by addressing words to me you would not have dared use to a girl whom you regarded as your equal in rank. I have never looked at or spoken to you since, when I could avoid it without exciting remark on the part of those who would not see me insulted. If you ever allude to the subject again, I will tell your father everything. He is a gentleman in truth as in name, and will protect a woman in whose veins runs the same blood as in his—a guest under his roof."

"He would doubtless credit your statement when opposed by my solemn denial that I had ever given you cause of offence in word or deed—my assertion that the whole story was a trick of a morbid fancy," sneered Shelby. "Yes! she will be up in a moment! Go!" he said to the servant who brought a message that "Miss Hadassah

sah was to come right to Mistis' chamber." "This is sheer folly, Hadassah! useless and ill-timed enmity! You have penetration enough to see in what quarter the winds sets for me here. It suits you to have the footing of a near relative in this house, because by this means you gain admittance to the society you are formed to adorn. It pleases me to see you here. My bonnie Violet is gracious and pliable—barley-sugar is not sweeter, nor honey; but I am epicurean enough to like a dash of more piquant sauce than she can supply. I admire your talents, honor your dauntless spirit, appreciate your original sayings—the very peculiarities of manner and disposition that pretty Viola laments over as 'eccentric.' It is to gratify myself as well as to serve you that I propose this amnesty. Let bygones be bygones. Won't you shake hands?"

In her passion she struck down the short, thick fingers he extended, with a smile he meant should be winning, but which was to her a hateful leer—dealt them a smart ringing blow that must have tingled to the bone for many minutes afterward. He received it without a token of pain or chagrin—kept his stand in the doorway, through which she sought to pass.

Diversion of the subject came from an unexpected quarter. Leo, whose reddening eyes had passed sagaciously from one to the other during this little scene, growled threateningly—the deep, low thunder peculiar to his breed, and showed all his fangs in a portentous grimace at him whom he adjudged to be the offender in the quarrel going on over him. With a muttered oath Shelby lifted his heel. But Hadassah interposed her own form between him and the dog she yet held by the collar.

"It would be safer to kick me," she said, tauntingly. "He likes you as little as I do, and you may remember that I have some influence over him. Were I to speak one word, he would spring at your throat and you would reap small profit from your threefold treason—to your pretty sewing-girl, your brother, and your overtrusting father. You had better step back into the house, and let me pass, for I cannot stand here holding my sanguinary friend much longer, and I will not be responsible for his behavior when I let him go."

Shelby walked to the other end of the piazza, and shouted to two colored men at work in the garden.

"See that this pestilent brute is chained up, and not untied until I give the order," he said, when they came up to him. "If I find him roaming about the house or grounds again I shall shoot him."

"He's mighty peaceable, Mars' Shelby, 'thout his interfered with," expostulated the gray-haired gardener. "He can't b'ar the sight of a low-lived pusson, and keeps the likes off the plantation, but I'se nebber knowed him to say a word agin' a raal gentleman or lady. And Marster sets heaps o' store by Leo, he does—"

"Another word, and I will knock you down!" interrupted the lordly youth. "Do as I tell you!"

Her heart was swelling with wrath and pity, but Hadassah smiled significantly at the telling random speech of the servant, as she patted the huge head and released her grasp of the collar. Leo was led away between the negroes, his great red tongue lolling in sulky indifference over his pendulous underlip, and his hoarse pant sounding like defiance of his tyrant.

"It is to be war between us, then?" Shelby threw



his arm across the door, when Hadassah would have escaped.

There was a cold glitter in his eye, menace in his tone, but the insulted girl was too angry to think of prudence.

"While we both live," she said, looking steadfastly in his face.

He laughed. "You will be the first to sue for peace. This is not a threat, but prophecy."

He dropped his arm, and began to pace the porch, whistling softly, as Hadassah went up the broad staircase.





## CHAPTER VII.

“IT IS A WICKED WORLD.”

**V**IOLET was just coming out of her own room, when Hadassah entered it. She wore a white muslin dress, with a lilac sash and neck-tie; her curls were banded away from her temples with ribbon of the same tint. Her eyes were soft and bright, her complexion fresh, and there was a look of dewy purity about her whole face that reminded one of her name-flower. She threw her arms around her confidante's neck, and kissed her warmly.

“You darling! I have been dying for you! But Auntie is in an awful hurry to see you, and I must wait my turn. Just lay off your things and run away to her—there's a dear!”

She floated along the hall and down the stairs, and Hadassah sought Mrs. Humphreys' chamber.

The hostess' was a grievous face, as in custom and feeling bound. But she made no secret of her devout gratitude that the one in disgrace was not her Shelby.

“If poor Maxwell were more like his brother, if he had taken him for a model, he would never have gone so far

astray," she said to her young friend, after going over the leading points of the story in a maundering fashion, that irritated the auditor almost beyond endurance. "I used to tell him so when they were boys together. Shelby never failed to wipe his shoes on the mat when he came in, and brush his hair before meals, and his clothes kept clean twice as long as his brother's did, and he never tore them. Maxwell would ruin a suit in one afternoon's hunt. But Shelby is rightly named. He takes after my family. The Shelbys were always very particular in conduct as about their appearance. Nothing could have been more disagreeable than this affair, happening, as it does, on the eve of poor, dear Violet's party. But, as she says, Maxwell never had the least idea of expediency. Mr. Humphreys will not hear of putting off our company. He says the sooner everybody hears what has happened the better—that he is glad of the opportunity to make public the alteration in our family arrangements. But, dear me! I can't help feeling that it is like asking people to a funeral, for he vows Maxwell shall never enter the house again; has forbidden everybody, white or black, to mention his name. It is a great misfortune to have such a temper, although, of course, he is one of the best of men. Morris and Maxwell take after him in disposition. Shelby, now, is like my branch of the house. It is beautiful to see how he bears with his father's moods, at this time, so patiently and sweetly! and saying nothing that is not designed to soften his resolution to disown Maxwell. For the poor, dear, unhappy boy *was* very sharp upon Shelby at times. His forbearance and generosity are lessons any Christian might copy, although the dear fellow makes no profession of piety. I was telling Violet

to-day that we ought to esteem it a privilege to be in the same house with one who rules his own spirit so nobly."

"What can I do to help you?" interrupted Hadassah, unable to listen longer. "Violet said you wanted me."

"True, child!" resignedly. "And as dear Shelby tells me, active occupation is the best thing for me. Mahala sent up a while ago, to say that she wanted us both in the store-room the minute you came. Morris' family and my brother Nat's young people, and three or four others from a distance, will be here to dinner. And to think that this time yesterday, I was pleasing myself with the idea of how my three boys would sit down together at the table!" wiping her eyes anew, as they obeyed the house-keeper's requisition. "But, since it is the will of Providence, we must submit."

Hadassah made a stand at the store-room door.

"Where is Judge Humphreys?" she asked, feigning sudden recollection of unperformed duty.

"In the office, I believe. Why?"

"I have a letter for him, which I ought to deliver. No! I will give it to him myself,"—checking the mistress' order to a servant, and, determined not to be balked, she hurried off.

"The office" was a small brick building in the yard, where the Judge used to receive clients when he was in practice as a popular lawyer, and where he still kept his law-library, and transacted such professional business as could be attended to at home. Hadassah had a glimpse of him in passing the window, and the sight of the bowed white head, as he sat idle and dejected in his arm-chair, lifted her sinking hopes.

"Come in!" he replied gruffly to her knock, and by

the time she entered he had caught up a newspaper, and affected to be absorbed by its contents. "Ah, Hadassah! Good-morning!" without rising, and keeping his finger upon the line he had pretended to read. "Did you want to speak to me?"

"Only to bring you this letter, sir."

She put it into his hand with the superscription uppermost; saw the swift purple surge up to his silvery hair, and was withdrawing with speed, when he called to her.

"Wait! I have something to say to you!"

It seemed to Hadassah that the firm plank on which she stood bent under her weight, and the long lines of book-shelves leaned over toward her devoted head, while the throbbing in her throat sounded louder than the ticking of the clock in the corner, as the father tore open the envelope and read Maxwell's request that he should be allowed the criminal's right—a candid hearing.

"When did this come?" he inquired, when he finished.

His eye was not wrathful, or the listener's courage would not have failed so fast. But it was cold and bright as steel. His son had spoken of "simple justice"—asked nothing of his mercy or affection, and he would mete out to him such measure as he craved.

"Last night, sir."

She did not use sophistical arguments to excuse untruthfulness. If a lie, if perjury, could serve Max better than the truth would, she would lay hold of both without stay or scruple. What mattered evil-doing or evil-coming to her, so long as good was to be gained for him? She said it calmly, the beating in her ears, and the whirling before her sight subsiding at once into stillness that might be felt.

"Have you one from the same source for Mrs. Humphreys or Miss Hayne?"

"There is one for Violet."

"Have you delivered it?"

"No, sir."

The reply was prompt, but she ran over in her mind the pros and cons of falsehood and truth before it was uttered.

"Give it to me!"

"SIR!"

"I have a right to forbid my ward—a minor and a member of my family—from keeping up an improper correspondence," he deigned to explain.

Hadassah stepped back.

"Excuse me, Judge Humphreys! I cannot act so dishonorably to my friend, even at your request. I shall give the letter into Violet's hands, and hers only!"

"Be it so!" with no added shade of displeasure. He called a passing servant from the window. "Here! Tiberius! Where is Miss Violet?"

"In de liberrery wid Mars' Shelby, sur," drawled the lad.

Hadassah never could decide whether he was more knave or fool, but she fancied his grin was impish, as he described the situation of the interior.

"Tell her, with my compliments, that I would like to speak with her."

In less than three minutes the silent couple saw her tripping across the turf by the shortest route from the library. She nodded smilingly, but widened her eyes wonderingly at Hadassah, and presented herself before her guardian with the innocent bewilderment of a fleecy cōs-

set whose nibbling at the spring turf is unceremoniously interrupted.

"Why, Haddie!" she said. "You here!" Then, leaning on the Judge's shoulder, she slipped her hand into his. "What is it, Uncle, dear? What can I do for you?"

But the tender eyes stole a glance at the open letter on his knee before settling on his face.

"Hadassah has a letter for you from—a person I need not name. As your guardian I requested her to surrender it to me. She insists that she has no warrant to do this—that you, and no one else, have the right to break the seal and read it. What is your decision?"

"Why, Haddie!"

The dewdrops of wounded affection suffused the matchless eyes and emphasized the loving reproach. Her head sank upon the Judge's neck. One white arm lay over his chest, and her voluminous draperies swept the floor.

"If you prefer to have it; if you have any lingering doubts as to the justice of my decree of non-intercourse with the author of the letter, any desire to hear him in his own defence, it shall be as you wish," continued the guardian, without offering to return her caresses. "I withdraw my interdict, and shall never blame you for daring to have a will of your own."

"But I *haven't*, you know!" Violet raised her face, streaming with the sorrowful lymph expressed by the antelope eyes, yet lit by an angelic smile. "I am *perfectly* willing to be guided by you in this matter and in everything else. You are so much wiser than I am—know so much better what is good for me!"

"Are you convinced?" inquired the Judge of Hadassah in his hardest tone, and frowning heavily.

"When she asks for the letter she shall have it," returned the incorrigible rebel.

Without a word, but with volumes of rebuke, virtuous as gentle, in gesture and countenance, Violet held out her hand for the epistle. It was given as mutely, and the whilome betrothed proved herself to be worthy of canonization as an exemplar of filial obedience by tearing it, sealed and unread, into four pieces. These she dropped from her pink fingers in fine disdain, and set her dainty toe upon the pile of fragments. The color passed slowly from the father's face, but the frown still bent his brows, and his lips hardly opened for the next question.

"What have you to say, now?" to Hadassah.

"Nothing!"

With that she turned on her heel and left the duteous dove to receive the reward of her pious self-denial. Left them with the full determination to walk back to the Cross Roads and never enter Riverview again; to shake the dust from her feet upon those whose monstrous and unnatural abnegation of offspring and betrothed bridegroom scandalized as much as it enraged her. But in the shade of the giant elm at the side of the mansion, she stopped to take counsel—not with prudence, she was too hot for that, but with love for the homeless fugitive hiding in the woods, and longing for night and the knowledge of his fate. A brief struggle ended in her return to the store-room, and Miss Mahala's jurisdiction, where she beat eggs and churned syllabubs, and garnished dishes with cut paper, and flowers carved out of beets and radishes, working so diligently and saying so little, that her companions voted her a treasure in the hour of need.

"I shall depend upon you a great deal to-night, too,



Haddie!" said Mrs. Humphreys, sighingly. "Poor Violet will naturally not feel in spirits for gay company. She is *so* sensitive, the dear child! and people will be whispering about and staring at her, if she puts herself forward too much. We must do all we can to spare her feelings—poor thing! I can see that her heart is bleeding, although she does conduct herself with such sweet propriety. She was so much attached to Maxwell! And how, having known and been beloved by such a superior girl as she is, he could demean himself to take notice of that low creature of a milliner, passes my comprehension."

"He did no such thing, Mrs. Humphreys," replied Hadassah, in a low, firm voice. "We shall all learn, in time, that he has been foully misrepresented—his deeds, motives, everything! People do not change their whole natures so suddenly."

"I wish I had your faith in him, child; but Shelby is very exact in his statements, and he acknowledged, when pressed by his father, that he had other proofs of his poor brother's misconduct than those that were made public. I could see that he hated to make the admission. He is sadly depressed by this miserable affair."

The library was in a wing of the building. The rear extension, of which the store-room formed a part, jutted from the rear at right angles with this. The windows were all raised in this warm weather, and through the Venetian shutters of the apartment, formerly devoted to Violet's conferences with her *fiancé*, there issued now a peal of musical laughter, blent with the unpleasant chuckle which was Shelby's noisiest demonstration of mirth.

A bitter smile wrung Hadassah's lips. A sour one passed over Miss Mahala's saturnine visage. The eyes of the two met over the cake they were decorating, and with a feeble glow of comfort Maxwell's champion saw that he had one friend besides herself in the camp she had believed was altogether sold to the enemy.

"It is very good in dear Shelby," clucked the mother hen, "to devote himself as he does to the poor, distressed little thing. The comfort I have in him goes far toward consoling me for his brother's misconduct. He is a genuine Shelby!"

"Morris' family and my brother Nat's young people," and the three or four expected dinner-guests, arrived in due season, and the awkward task of acquainting them with the cause of Maxwell's non-arrival being entrusted to the incomparable Shelby, "the thing," as his mother expressed it, "was gotten over much better than could have been expected." True, Morris was very grave and abstracted at the social board, and brought from the subsequent interview with his father a face that augured ill for Mrs. Humphreys' hospitable scheme of "trying to forget all disagreeable matters until the party was over and done with." But Shelby's tact covered his brother's shortcomings in a wonderful degree, as even Hadassah had to own. Indeed, the second son acquitted himself gallantly in all departments of his difficult and delicate business. The sharpest scrutiny could discern no evidence of ungenerous exultation in Maxwell's downfall, but he bore himself like one who was in no wise degraded by the family misfortune.

"Max and I have sailed in different boats ever since I can remember," he said, in a confidential and post-pran-

dial smoke with Morris under the elm which shaded the store-room windows and half a dozen others. "He has been living pretty fast ever since he entered college—faster than ever, in his senior year; but I never dreamed it would come to this. I am more troubled than I dare show, while father is so severe upon him. It isn't the decent thing for us not to try and pull him through this scrape. It will be a disgrace to the family if he is left to take his chance, and if somebody doesn't interfere, it will go hard with him. I haven't a dollar of my own in the world, or I would pay counsel's fees."

"I could attend to that, if necessary," said Morris, very soberly.

His own expenses were heavy, and he was more fond of money than the Humphreys clan generally were, as Shelby knew perfectly well, and the offer was not very cordial.

"You are very good—generous beyond what could possibly be expected of you. It is a deuced shame, though, that there should be such a haul upon your resources. Heaven only can tell what the dirty affair will cost before it is settled. You see this is a serious offence against law, as well as order—not an ordinary college frolic."

"More shame to him if he is really guilty," growled Morris. "I would not have thought it of Max. He used to be one of the best-hearted fellows in the world, and honorable to a fault. His engagement to Violet should have kept him straight. I am surprised at her cheerfulness. I had not given her credit for so much self-control."

“Oh! as to that, she was pretty tired of the silken bands before this *esclandre*.” Shelby blew one curl of smoke through another, and watched them catch and break on a hanging bough. “It was a girl and boy affair, that would have died a natural death long ago, but for father’s extreme desire that the marriage should take place. I may as well be candid with you, Morris. If Violet had been left to follow the dictates of her own heart, her choice would never have fallen where the world believes it did. Honor has sealed my lips until now, as it has kept her faithful to the letter of her engagement. My father’s unreasoning partiality for Maxwell came near making a wreck of more hearts than one. This is, for the present, strictly *entre nous*. The old gentleman’s weakness for the youngest boy is not surprising.”

Perhaps not, but Morris, as the eldest, did not like to be reminded of the chances against his inheritance of the homestead and the largest slice of the estate.

“Another instance of the deleterious effects of over-indulgence,” he said, oracularly; and the pair sauntered out of hearing of the eavesdropper behind the screen of Virginia creeper that grew over the store-room window.

All were against her hero, then, save herself and the housekeeper, who was powerless to divert the tide of censure.

“It is a wicked world!” said the girl, two great, hot beads falling and breaking upon her hands, while she went on mechanically with her task of binding bouquets. “A fickle, false, cruel world! A week—three days ago, all delighted to do him honor. Now, they vie with one

another in trampling him in the mire! And this is the news I am to take him to-night after his long hours of hopeful waiting! It is a wicked, hateful world! I wish I were out of it, since I can do him no good by living."





## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE LAST CARD.

**H**ADASSAH made one more effort, and a strenuous one, to win Violet back to her allegiance. The beauty had been shy of her since the scene in the "office." Notwithstanding her expressed dislike of lovely dalliance in warm weather, she had been closeted with Shelby, the comforter, until dinner-time, and clung close to Morris' wife and two young lady cousins all the afternoon. But she could not dispense with Hadassah's services as the time for dressing approached. Shelby's choicest wiles could not detain her when her conscience said the solemn duties of the toilette should be in progress. She summoned her confidante, therefore, as usual, to assist in mysteries more august than the Eleusinian, and kept her maid, Myra, in the room as a protection against inconvenient talk. Hadassah braided and banded the soft, brown tresses Maxwell used to say reminded him of the "hair, lustrous and smiling" of quaint old Burton, laced up the white silk boddice, arranged within the square corsage the tulle puffs, which Shelby dared to whisper, when he met her, were like heaving foam upon

a snowy beach; in fine, decked the idol from head to foot in her bravest vestments, before she herself exchanged her dressing-wrapper for the simple white organdie she had fashioned with her own hands.

"There, you are ready, all but the flowers, which I shall not add until just before the company assembles, that they may be fresh the longer," said Hadassah, drawing off to admire her handiwork. "Now, *ma belle*, I will seat you in such a position as shall not damage your flounces or head-gear, but comfortably, nevertheless, with your tired little feet upon this stool, and you shall have a good half-hour's rest that will make color and eyes bright by the time you are needed below. You look like a queen upon her throne. Don't stir at the risk of damage to dress and coiffure. Even queens are slaves to etiquette and fashion. I want you to appear in the crisp splendor of smooth drapery and irreproachable bandeaux."

Violet was well pleased with her enthronement, and the fine-sounding phrases of the clever parasite. She was just opposite the long mirror, too, and felt within her satisfied soul that the half-hour could be spent agreeably and profitably. She was "so relieved, moreover, to find that Haddie wasn't going to be uncomfortable after all."

"Myra," continued Miss Todd, wheeling upon the mulatto girl so abruptly that her mistress could not interfere; "you must go down to Miss Mahala. Tell her I couldn't spare you until this moment. Run along!"

Nothing loath to get a peep at what was going on in the lower apartments, the maid disappeared with amazing celerity, and Hadassah, forced to trust to the housekeeper's mother-wit to interpret the meaning of the message, knew that she could not count upon more than a few minutes'

freedom from interruption. She also understood Violet well enough to feel certain that the surest way to make her listen to reason was to carry it with a high hand—to coerce, rather than entreat her. The beauty was easily frightened, and the *intrigante* fired off a blank cartridge by the time Myra's skirt vanished at the door.

“Violet! do you really mean that these people—the Humphreys—parents and son—shall force you to give up Max now and forever? I could not believe that I heard aright when Judge Humphreys told me as much this morning. It will make your name a by-word and a hissing in the county. There isn't a man who won't be afraid to put his happiness in your keeping, when he hears how cowardly and fickle you have been to the one you pretended to love with your whole heart. And the girls will tease you to death—ridicule you to your face and everywhere, until you cannot hold up your head. I never heard of anything so preposterous, so absurd, and so contemptible. You are throwing away a splendid chance of becoming a heroine. You will be toasted everywhere, worshipped more madly than ever, if you will make a decided stand for love's sake; declare your determination to believe in and uphold your lover until he is proved to be guilty. I tell you there will be a reaction of public feeling before long. Max is sure to be acquitted when his trial comes on. I know what I am saying, for I have other sources of information than Shelby's one-sided statement. Maxwell has powerful friends at the North, who will prove his innocence triumphantly. He will come home with flying colors—put his accusers there and here to the blush. His brother will be confounded, his father prouder of him



than ever; the whole neighborhood will crowd about him; the women will rave over his interesting martyrdom; pity and adore him as one escaped from persecution. And you—what figure will you make among them? how face the contempt and evil-speaking of those who, you say, now envy and hate you? I wouldn't put such a weapon into Josie Galt's hands as you are furnishing her with, for all the money in the land. And you may be sure she will use it without mercy. If I speak harshly, it is because I am a real friend, not a flatterer. It provokes me to see what a tool you are in Shelby's hands, and how everybody else is keeping you in the dark, treating you like a baby, or a mindless doll! Assert your womanhood, your independence, for once, and you will bless me some day for giving you sound advice."

Violet, paralyzed and awe-stricken by the rushing torrent of words hurled upon her like a tremendous shower-bath, longing to run away from her terrific counsellor, yet ludicrously conscious, all the while, of the necessity of sitting still, lest her flounces and bandeaux should come to grief, was a pitiable object. But one avenue of retreat from the storm was open to her, and into the sanctuary of tears she withdrew without a second's hesitation.

"You are very un-k-k-ind," she sobbed, "to t-t-talk to me in this horrid way, just when I ought to be kept quiet and cool. I didn't think you were so malicious as to want to spoil my enjoyment at my coming-out party. But Shelby says all homely girls are mean and jealous, and I believe him."

"Don't tell me what Shelby says!" returned Hadassah, imperatively. "You know you are talking nonsense

when you impute such motives to me. What conceivable reason, except to secure your happiness, can I have for urging you to stand your ground, when they would make a heartless jilt of you? You are on the eve of making a fearful, I am afraid an irreparable, blunder, Violet Hayne, in listening to a man, who, if the truth were known—and come to light it *will*, ere long!—deserves the penitentiary as truly as his brother does the respect of the community. You are doing a *dangerous* thing in trusting to him! You had better build your house upon a quicksand, than your hopes upon his vows. He will be false to you as he is to everybody else.”

“I don’t believe that! He has loved me ever so long! He would marry me to-morrow if I would have him,” said Violet, with a faint dash of defiant coquetry.

“Of course he would. He would sell himself body and soul, for time and eternity, for half the fortune you will bring him!”

The heiress simpered. “You wouldn’t have him marry a poor girl, if he could get a rich one, would you?”

Her fatuous conceit would at another time have provoked Hadassah to merriment. She went on to vindicate her admirer from the charge of interested designs upon the wealth she yet argued was a worthy object of desire.

“But it isn’t my money he is after! He says he will settle every dollar upon myself if I will marry him.”

“He has gone so far as that, has he?” said Hadassah, stormily. “He is very cunning. He does well to bind you fast and sure, before his injured brother’s return! He knows no decent woman will ever look at him, except with detestation, when the truth is revealed. And you can hear such a proposal, and weigh its claims upon your

consideration—you, who but yesterday hoped to marry a man as far superior to this traitor and spy as midday is to midnight! You jump at him as if you never expected to get another offer! Where is your self-respect? your dread of public censure?"

"I didn't say I had accepted him," whimpered Violet, cut by the imputation that she regarded her suitor as a *pis aller*. "You frighten me out of my wits! What do you want me to do?"

"I would *not* have you marry a knave when you can have an honest gentleman for the holding. If you waver now, you will repent it in dust and ashes."

Violet wrung her hands.

"Dear! dear! I must mind Uncle! He is my guardian, you know, and I ought to follow his advice in all things. When he orders me never to think again of marrying poor Max, I dare not say a word. I am cruelly situated, and you haven't a bit of sympathy for me!"

Hadassah drew nearer, with gleaming eyes, spoke fast, and eagerly. "You *do* suffer, then! You are not so cold-hearted, so false in thought and deed, as they would make you out to be! I overheard Shelby tell Morris to-day that you had been tired of Max this great while, and preferred himself. I thought then that he was lying."

It was an adroit stroke, and it told in Violet's blush and pout.

"He took a great deal upon himself," she retorted, tossing her head, in momentary oblivion of her puffs and braids. "I suppose he thinks I will be very easy to get! He needn't be so sure. I haven't said 'Yes,' yet!"

"He *is* sure, nevertheless. His conceit stops at nothing. He believes he has only to beckon, and you will

rush into his arms. All that he said to his brother on this matter, this afternoon, showed that. Max was never so offensively confident when he had been engaged to you for eighteen months; always treated you with deference and tenderness, as one too holy and pure to be lightly approached or spoken of. Violet! dear Violet! that was the true love of a manly soul. If you ever cared for me, or for him, promise me not to engage yourself to Shelby, or to encourage him by look or action until after Maxwell's trial. Wait but one little fortnight until he brings you the news of his acquittal in person."

"I'd as lief as not," said Violet, carelessly.

Really, it was a very small favor, for which Hadassah begged as for her life. Only to play with Shelby's anxieties, and baffle his prayers for two weeks longer. If she granted this, there would be no more fuss, and she "hated a row." Then, there was the pleasant suspense of waiting for Maxwell's explanation, and the prospect of a beautiful scene—fainting and tears on her part, relentings on the father's, heroics from the returned prodigal. There may have been also—I would do deer-eyed Violet full justice—there may have been beneath the thick *mêringue* of vanity, all clay and froth and fixed air, with which her nature was encrusted, latent tenderness for the brave, beautiful boy who had adored her since her infancy; some touch of pride in his gallant bearing and knightly deeds, that combined with her facile will to win her consent to Hadassah's prayer.

"I am in no hurry to make up my mind," she continued, meditatively, "and"—returning to the point in her friend's argument that had borne most heavily upon her mind—"Shelby deserves to have a lesson in humility."

“He acts upon the principle of catching a heart in the rebound,” said wily Hadassah.

“He had better be certain that mine has rebounded,” was the pert repartee, which the other craftily applauded.

It was a distasteful business, this manœuvring and cajoling a woman whose weakness she despised, and time was when every instinct would have been up in arms at the suggestion, that she would ever stoop to such measures in her management of the friend she loved so dearly. But Max was to be served. All minor issues, and whatever was not subordinate to this end, were trodden under foot without a question—with scarcely a pang. She made much of Violet after this concession; praised her beauty and her dress; set her floral ornaments in hair and bosom, with gentle, skilful fingers, thanking her over and over for the assurance she had given that Max should plead his own cause with her, and that she would listen to him, without fear and without prejudice.

“You’ll write and tell him so?” she said, finally, as the roll of the first carriage was heard in the avenue. “Just a few lines! I will mail the note for you, and nobody else need know of it.”

But Violet had not lived fifteen years in a lawyer’s house without learning the value and the danger of documentary evidence. The roses and mignonette in her wreath jostled one another in the vehemence of her refusal.

“It wouldn’t be proper nor prudent,” she objected, positively. “What was that French motto you translated for Mr. Williams the other day? ‘*Le papier est*’—something! I never can remember the bothering things!”

“ *Le papier est le plus perfide confidente du monde !* ”  
quoted Hadassah.

“ That’s it ! Shelby said something like it to-day in English—‘ Say what you please, but be careful what you write.’ Tell Max, when *you* write—it won’t matter so much about your corresponding with him, for there’s nobody who cares enough about your movements to interfere—that I am waiting for him to clear himself, especially about that milliner creature, and that I will be generous, and give him three weeks’ time. Isn’t that good in me ! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, when you recollect how you’ve badgered me about this affair ? Shelby will be a skeleton before the time is up, I know. Won’t I have fun, playing him fast and loose ? I *do* enjoy making a man frantic, when he is in love with me ! And he ought to be tormented for boasting as he did to Morris.”

“ Send Max some token of remembrance—something to keep hope alive,” entreated his advocate.

“ What a nuisance you are ! ” said easy-tempered Violet, smiling. “ Here ! ” She tore a pink moss-rosebud from her bouquet, and put it coquettishly into her friend’s hand. “ It means Love-in-concealment. Rob Wharton told me so, one day. I send it to Max with the emblem, you may say. He ought to live on that for at least three weeks. Now for enjoyment.”

She unclosed the door, and sailed, like a white-winged gull, through the hall and down the stairs, shedding smiles and Lubin’s Extract of Violets wherever she moved.

Hadassah, exhausted already in body and spirit, was left, grasping the precious bud—the sole reward of her day’s toil—the wear and tear of nervous force, the sacrifice of self in behalf of a man who bowed before this simple-

ton as to a goddess among women! For one sick instant she was tempted to abandon the advocacy of a suit that required to be bolstered by the despicable arts she had stooped to employ, but as she walked to the window to regain strength and composure, her eye fell upon the grape-arbor that divided the garden from the orchard. Within the hour Maxwell would be pacing its length, staring with sorrowing or hopeful eyes at the house and its blazing windows, within hearing of the music that moved the dancers' feet, the hum of many and mirthful voices; while he, who should have been lord of the revels, was shut out into the darkness! The blush of the June twilight still lingered in the air, but night was gathering under hedge and tree and trellis; and while she stood there, a whip-poor-will began his melancholy chant in the far-off family burying-ground, at the left of the orchard.

Was the nameless dread that struck coldly upon her heart, as she looked and listened, reaction after protracted excitement, or presentiment, or but a natural shrinking from the trials yet in reserve for her?





## CHAPTER IX.

### IN THE GARDEN.

**V**IOLET HAYNES' "coming-out" party was not an hilarious one from the outset, as people remembered afterward. Even when the dance was in full swing, and the stiffening ceremony of reception and introduction was over, there was an air of constraint about guests and hosts. The Judge led one of the prettiest girls in the room through the first set—an old-fashioned country-dance, with grace that was not excelled by any younger man there. Mrs. Humphreys slipped in and out between couples and groups, chirping and smiling, and beseeching Everybody to feel entirely at home, and telling Everybody's wife how delighted she was to see her. Dr. Humphreys and *his* wife were charmed to meet their old friends, and full of kindly inquiries and converse of former days. Violet—with Shelby, the invaluable, at her right hand, a benignant satellite—shone impartially and serenely upon her emulous band of attendants, and people, after the hints dropped in dressing-rooms and upon the stairs, forbore to ask after Maxwell;



were careful not to look as if they missed or remembered him.

But something was amiss. The gayest laughed with his lips—not with his whole heart. The least sensitive had some consciousness he did not know how to express, that the moral atmosphere was surcharged with electricity, and that there was danger to somebody in the threatened explosion. It was easy for Hadassah to avoid dancing; quite practicable for her to quit the great parlor unnoticed by the revellers, when she had made the round of the room in the laudable attempt to accomplish what Violet called “stirring up the wall-flowers,” a species of floriculture in which humble and amiable relations are expected to be proficient. The Judge’s portly figure blocked the door by which she designed to escape; and to avoid the appearance of impatience, she waited, without seeming to do so, for him to yield to the sway of the throng, and move far enough aside to let her pass.

He was playing the hospitable to a gentleman from the East, now the guest of a neighboring planter.

“You have three sons, I believe, Judge Humphreys,” said the innocent stranger, bent upon doing the agreeable. “I have seen but two here, this evening.”

“You have been misinformed, sir,” rejoined the host, stiffly, and involuntarily elevating his voice to give energy to the declaration. “I have but two sons—Dr. Morris Humphreys, of Louisville, and Shelby Humphreys, who has just graduated at —— college, in your State. Allow me to introduce him to you, if you have not already met him! Shelby!”

He advanced a step into the hall to summon his son, whom he espied in the library beyond, and Hadassah

glided between him and the wall into the narrow passage leading to the housekeeper's apartments. These consisted of her chamber and the store-room already spoken of, which was devoted to all manner of housewifely purposes, excepting cookery. The walls were lined with cupboards, and there was a row of tables down the middle of the room, on which was spread a *corps de reserve* of edibles, intended to supplement the great army of substantial and delicacies already upon the supper table. The place was cool and still after the crowded parlors, but the faint, sweet smell of cake and confectionery was overpowering to Hadassah's disordered senses. She held her breath in passing through to the closed inner room. There was no one there either, and with a sigh of self-gratulation that her way thus far was clear, she caught down a skirt of checked gingham from a nail behind the door, and put it on over her gala robe. It was always hanging in that spot, except when the owner had it on as a shield for her "better gown." To-night she was in full dress—black silk and lace mitts, and the homely but clean overall was discarded. To this disguise Hadassah added a shawl, also the housekeeper's property, and a brown calico sun-bonnet. It was near moonrise, and her light garments and uncovered head would have made her a conspicuous object, even in the shade.

The hands of Miss Mahala's clock pointed to a quarter of ten, when the young girl shut the back door softly behind her, and ran like a swift shadow along the althea hedge separating the lawn from the kitchen yard, down an alley edged with tall privet, to the southern extremity of the "pleached walk," as Max had named that enclosed by espaliers of apricot, peach, and plum trees, for half

the width of the garden, of which it was the lower boundary, and the rest of the way by a close network of grape-vines. It was a pleasant lovers' haunt in summer time. The ground was covered with white gravel, always clean, and now as dry as a floor; and presently, when the moon should pave it with many-shaped arabesques of silver, fancy could scarcely picture a fitter spot in which to hear, or to tell, the old, dear story.

There were no sweet, stolen caresses on one side, no maidenly tremors on the other, as the two who came hither by appointment to-night met midway in the arbor.

Only a close hand-clasp, and a lowly-spoken "Queenie!" "Max!"

Then they walked up and down, too restless to stand still, while Hadassah related the events of the day, omitting or softening the harsher features whenever she could without injuring the continuity of the story. But the reluctant admission that Violet had refused to read the letter he had written her because his father had prohibited their intercourse, threw Maxwell into a frenzy of grief and anger.

"She is willing to give me up, then? prefers to believe my traducers? is afraid to cling to the disinherited outcast? lets policy or timidity outweigh her plighted word!" were his mad ejaculations.

"Hush!" ordered the other, with the authority presence of mind exerts over distraction. "I will tell you nothing more unless you promise to be patient."

Then followed a slight and hurried sketch of the conversation between herself and Violet, or so much of it as reflected credit upon the vacillating beauty, concluding with the gift of the rosebud. Max turned from even the

envoy's friendly eyes when the fading token of a love yet more frail was laid in his hand. A level ray of light from the rising moon pierced the covert, and showed his bowed head, as he lifted the flower to his lips and held it there for a long minute. In the hush of that speechless instant, Hadassah's fine ear caught a sound near at hand, and alarming—the stealthy approach of feet that picked their way along the turf borders of the path, lest the crunching gravel should betray the intruder. Near where she stood with Maxwell, was an arched opening in the side of the trellis toward the orchard, and ere her unguarded companion guessed at her intent, or the necessity for immediate action, she had pushed him through it with an emphatic whisper—"Silence! Some one is coming!" and was almost at the other end of the arbor.

In her haste and fright, she mistook the direction from which the interruption came. A low, peculiar laugh, disagreeable as it was familiar, was the first intimation she had of this, as Shelby stepped into the path in front of her.

"Miss Mahala, moonlight rambles are hardly in your line," he said, mockingly. "And you cannot be here upon hospitable thoughts intent. Green peaches and plums and really sour grapes would not be a palatable addition to our bill of fare. I recommend that you take my arm, and allow me to escort you to the house, lest the night air should give you the rheumatism."

Hadassah wrested her hand from him in a spasm of detestation she durst evince in no other way while Maxwell was still within hearing. Above all things else, she must not precipitate an encounter between the brothers.

She even forced herself to speak civilly as she strove to walk on without heeding his disposition to hinder her.

“I borrowed Miss Mahala’s habiliments to protect my finery. She wanted some curled parsley and fennel sprigs for garnishing her dishes. You frightened me, coming upon me so suddenly.”

“Not half as much as you did me,” putting out his arm to bar her way, and speaking with ironical insolence that made her blood boil and cheeks tingle. “I mistook you for a witch, gathering herbs for hell-broth, and muttering incantations. Who was your companion? The gentleman in black himself? I fancied I heard masculine gutturals.”

“You are mistaken.” Hadassah, brought to bay, pushed back the sun-bonnet and showed her face, pale, but not with terror. “I came to this place, as I wish to return—alone.”

It was a rash speech, and she felt that it was, before it quite escaped her tongue. She was in his power, and must submit to impertinence, unless she elected to rush upon the greater evils of appeal to Maxwell’s protection—perchance of alarming the house and provoking widespread scandal.

He laughed again in impudent security.

“You are not complimentary, but I hope you are too well acquainted with my taste and gallantry to imagine that I would let slip so precious an opportunity of enjoying your society ‘by moonlight alone.’ This bower is Arcadian, and you are none the less charming for your rustic garb and slight tartness of temper. I have it in my heart to be cousinly and confidential. In fact, I tracked you on purpose. My beauteous Violet has confessed to

me that you wanted to bind her over to keep me at arms' length for three weeks. I needn't tell you, who know her charming foibles, that she is a stanch believer in the adage, 'All's fair in love,' and classes the pledge you extorted from her with pie-crust, her lovers' hearts, and other predestined breakables. I thought at first that I wouldn't forgive you for meddling with my wooing, but you were so nearly handsome to-night, I was obliged to change my mind. There is not the least occasion for haste, I assure you!" catching hold of her, as, irritated out of all reason, she started to walk in the opposite direction. "Nobody else thinks as much of you as I do, and the occasion inspires me. You must retract some of the naughty things you have been saying of me to my bouncing belle. Be sensible, Haddie! You would do better for yourself by espousing my cause, than that of my graceless junior. Give me one kind word to take the taste of the many bitter ones out of my mouth—one kiss as an earnest of future good-will, and I will pardon your inconsiderate enmity in the past, your present anxiety to get rid of me. Most ladies do not find me so hateful."

She struggled with all her might, but dumbly, still mindful of Maxwell's possible proximity, to free herself from the arm he cast about her waist, and he chuckled at her rage.

"What a spiteful little tiger-cat it is!" he began.

Powerful hands undid his grasp and hurled him violently against the trellis.

"Hadassah! go up to the house!" commanded Maxwell, sternly. "If this *gentleman* has anything more to say, I will hear and answer it."

For one second Shelby's native cowardice held him a

breathless captive. He shrank and trembled away from the avenging figure that towered into gigantic proportions in the moonlight, now pouring through the archway—covered against the lattice-work, unable to fly. The mean terror of face and attitude was never forgotten by either of the observers, and in Hadassah's reply to Maxwell's injunction there was an inkling of the scorn with which the sight inspired her.

"I am in no danger now. But *you* must not stay here."

It was a luckless speech, since it gave the craven time to collect his cunning, and suggested his real advantage in the encounter.

"I comprehend," he said with a slow, deadly sneer. "The lion is playing the fox's part, but he has still his obedient jackal. Or is this a modern edition of Pyramus and Thisbe, with my unworthy self as the king of beasts? a lover's masquerade? The audience should be larger."

He moved toward the house.

Maxwell laid an iron clutch upon his arm.

"Now that I see you face to face, we may as well settle the account between us. We will go together before your audience. When they learn that I have lain in ambush like a hunted hare, for news of my father and my promised wife, they shall also hear to whose baseness I owe my disgrace. You understand me, and they shall!"

He relaxed his hold, and motioned Shelby to lead the way.

The traitor's laugh was forced, but none the less insolent.

"And what if my addenda to your likely tale should be an account of the circumstances and the company in

which I found you here, Sir Galahad? Would sweet Viola's confidence in your honor and fidelity be enhanced by knowing on what terms you stand with her bosom friend? yours, too, as I am prepared to swear?"

Maxwell moved nearer to the retreating form.

"Not an inch farther shall you go until you retract your slanderous insinuation."

"I insinuate nothing." While he spoke, he steadily and slowly stepped backward toward the head of the arbor, evidently with the design of escaping by flight so soon as he reached the upper walk. "I assert that our prudish cousin here and your pretty dressmaker—"

Maxwell had him by the throat before he could finish the sentence. There was a struggle, a hard wrestle, in which no word was spoken, and of which the horrified spectator could only discern the swaying and writhing of the forms locked in each other's arms—a backward reel, a dull, fearful thud, and the taller and slighter of the combatants arose.

"He is only stunned?" he panted, as Hadassah pressed forward. "He tripped me purposely, or we would not have gone down. Stand back, and I will loosen his collar," recovering the voice the violent wrench had driven from his lungs. "He will come around in a minute." Lifting the head to his knee, he undid the cravat, and Hadassah seized a handful of dewy grass with which to bathe the ghastly face. She recoiled with a stifled cry at the touch of warm, thick liquid, and held up her hand in the moonlight.

"It is blood!"

Shelby had fallen upon a broad, flat stone, the step to the upper alley, and from the back of his head a dark



stream trickled fast over this, and began to streak the gravel of the pleached walk.

Maxwell laid the limp head down.

"I am afraid he is badly hurt," he said, regretfully. "I will stay here while you go for Morris. I had better be seen than have him suffer for attention."

"There is no need of either." Hadassah spoke resolutely and more calmly than he had done. "It will be your ruin and mine, if you are discovered here and now—if not your father's death. He will never forgive or forget the public scandal. I will have Shelby attended to without delay—will say that he was walking with me, and fell. He will keep the secret for his own sake, for when he tells his story, I shall mine. If his hurt is serious, I will send for you in the morning. Wait for my messenger at the High Rock Spring until eight o'clock. If he should implicate you or me in the account he gives of the affair, you shall hear from me all the same. If you get no message, go back to —. I will write to you there. He is reviving already," leaning down, as if hearkening to his breathing. "Max! go! You drive me wild!"

Solicitous though he was for the restoration of his late opponent, Maxwell lingered. The consequences of discovery at this unfortunate juncture rushed through his mind—his father's displeasure, it might be, his curse; his mother's distress, Violet's anguish and alarm; the reprobation of the throng of old acquaintances before whom he had hoped to appear in honor, not ignominy. Yet he could not leave this woman to brave the penalty of his deed. He would sooner surrender himself into the hands of the law, as a brawler and almost murderer. He felt

sick and giddy—the effect of fasting, travelling, and excitement—unable to think which was the better and more honorable course for him to pursue. He cursed his decision in later years as pusillanimous and unmanly to the last degree, but at the time he had no volition of his own. Hadassah's rapid utterances swept him along as a feather on a rushing stream. He was neither craven nor villain—only a boy, goaded to desperation, and fearing to meet his deadliest foes in his nearest of kin.

Hadassah was the one friend who had clung to him in this the clouded midnight of his young life, and she reiterated her commands with vehemence—forced, not led him to the gap in the orchard boundary.

“If there is need, I will send for you. I promise it solemnly. I can quiet suspicion—manage everything—if you will but go! You will *kill* me, if you stay! Every moment is precious! He is moving! Don't you see that the sight of you will only make him furious?”

In his bewilderment, he hardly noticed that she threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him with a wild, tearless sob. He remembered afterward, that it was more from a desire to quiet and serve her, than to save himself, that he went fleetly down the orchard slope in the direction of the forest where he had lain hidden all day—in which he was to await further commands.

Hadassah listened to his retreating footsteps until the sound was lost in the distance—then ran toward the house. Not up the moon-lighted, central alley down which Shelby had come, but in the shadow of the picket-fence, terminating in a little gate that opened into the stable-yard. A great dog leaped upon her from the kennel hard by, when the gate fell to after her—sprang so

high that his tongue touched her cheek, his breath choked hers, as he whined with delight.

"Down, Leo! down, sir!" she said, in harsh, imperious undertone. She beat him off with rough, impatient hands, and sped onward. She was not half way across the yard when she heard him howl—a hoarse yell, prolonged until the windows rattled and the hills took up the echo. It sounded again, with demoniacal dissonance and force, as she gained the housekeeper's inner room unperceived, and began to tear off her disguise. Seeing the dyed hand in the candle light, the truth burst upon her. The hound had smelled the blood! The very heavens seemed to take up the cry and call men to the pursuit of the fugitive. She set her teeth hard—her trick of old when pursued to extremity—and her eyes brightened. Her mind did not topple upon its balance as when the bloody grass had revealed to her the extent of the vengeance done by brother's hands for the insult offered her. She had deceived Maxwell in saying that Shelby breathed and moved. For aught she knew, he would never breathe or move again. Let that be as it might, Maxwell's safety—his life, perhaps—were in her keeping. Whether the wounded man struggled back to consciousness unaided, or grew cold and stark on his earthy bed, was just now of less consequence than time for his assailant's escape. She would think of nothing else, until this was gained.

"Fifteen minutes will do," she was saying, as she moved to hang Miss Mahala's skirt upon a nail.

Something on it caught her eye. She laid it upon the table, and inspected every breadth minutely as rapidly. There was but that one spot—a brownish-red stain she could have covered with her hand, at the bottom of the

hem. Without pause or tremor she returned the overall to its peg, keeping the soiled breadth outermost, and held the candle to it, never turning away her head, as the wet blood steamed hotly for an instant, then the fabric shrivelled and crisped in a dull flame. She extinguished it when the darker hue was burned away, set the candle on the table beneath near enough to scorch the gingham, flew up the back staircase to Violet's room, which was fortunately unoccupied at that moment, readjusted her hair, settled her draperies, and walked tranquilly down the front stairs into the heart of the laughing, surging crowd.

She had not been missed. The discovery that would, in ordinary times, have mortified her, gave her courage now. She held feature, voice, and thoughts under superhuman control; put absolutely out of her memory the moveless, dumb horror lying alone in the moonlight, down in the garden, and chatted easily, smiled brightly, upon all whom she met.

"You are engaged for this set, of course?" she said to Josephine Galt, as the band struck up a cotillion.

"Yes; that is, Shelby Humphreys wrote his name down for it, but I don't see him anywhere. Violet Hayne!" as the beamy belle swam by, "if you stumble upon Mr. Humphreys in your rounds, tell him I shan't keep this dance for him one minute longer; and if he forfeits this, he shall also the waltz I promised him. He won't find it safe to trifle with *me!*"

Violet was bland and sweet as vanilla custard.

"I'll tell him if I don't forget it!" smiling at Rob Wharton, on whose arm she leaned, as if she thought there was danger of forgetting everything but his pres-

ence and devotion. The idea of anybody's trifling with *her* was so absurd, she disdained to notice Josephine's significant emphasis.

"It is outrageous for him to keep me waiting in this way," continued the latter to Hadassah, whose gravity looked like sympathy in her perplexity. "He behaves tonight as if he had the world in a sling. The set is forming, you see. Ought I to say 'No,' if I get a good offer?"

"I wouldn't," said Hadassah, positively. "Here comes Frank Lansing for you. He is a pleasant partner."

"You will stand between Mr. Humphreys and myself, if he is angry with me for leaving him in the lurch?" laughed Josephine over her shoulder to the "friend of the family," as Mr. Lansing led her to her place. "I am but following your advice, you know."

"He cannot complain. He should be more punctual," was the reply.

"Cannot complain!" Hardly, with those still lips and palsied tongue! Little reck's his brain of dancing men and dancing women, of coquettish wile and pique, as the dark stream drips from the flat stone upon the white gravel, makes yet more dank the dewy turf!

She was very safe in engaging to stand between the pretty trifler and Shelby's wrath.





## CHAPTER X.

“SILENCE À LA MORT.”

**D**ID you ever hear such a fearful noise as that dog makes? Doesn't he like the music, or what is the matter?" said a nervous old lady in Dr. Humphreys' hearing; and he, accustomed to heed the complaints of her age and sex, good-humoredly went out to quiet Leo.

It was not so easily done as he had expected. The creature was straining his chain to its utmost length, tearing up the earth, rolling over and over, and altogether conducting himself in such a frantic style that the physician kept out of his reach, and called one of the stable-boys to his help.

“Is he mad, do you think?” he questioned.

The latter approached the dog fearlessly, and patted his head.

“Poor fellow! Down! So, so!” And, as Leo licked his hand with his strangled whine—“No, Mars' Morris, he ain't a-studying 'bout goin' mad. But he allers did hate like pison to be chained up. I tole Mars' Shelby as how he wasn't use' to it; but he wouldn't hear to reason.

Leo 'll never hurt nobody 'thout dey's no-count white folks or free niggers, and *dem* he won't 'low on de place. He'd be peaceable 'nough ef I was to onchain him."

Leo threw up his head for another ear-splitting howl, dreary and hollow.

"This infernal hubbub must be stopped. The ladies will all go into fits. Unchain him at once," ordered horrified Morris, his teeth on edge.

"You'll stan' between me an' Mars' Shelby, den, sur? He give bery pertickler orders; an' he's a marster one to lay down de law, Mars' Shelby is."

Morris was ignorant of the coincidence between this appeal and that made by his brother's promised partner, and he would have discerned no especial significance in it had he heard both. *He* had no fear of the autocratic junior.

"I'll make it all right. Send him to me if he finds fault," he said carelessly, moving away.

An ejaculation from the negro made him look back.

"Sure's you're born, sur, dat dog done been see some-thin' wrong 'bout here! Jes you watch him!"

Leo had accepted his release with a bound, and running, as is the manner of his kind, with his body close to the ground and his nose touching it, followed Hadassah's trail through the grass to the back door, which was shut; stopped with his fore-feet upon the step, and howled again—a bay of disappointment that went through and through the house—the music having just ceased. There was a chorus of alarm and amusement from the promenaders in hall and porticos.

"Git out, you bellering Evil!" said a saucy negro boy,

throwing a pailful of water out of the store-room window upon the big black head.

The hound turned in his tracks at the rebuff, dashed past Dr. Humphreys and the groom, leaped the little garden-gate, and ran down the walk skirting the palings.

“Sure’s you’re born, he’s on de track of *somehin*!” repeated the amazed negro.

A howl yet more discordant, but which was a yell of savage triumph to the senses of one person in the now attent throng in doors and out, sounded from the bottom of the garden. Another and another, in meaning so dread and startling, that in spite of pretty frights and threatened hysterics, and some real terror, twenty young men raced across the lawn upon Leo’s track.

“Ah, well! it was best so! They must have found it very soon,” Hadassah said within herself, as the crowd poured around her from within-doors to learn the cause of the excitement. She had promised Max that Shelby should be cared for without needless delay. She had concocted a plan that must have led to this end; had already expatiated to several romantic couples upon the beauty of the night, the dry, clean walks in the garden, and the heat of the lighted rooms; had represented that there was no more pleasant ramble on the place than the wide central alley bordered with Mrs. Humphreys’ famous rose-thickets. In five minutes more, the awful quiet of the arbor would have been broken in upon. Since the discovery of what lay there was to be made without her agency, it only remained for her to brace mind and body, to husband her strength and wits, for the most terrific ordeal of all. She shut her eyes for one minute, and leaned back against the wall in the shadow



of the portico-roof. Nobody noticed her, and Nature demanded the relief. She wondered afterward if she had slept or swooned in the brief oblivious space. Whichever form of forgetfulness came to her help, it was banished by the strange hush that brooded over the affrighted throng about her.

She unclosed her eyes to see the yellow glimmer of candles and pitch-pine torches, struggling with the white moonlight in the procession that filled the main walk. Bareheaded men, whose horror-stricken countenances and slow tread contrasted oddly with their evening dress, bearing and surrounding something heavy and still. She saw a group of negroes bringing up the rear, and that they led Leo in a leash—then, Miss Mahala appeared at the window of her room, looking out upon the long back porch, and called shrilly for "Hadassah Todd!"

"If she is there, she must come straight in here! I want her!"

The silent ranks opened to let her obey, and she bowed in mechanical acknowledgment of the courtesy as she moved between them—pale as a ghost, but so was many another young face there. The probability was, she argued, that she was suspected of complicity in the deed. She had been dogged by others as well as by Shelby, or the stained and burned skirt had betrayed her. Conjecture was useless. She must prepare for action—be fearless for herself—dumb for the fugitive.

"*Silence à la mort!*"

The phrase leaped into her mind as if it had been repeated audibly in her ear, and with it a story Max had read to her and Violet in his last vacation, of an officer in the secret service of the First Emperor, who, in carry-

ing out a confidential order of his sovereign, was arrested and court-martialed upon suspicion of treasonable correspondence with the enemy. The Emperor presided at the court, and when the sentence of disgrace and imprisonment was passed, the faithful emissary cast one glance of agonized appeal at the calm, severe face of his demi-god. There was no sign of compassion or remorseful memory, and the brave servant's heart and reason failed him together. He lived for years longer, but thenceforward spoke but one sentence—the words which had been the parting admonition of the iron-hearted chief in their private interview—

“*Silence à la mort.*”

Hadassah thought out the motto and the tale; remembered how the sunbeams wove a halo in Maxwell's hair, and flecked his book as the three comrades sat on the rustic bench in the grape-walk; how the leaves had rustled overhead and the robins twittered to their young in the old apple-tree behind them; how cool and lovely Violet had looked in her thin blue lawn; how like a young Apollo her lover; saw it all—a picture, bright, peaceful, and present—by the time Miss Mahala seized her arm, pulled her into the store-room, and shut out the sight of the crowd.

“Honey!” It was a homely address, but it was wine of comfort, tonic of strength to the auditor. “Ther' ain't a creatur' here I can depend upon but you, and they're a-bringing him into my room. Morris says they must. Put that on over your dress!” handing her the gingham overall. “Some fool of a nigger sot a candle under it, and came near burning the house down. But 'twill keep you clean!”

Without seeing that Hadassah laid it aside, she hurried back to the bed.

"Now if you'll help me turn this mattress! This sheepskin next—to keep spots off the bedding. They tell me he's bleeding awful! And there's the sheets! Double the lower one, so's it can be slipped right off. Pillows, next! No bolster! We're all ready, gentlemen!"

The bed was low, broad, and firm. The spinster was scrupulously neat in her personal belongings, ready in emergencies, and a marvel of self-possession among women. The couch was spread with an eye to surgical and possibly mortuary requirements, the while the invalid's comfort was consulted. For the form the bearers laid carefully down was not breathless. The eyes were shut, the features pinched as by the frost of death; there were gray shadows about the mouth and under the eyes; and the slender, purple stream still trickled slowly from the back of the head, along the floor, and upon the coverlet. Morris Humphreys and Dr. Washburne, a physician from the neighborhood, bent over it, when the others drew back. Miss Mahala had a basin of water ready, a sponge, and linen cloths.

"You hold that, child," she said, thrusting the bowl upon her reluctant assistant. "And *if* you please, gentlemen, we'd be the comfortabler for a breath of fresh air. Judge Humphreys, your wife is in a dead faint in the parlor. 'Twould be a good plan for you to speak a word or two to her, when she comes to."

"Don't let her come in here!" ordered Morris laconically. "We must be quiet!"

"*Just* as I said! *Must* be quiet!" echoed the emphatic housekeeper; and at her stride toward them, the

group in the background disappeared into the outer room, where the jets of fresh blood dotted the floor between the double row of laden tables.

Miss Mahala shut the door, and there remained in the chamber but the wounded man and the four attendants. Dr. Washburne was the only one collected enough to mark the demeanor of his companions, and to his apprehension, Hadassah's nerve was not inferior to that of the sharp-visaged head-nurse. Without quail or quiver, she held the basin in the position indicated by Dr. Humphreys' silent gesture, and kept her eyes steadfastly upon it, while the liquid changed from purity into foulness by the repeated submersions of the sponge. She expressed no curiosity, offered no suggestions, made no feint of offended modesty at the singular position into which she had been thrust, and performed her task-mistress' behest with dispatch and dexterity. Stimulants were needed to revive the failing pulse, mustard-draughts for the wrists and feet; and so the minutes—rapid to the others, each one an age of torment to Hadassah—went by, and no change came upon the pallid countenance of the insensible youth, unless it were an added ghastliness. The mother forced her way once to the bedside, but fainted at the sight that met her there, and was borne out. Judge Humphreys stole in and out of the room, from time to time, to gather and to impart the latest information touching the patient. The hum of the crowd had subsided into the distant roll of carriage-wheels, and this into the silence of night and nature.

“How did it happen, do you suppose?”

The inquiry, in the father's deep voice at her elbow, did not make the girl start.

"It was undoubtedly an accident," returned Dr. Washburne. "Vertigo or a misstep, as he went down into the lower walk, and the back of his head struck upon the sharp edge of the stone. There are no other marks of violence, and nothing was taken from his person."

"Is this a likely hypothesis, in your opinion?" asked the Judge of Morris.

"Decidedly, sir. I met him on the porch as he came out of the house. He said 'Champagne and waltzing had played the devil' with his head, and he was going to take a turn in the air to steady himself. He grew worse, probably, while walking, for his collar was loosened, no doubt when he felt himself becoming more dizzy. I fancied he did not look or speak quite naturally when I stopped him on the steps. I wish I had gone with him."

"Oh! if he had! if he had!" Hadassah's pulses and heart kept saying over and over, but she looked straight before her, and her lips were sealed.

"We will have the ground examined in the morning for traces of a scuffle, or other token that he was not alone when he fell," mused the father. "Yet I do not think he has an enemy in the world. His disposition is the reverse of quarrelsome."

"He didn't get hurt in a fight! You may bet your life on that!" Miss Mahala's decision was positive, and maybe a trifle derogatory to the courage of the worsted one. "As to searching the ground, there's been fifty people on the loose gravel since he stood on his feet. There's no use looking for suspicious tracks. I suppose the truth is he ain't tasted such wine as yours, Judge, in an age of Sundays, and he was a *leetle* too free with it."

“He has shown no sign of consciousness whatever?” interrogated the Judge of Dr. Washburne.

“None. We fear the brain is seriously injured. But we cannot be quite sure.”

They were no nearer certainty three hours later, when Hadassah was bidden by the housekeeper, “Go upstairs, honey, and catch a wink of sleep! You’re white as a sheet, and look just beat out. There’s no telling how long this sort of thing will be kept up. And people of sense, who know how to use their feet and hands, and hold their tongues in scary times, are scarce.”

“You have done wonders to-night, Haddie. We cannot afford to let you break down,” added Dr. Humphreys, kindly.

Mrs. Humphreys’ door was ajar, and, as Hadassah trod by on tiptoe, she heard the regular breathing of more than one sleeper. Mrs. Nat Shelby, the hostess’ sister-in-law, had taken upon herself the care and comfort of the afflicted mother. It was not possible to doubt the sincerity of her grief at the calamity that had befallen her beloved child, but Hadassah felt with cruel acuteness how much lighter was this woe than her own.

“Hers is a wound that bleeds freely and is healed—mine, a poisoned cut!” she thought. “She may well sleep, while I wake and suffer.”

Tender-hearted Violet had likewise her consoler. Lydia Shelby, a sentimental maiden of thirty-four autumns, had offered to bear the trembling dove company in her hour of need. Need of sleep, no less than of friendship’s balm—sympathy—if one might judge by the depth and serenity of her slumbers. Her fair face was placid as a plate-glass mirror. No unsightly tear-marks or disordered tresses were

to be lamented over next day. Her curl-papers in front were securely pinned up, and the thick coil of back-hair had been burnished and banded as usual, before it was tucked within the pretty lace night-cap. She had put on one of her best cambric gowns, with a puffed yoke, and ruffles trimmed with Valenciennes at the neck and wrists. She never looked so enchanting in any other garb as in her night-gown and cap. She often expressed her regret, that custom forbade her appearing thus apparelled before her gentlemen admirers.

Miss Lydia had decked her person as carefully, albeit not with the like effect.

"In case anything should happen before morning, and we be called up unexpectedly, we could throw our dressing-wrappers on over these, you know, dear," she said, pathetically. "I always esteem it my duty to be prepared for the worst, while I hope for the best."

Violet's sigh was yet more full of feeling.

"Yes—and I could take down my curls in a second. I never saw another person who could undo her hair so rapidly as I can," she responded, plaintively. "Isn't this the most mysterious providence—all these uncomfortable things happening just now? I declare, Cousin Lydia, it makes me feel superstitious—as if Fate had decreed that I should not marry into the Humphreys' family!"

"She sleeps like a milk-white baby, while one man who loves her is an outcast, hiding in the dens and caves of the earth, and another lies dying!" said Hadassah, standing over her. "And I feel—and I dare say look like a lost spirit—lost and wandering, and blaspheming!"

She sat down, bound her temples with her hands, and forced herself to think connectedly, and with a view to

action. Shelby might die. The likelihood was that he would not survive twenty-four hours. If he died, she was his murderer, not the hot-headed boy who had espoused her quarrel, saved her from persecution and insult. She had enticed him back to the homestead, with promises of reconciliation and restoration of his rights that had proved but bursting bubbles. Her ill-advised petulance to Shelby at their meeting the preceding day, had irritated him into playing the spy upon her movements in the hope of revenge. Her imprudent retort in the grape-arbor had driven him to offer the indignity for which Maxwell had fought him.

“I have been Max’s ruin! his evil genius throughout!” she cried in bitterness of spirit, the first tears she had shed that fearful night, blistering the dry, hot lids as they passed. “Ruined him when I would have laid down my life to give him happiness. O my love! if I could suffer all in your stead!”

She was not sorry for Shelby yet. She had hated him when, in the flush of bodily vigor and insolence of prosperity, he had insulted her and slandered her hero. She hated and feared him now, ill—dying—though he was. Instead of praying that he might utter one conscious cry for mercy before he faced his Judge, she hoped, if his injuries were fatal, that he might never know another lucid moment, lest he might name him who had inflicted them. If he were to recover, she believed that he would hesitate to reveal that which reflected so unfavorably upon himself; that he would favor the theory of accidental injury sooner than confess in what cause he had fallen before his brother’s indignation.

“He deserved all he got!” she said, in sudden heat,



straightening herself up. "But I wish my hand had done it—not *his!*"

There had been no preparations made for her sleeping in Violet's room, or elsewhere. Every bed was occupied, and every sofa. She could not even find a spare coverlet. She did not care. Her eyelids, that had not tasted sleep in forty-eight hours, seemed to be fastened open with excited sleeplessness. The air of the house oppressed her. It was confined and hot, and reeked with stale Parisian perfumes and the odors of dying bouquets. Then there was the imminent risk that some one of the sleepers might awake and catechise her. She was sore distracted in spirit, and the thought of the gabble of questions and comment the morning would bring, was insufferable. Again, she must be the first to revisit the scene of the disaster. If any trace of the brief but bitter encounter existed, it should be effaced. Unless the bloodless and hardly breathing lips downstairs divulged the truth, it should never be told. She would wait in the grape-walk for the dawn.

"*Silence à la mort!*"

Whispering it to still the throbs of the brain she was finding it more and more difficult to control, she stripped off her muslin dress, creased and soiled, rolled it up in a bundle, and thrust it into her trunk; arrayed herself in the calico wrapper she had worn while assisting Miss Mahala to make ready the untasted feast, threw a shawl over her head, and went cautiously down to the lower floor. The outer doors were wide open, and the gray dayspring was visible through them. Four or five young men were sleeping on lounges and pallets in the parlor, and answering snores resounded from the darkened dining-room.

She met no one in hall or piazza. Chinks of light fell athwart the floor of the latter, through the shutters of Miss Mahala's room. The watchers there took no heed of the broadening dawn. In the office window there was also a light. Creeping noiselessly up to it in the dense shade of the trees, she peeped in. Judge Humphreys was there, alone, as she had seen him yesterday forenoon—bowed together in his arm-chair, his white head upon the table. What if she were to confront him with a full confession of everything; plead Maxwell's cause while his heart was softened by this new sorrow? If Shelby died, his house would be left unto him desolate. What was more likely than that he would welcome back the son he had so loved? Max would make up to him for everything. She would tell him where he could be found—bring him home within the hour. She moved to the door—laid her hand upon the lock. The touch of the cold brass knob aroused her to a clearer perception of the consequences of the step she meditated.

“I believe I am going mad,” she muttered, stealing away through the wet grass to the side gate. “I was about to deliver him up! to endanger his life, with his reputation! I will say nothing! nothing!”

Leo had been removed from the kennel, and locked up in the stable. She thought, in a confused way, how lucky it was the scent of the blood on her hands and skirt had set the dog upon her track. But for that, he might have followed Maxwell. She could not have managed it better had she intentionally dabbled the gingham in the warm liquid.

If the pleached walk had been solemn by moonlight, it was weird-like, with its stretch of gleaming gravel and

moveless shadow, in the mingling of the wan moonbeams and morning twilight. Hadassah paused at the stone terrace, stooped for a nearer view of the dark spot that had spread irregularly upon the broad step.

"It is larger than I thought, and shaped like a bat with outspread wings. There is no need or use to try to hide *that*. Will Judge Humphreys put a new step there, I wonder? They say blood-stains never wash out!"

The small stones had been disturbed by the trampling of many feet, and she patted them smooth. Then she went a little way into the orchard to see if it would be practicable to trace Maxwell's footsteps there. The dew lay undisturbed everywhere. He would wait for news from her at High Rock Spring, a mile away, a secluded nook, to which the three playfellows had often resorted in the holidays. There was a deserted cabin near by, where he could sleep. She had no intention of sending him any message. That no news was to be good news, was the understanding between them. The sooner he was away from this region the better. He had told her that he had money enough to take him back to his friend's house in—. There let him await his trial, eight days off. She would not divert his attention from the preparations for his defence by telling him of Shelby's state.

"I will write to him to-day, sometime, when I go home, and make him think all is going on well," uttered the half-delirious plotter, dragging herself to the rustic bench. "I can do nothing more, just now. How my head aches!"

Every nerve in it was alive with agony. There were red patches before her eyes wherever she looked, dancing spots like scarlet sunbeams, striking here and there.

Her brain, cheeks, and eyes were as hot as fire, her feet and hands like clay, and she was tired to death!

"Tired to death!"

Repeating it wearily, she lay down upon the settee, the same on which Max had sat, between Violet and herself, when he read the French story aloud.

She lay there still, her arms rolled in her shawl, her head resting on the hard wood, when Judge Humphreys came, an hour after sunrise, to examine, by daylight, the scene where his son had received his hurt.





## CHAPTER XI.

“CHECK!”

**W**HAT are you doing, here, child? You will catch your death of cold.” Hadassah opened her eyes, red and watery, and stared stupidly at the majestic figure above her. Stern as was his tone, she understood dimly that he was not seriously displeased with her, that his look had in it something of benignity, more of compassion. He put out his hand to help her, when she tried to raise herself from the bench.

“It was imprudent in you to fall asleep in the open air,” he continued, tightening his hold, when she staggered in giddiness or weakness.

“It was hot indoors, and there was no place for me to lie down,” she stammered, feeling her way from one word to another, with but one distinct idea in her beclouded brain, to wit, that she must keep as far off as possible from dangerous topics. “I dropped a ring—I mean a rosebud—”

She checked herself, aghast. Was she framing a lie that would betray her presence on this spot last night?

“You are talking in your sleep, I think,” said the Judge,

moved to deeper compassion by her haggard face and confusion. “You had better go to the house and get real rest. Your strength has been over-tried. Take my arm.”

He had never offered it before, but Hadassah, in her stupefaction, forgot this. It was a timely support to her benumbed limbs.

“I have just come from the bedside of my poor boy,” remarked the Judge, presently, with a furtive look at her she did not see.

“Ah! how is he?”

She did not ask it immediately. Her companion thought there was a manifest struggle for self-command. In reality she hesitated, to assure herself that the query was a safe one for her to put. She was growing more dubious of her own discretion each minute.

“Still unconscious—and there are signs of fever. The doctors hold to their first opinion of concussion of the brain.”

Hadassah’s lips moved without sound.

“Concussion of the brain!” she was saying over to herself. What was that? The answer seemed to melt away in her mind before she could seize it, to slip into invisibility as the brown-red brick house at the top of the garden was moving farther and farther from her at each step she made towards it. How powerful the odor of the mignonette and pinks was! And the sun was fearfully bright, his rays multiplying a thousand-fold the dancing scarlet spots that had dazzled her before she went to sleep. They speckled the flower-borders, the gravel walk, the Judge’s broad white vest, her own hand where it rested on his coat-sleeve. There were darker streaks upon her palm and the inside of her fingers, she suddenly bethought

herself, unmindful that she had washed them away hours and hours ago. He must not see these! She must not think of them, or of anything else connected with last night. *Silence à la mort!*

But—coming back to connected thought with a start—Judge Humphreys would suspect something if she did not answer him. What *had* he said? Oh! concussion of the brain! Was that it, or was it *discussion*? It could not be *percussion*—yet one word meant as much to her as the other. How sick she felt! and her ankles doubled under her as she walked; her feet lapped over one another, dragged on the ground, although she tried to lift them. Or, was it that the ground arose higher each instant, until the tops of the Riverview chimneys were out of sight in the clouds?

Steady! she would speak rationally; show how calm and sensible she was. If only her head would not whirl and ache so that she could remember nothing. "Concussion!" That could have nothing to do with—better not name him even to herself while thoughts and tongue were so unmanageable. Yet it sounded like a safe thing to talk about—and here was the Judge wondering at her silence and incivility.

"Concussion of the brain!" she repeated, in a faint, strange voice. The Judge started, looked down at her, and caught her as she fell backward.

When she came to her senses she was on the parlor sofa, with Miss Mahala on one side, Morris Humphreys on the other. His fingers were upon her pulse, his face near hers, and in the mist of the departing swoon, he looked so like his younger and handsomer brother, that she would have called Maxwell's name, but for her weak-

ness. She smiled happily, however, and her hand closed upon his.

“You will soon be all right, now,” he said kindly.

The pulse bounded high and hurriedly, then sank almost into stillness. The brow contracted, the eyes were darkly troubled. Again on the verge of betrayal! Distracted Reason ever and anon made a melancholy rally of her forces, in aid of the faithful heart. She would get away from this, hide herself in her own room; the cool, white solitude that wooed her like a faithful friend in the turmoil within and about her now. Here was Miss Mahala with her panacea—a cup of hot tea; would she drink it? Yes, if it were aqua-fortis, if she were sure it would give her temporary strength. The pain in her head returned, and the dumb nausea which is so like death, and is, I doubt not, often more distressing than the actual severance of soul and body.

“Am I going to be ill?” she asked of Dr. Humphreys.

“I hope not,” he replied consolingly.

“What do you *believe*?”

“Your nervous system has had a severe shock. It will probably be some days before you recover from the effects of it.”

“A severe shock!”

Her mind began to wander as it had done in the garden. She shut her eyes that she might not see the whirling patches of red light, and *made* herself think.

“Please send me home,” was her next speech addressed to Judge Humphreys, who stood at the foot of her lounge. “Now! before I am worse. I must not have a spell of sickness. I cannot!”

Morris began a remonstrance, but his father interposed



"If you wish it, my child, you shall go," he said, strangely gentle in tone and manner. "I will order the carriage at once. Get her ready, Mahala. Morris, you and your wife will see her safe to her father's door."

Miss Mahala growled behind the autocrat's back, that it was "a species of murder to pack her off while she was so out of sorts. A half-day's sleep would bring her up all right, and the girl was worth her weight in gold when there was extra work or trouble in the house."

In less than half an hour, the roomy chariot was brought around, abundant store of pillows packed about Hadassah on the back seat; Morris and his kind-hearted wife upon the front, and the three were driven carefully away down the avenue. Hadassah spoke but twice upon the road—both times in reply to Dr. Humphreys' inquiries as to her comfort. She lay back in her cushioned corner, with her eyes shut, and features composed, dreaming or asleep in appearance—really groping darkly in the land of shadows in which she wandered, for firmer footing and a surer stay; besieged by terrific, yet formless fancies, and weary, weary, ready to fall and perish by the way.

Some rumor of Shelby's mishap, and the premature dispersion of the revellers, had preceded them to the Cross Roads. Dr. Humphreys' explanation to Mr. Todd of the causes of his daughter's seizure was measurably abridged by this circumstance.

"All she needs is quiet and good nursing for a day or two," he assured the parents. "She was so self-possessed, so helpful of wit and hand in the general confusion, that we availed ourselves too liberally of her services. I do

not know what we should have done without her. I hope she will not suffer for her kindness.”

Mr. Todd believed all the praises of his darling, and although concerned at her indisposition, seemed less alarmed than the usually selfish mother. She was greatly overcome by the arrival of the trio, and shocked at Hadassah’s condition, and while assisting Mrs. Humphreys and a servant to get the semi-conscious girl into her bed, was so volubly incoherent in her questions, and so abstracted by turns, that her cousin-in-law lost all patience with her.

“I declare,” she said to her husband, in their ride back to Riverview, “I believe cousin Octavia is slightly insane. She would have the whole story of Shelby’s accident over twice; how he was found and by whom, and when and where; an exact description of the size, shape, and locality of the cut on his head—interjecting, at every third sentence, such expressions as, ‘It *must* have been an accident—don’t you think so?’ ‘He could have hurt himself terribly by a misstep—don’t the doctors think so?’ ‘Nobody would have injured him designedly, you know!’ and a dozen others. Then, she would hear what he said when he revived, and upon learning that he was still unconscious, was anxious to know if you supposed he would be likely to recollect how he got hurt, and how long it would be before he would come to his senses, if ever. She talked to me in a whisper, eking out her meaning with nods and winks—generally drawing me into the entry to be catechised; and I had at length to say that I had told her all I knew, and to plead your haste to get back home to Riverview, as my excuse for leaving her in the middle of a sentence.”

"She is an affected humbug! I always did despise her," said Morris, bluntly. "But her husband is a sensible man, and this daughter is a remarkable girl, in spite of her surroundings and early training. Did you ever hear of any love-affair between her and Shelby?"

"None. What a preposterous notion!"

"It looks so at the first blush, but I am persuaded there is some weightier reason for this seizure than the loss of a few hours' sleep and her attendance upon Shelby last night. True, he intimated to me that Violet had been over-persuaded into the engagement with Max, and that he would probably marry her himself, and this girl always impressed me as being indifferent to him and to the attentions of gentlemen generally, but I can't divest myself of the idea that there is something queer in this attack of hers. She has great strength of mind, and a good constitution, or I should be sure that she is booked for a spell of brain-fever. I will go over again this afternoon if I can be spared. Since she fell sick in our service, the least we can do is to look after her."

Mrs. Morris was very serious.

"I trust sincerely that Shelby has not been flirting with her! The young men of this day are shamelessly unprincipled in these matters. Yet she should have known that a marriage between them was not to be thought of."

Meanwhile, the low, white bed heaved and rocked under Hadassah, like the trough of an unquiet sea, bearing her farther into the great trackless main of delirium. She felt herself drifting, and now and then threw out her hands to catch at straws of memory—a stray plank of fact that might retard the utter destruction of consciousness. The fever Dr. Humphreys dreaded came on by

noon. She did not know him at his afternoon visit. Her eyes were bloodshot, and rolled distressingly. One hand was tightly clenched and hidden in the bedclothes—the fingers of the other opened and shut convulsively, or picked at the coverlet, and her head was not still for one minute. Unrest was stamped upon every lineament—expressed in every gesture, but her mouth was compressed, and her father mentioned as a singular feature of her disease, that she had not spoken since morning, and was with difficulty induced to take food or medicine.

The next day the report was the same, and the next, and so on until the ninth.

"If she were possessed of a dumb devil, she could not be more obstinately silent," said Dr. Humphreys to his father, whose interest in the case had increased rather than diminished since the beginning of her illness. "I incline more and more to the belief that the shock of Shelby's misfortune was greater to her than any of us surmised at the time. One could imagine the existence of some mysterious magnetic sympathy between them, so closely do certain of her symptoms resemble his."

"There was undoubtedly some mutual bond, known to none but themselves," returned the Judge, thoughtfully. "This has been my conviction from the hour I found her sleeping in the arbor, the morning after the accident. Poor girl!"

There may have been elements in his pitying regard for his cousin's child he was too proud to confess to his son. If there remained in his breast one spark of the love he once bore his youngest-born, he must have inclined affectionately to the dauntless young creature who had stood up in defence of the absent—maintained what

she considered the cause of right and honor to his august race. But this he kept to himself then, and long afterward. Had the object of her fancied attachment been in the full enjoyment of health and reason, the chances are that the whole family would have frowned loftily upon her passion as presumptuous, no less than unmaidenly. While he lay upon the outermost confines of the shadowy Border-Land, deaf alike to love and enmity, everything associated with him was sacred.

Could that other insensible and stricken one have known that this was her claim upon her patrician friends' pity and attention, the might of her indignant disdain would have mustered words pertinent and pregnant into her service; she would have burst the bonds of the dumb devil as tow that had been touched with fire. But ignorant of this, as of the other consequences of her protracted illness, she lay prone and mute, torn by a legion of evil things; fighting with them while she strove to resist the undertow that would have washed her into the wild, black Nothingness—bruised, breathless, despairing, but still mute. Her powerful will yet exerted thus much control over the rebellious forces of thought. She moaned often, in bodily or mental torture. Except when she slept, the fingers of her left hand were seldom still. Sometimes, the motion was as of one who wrote fast and tremblingly; then tore the paper into fragments and scattered them to the wind. Again she waved back an invisible enemy, horror and beseeching in her eye. For hours she feigned to wipe one spot on the coverlet with an imaginary sponge she cleaved and squeezed from time to time, and this was the only gesture her attendants could understand. Least of all did they compre-

hend the significance of the locked right hand hidden in her bosom or among the bedclothes, and never unclasped while others were by, and she was never so dimly conscious of their presence.

The story of her sad state went near and far—how she had long cherished a hopeless passion for Shelby Humphreys—so cleverly concealed that many thought she disliked him; how she insisted upon nursing him all the terrible night that followed his hurt, and was discovered by his father next morning insensible upon the spot where he had received it; how, on being told that his case was considered hopeless, she had lapsed into delirium, and now lay as near Death's door as he did. This was the outline of the rumor that ran swiftly hither and yon, and kept five hundred tongues wagging for a fortnight after Violet Haynes' party. People even forgot to inquire what had become of "Poor Max," so absorbing was the interest of this later and nearer scandal.

Dr. Humphreys had intrusted his city practice for a while to a brother physician, and divided his cares between the pair whose oddly analogous symptoms enlisted his professional and humane sympathies. At his morning visit to Hadassah, on the tenth day after her removal to the Cross Roads, Mr. Todd met him with a countenance a shade less gloomy than he had hitherto worn.

"The fever broke last night at twelve o'clock," he said, "and she dropped into a natural slumber which lasted six hours. I cannot say that she was conscious when she awoke; but she was quite calm, took the nourishment we offered without resistance, and fell asleep again.

"Has she spoken?"

"Not a word."

"I wish she had!" rejoined Morris, following the father to the upper chamber—no longer the cool, white solitude Hadassah had pictured to herself in the earlier phantasies of her fever.

Mrs. Todd was matron of the ward, although the night-watches and much of the nursing devolved upon her husband, and traces of her untidiness and sloth cumbered the bed, tables, and floor. Hadassah's hair had been clipped close to her head, and the ruffles on the wristbands of her gown had been torn by her unquiet fingers, and not mended. The counterpane was stained and creased, and the atmosphere of the apartment reeked with fever-breath, aromatic vinegar, and drugs. But the tenant was not offended by the disorder amid which she lay. Her brows were no longer contracted, or her lips tightly folded; yet there remained lines, which she carried to her grave, of the long and stern repression of emotion and utterance.

Dr. Humphreys lifted the right hand very cautiously. It was moist and pliable, but at the touch the sleeper stirred, and opened her eyes to meet his smile of satisfaction. Their depths were cloudy, and vaguely troubled, but her gaze was intent, and seemingly intelligent, and the dry lips fluttered in the effort at articulation. The physician put a cooling drink to them without speaking, still smiling encouragingly.

"Is all right?" she whispered, eagerly.

He nodded assent. How could he trust himself to speak, or her to hear, of that other life and reason that seemed flickering their last?

Her face lit up faintly, but beautifully.

“Thank God!” she breathed, and the eyelids fell together again from very weakness.

With Max’s “face upon her sleep,” she rested tranquilly; too spent in mind to dream, too much dazed still to remember, or to anticipate, when she awoke. She mended hourly from that morning, the more surely that for several days she was conscious of little except animal wants—ate, drank, and slept like a convalescent child who is not yet strong enough to be amused.

At the end of three weeks, her father lifted her from the bed in his arms and set her in her easy-chair by the window. The morning was fresh with dewy breezes, and she gave an exclamation of delight at sight of the waving trees and flower-garden beyond; put out her hand to pick a cluster of honeysuckle that had strayed over the window-sill. A rush of color dyed her wan face as she inhaled the spicy odor; her eyes grew large and wistful.

“Father,” she said, abruptly, “how long have I been sick?”

“We won’t speak of that, dear. You are getting well. That is enough for us to know.”

“Ten days?” persisted Hadassah, with the determined look he knew so well.

“Yes, my child.”

“More than that?” noting his evasive tone.

“A day or two,” he admitted.

“Have any letters come for me?”

Terrified by her increasing agitation, Mr. Todd tried to pacify her by producing a couple from former school fellows, which had arrived during her sickness.

She tossed them aside impatiently.

“You have another! I want it!”



She had detected the secret of his badly-concealed trepidation. Without further demur, he took from his wallet two sealed envelopes.

"I thought you hardly strong enough to read them yet. No one has seen them excepting myself."

He did not add that his wife had, of late, grown pertinaciously curious respecting the contents of the mails, and had plied him with many and perplexing inquiries about their daughter's correspondence. He divined no motive beyond idle inquisitiveness, in the lady's suspicions and researches, but in the remote chance that Hadassah might not like to confide to her mother the contents of the epistles he knew to be from Maxwell, he had secreted them.

Hadassah's fingers were suddenly tense and cold as she undid the covers. The first was bulky, and contained a brief statement of the proceedings of the court, before which Maxwell Humphreys had been tried upon the charges of burglary and arson, and the verdict of acquittal, drawn up in a fair hand and signed by the clerk of the court, attested as true by the presiding magistrate. Secondly, a statement from the Faculty of the college to the effect that, after a careful investigation of the case, they were unable to substantiate the accusation of gaming and other irregularities brought against the same person, late a student in the Institution. Thirdly, an open letter from the president to Judge Humphreys, declaring his belief in his son's honor and rectitude. These were in an unsealed envelope, directed in Maxwell's hand to his father, and wrapped about with a half-sheet of letter-paper.

On this last was written, "I enclose these to you,

Queenie, for two reasons. One is that I wish you, who have all along believed in my innocence, to read for yourself how thoroughly it is proved to others. Again, I would be sure that the papers reach my father. If they should chance—as is more than probable, if they are forwarded with other mail-matter to Riverview—to fall into Shelby’s hands, they will never be seen by him for whom they are intended. I have not added a word of appeal. A letter from my father, written and mailed on the day he received the one of which you were the bearer, bids me ‘establish my innocence by other means than my own protestations. Then,’ he says, ‘I may see reason to reconsider the verdict my judgment has pronounced, and recall you to the home the intelligence of your misdeeds has darkened. Until you can bring me conclusive evidence that your preceptors, the officers of the law, and your brother have combined to slander you, you are no son of mine.’ He subjoins the information that ‘Miss Hayne’ declines to hold any communication with me until he shall sanction the renewal of our intercourse.

“Bitter words these, and hard to be borne by an innocent man! I obey him literally, but with slight hope of reestablishment in his favor. If you could have sent me good news I should have heard from you ere this. Unless the enclosed are effectual in restoring me to the full confidence of my parents and Violet, you had better not answer this yet awhile. I shall know how to interpret your silence. I write by this mail to your father a single line, to make sure that this *pacquet* has been delivered into your hands.

“I presume from the fact that you did not recall me on the morning succeeding our last interview that no

evil consequences followed the encounter of that evening. That Shelby will in any event do me all the harm he can, I am persuaded. I care little for his enmity unless he should attempt to compromise you. My only request of my relatives is to be allowed to speak for myself when these papers shall have prepared the way. My father is a stern man, but he used to be a just.

"As for yourself, dearest, noblest of friends! if, in days to come, I shall be able to make some amends to you for all you have dared and endured for my sake, I shall be a proud and a happy man. I shall never forget that in the darkest hour of my adversity you were true as steel, and brave as true.

"Ask Violet if I shall send her rosebud back. It was lent me for three weeks, you know. If I keep it, it must be with her permission.

"Ever truly and gratefully,                    **MAX.**"

Drops of sweat stood upon Hadassah's forehead as she unfolded the second letter:

"I have waited a fortnight," it said, "for news from Riverview; waited, the penniless beneficiary of a stranger's bounty, with a heart from which hope has surely and painfully died. You received my dispatches, I know, for your father wrote me a few words to the effect that the 'letter for his daughter had come safely to hand, and should be delivered as addressed.' That was all. I did not expect a sympathizing epistle from him, for I had not asked it. Yet knowing as I do what your silence portends, I could wish you had written to me. A letter from you would have mitigated somewhat this gnawing heart-lunger. Forgive me! I must be madly unreason-

able, indeed, when I chide you for doing just what I directed.

“My father will none of me, then, and my promised wife has abjured her troth! I do not believe that you have deserted me, but that you shrank from giving me pain. If I do not hear from you within the week I shall enlist for the remainder of the war. The country needs men. I am wanted by nobody and nothing else. And Mexico is so far away I shall be as completely lost to those of my blood and name as if I were already dead.”

“Father!” The sharp tone made Mr. Todd drop his newspaper. “Tell me *truly* what day of the month this is!”

He named it.

Her answer was to pass over to him the paper she had just read, and to bury her face in her hands with a groan.

The date was ten days old!





## CHAPTER XII.

“IT WAS ALL MY FAULT!”

**A** YEAR and a month had gone by. Light-footed to the happy, shod with gold to the fortunate, heavy of gait and with tramp like grinding iron to the sorrowful and unsuccessful.

The mark of the mailed heel was upon Hadassah Todd's face and heart as she sat alone in the sunset upon the steps of the front portico at Riverview after a fatiguing day in the service of her wealthy kinspeople. The house wore an air of smart expectancy within and without. Every window-pane shone; the oaken floors were polished to the last degree of slipperiness—flowers bloomed upon mantels, stands, and toilette-tables. There were green boughs in the fireplaces, and through the window behind Hadassah was visible Maxwell's portrait, which had been removed to the garret on the day of Violet's party. It hung in its old place now, the most conspicuous on the parlor wall; the frame was garlanded with evergreens, and two flags were festooned above it. This was Violet's handiwork, as was the green and beflowered “WELCOME!” over the main arch of the portico. Hadassah's attitude and visage denoted neither triumph nor

expectancy. Her dress was black *barège*, her sister Juliette having died at Christmas. Her hair was plainly arranged, and the fashion of her attire simple as a nun's. She sat with her elbow upon her knee, her chin in her hand, and her eyes were fixed upon dreary vacancy. Blind they might be to external objects, but before her mental vision the panorama of twelve months and more was slowly passing.

Such a long, darksome time it was since that day in early August, when she opened the delayed packet to read that through her, Maxwell's last, best chance of rehabilitation was blighted, that while she lay, dumbly unconscious of the flying hours and weeks, he had sickened with suspense into despair and desperation. Mr. Todd had hastened to lay the proofs of his son's innocence before the Judge, and the latter, still proud and tenacious of parental dignity, at heart wounded that his boy had taken him at his hasty word and forborne to address a syllable of appeal or vindication to himself, had made another and a distant relative his medium of communication—penned a brief formal letter of recall. Hadassah wrote by the same mail, with a trembling hand that had to pause for strength and steadiness at the end of every line. Her father begged that she would accept his services as amanuensis; the doctor prohibited the attempt as perilous to life and reason, but she was not to be turned aside from her purpose. The letter finished and sealed, she gave it to her father to direct; then motioned him to lay her back upon the bed; turned her face to the wall, and did not move or speak again for hours.

Maxwell opened both letters on the eve of his first battle, for they were directed to the college town he had left

before they reached it, and went astray more than once in their south-western journey. He read first that he could return to his father's house whenever he chose, since the sentence of the law had wiped the soil from the honorable name he bore; that his parents and friends hoped the severe lesson he had received would be salutary, and that his future conduct might efface from the public mind the recollection of past imprudence and folly. While writing thus leniently of what had afflicted him beyond the power of expression, Judge Humphreys did not seek to disguise his disapprobation of the spirit his son had displayed throughout the affair, and especially of the rash threat contained in the note to Hadassah Todd. He had not seen it himself, but Mr. Todd had reported the substance of it. He, Judge Humphreys, wished the headstrong boy to understand that if he enlisted, he must serve out his time in the ranks. The father would not interfere to get a discharge, or secure a commission for him. The consequences of his unwarrantable act must be borne by him who had committed it. Not a line of home-news, no mention of mother, brothers, or betrothed. The writer only remained "Very truly, Morris Humphreys."

It was not a harsh letter. But it was a cruel one, and the young recruit's heart beat stormily in the reading.

"Be it so!" he said, aloud, letting it drop into the muddy trench at his feet that he might open the other.

The flaming torch, stuck into a forked stake near the watch-fire, cast a wavering light upon the sheet, but the characters were certainly unlike Hadassah's clear chirography. It was a crooked scrawl he must have deciphered with difficulty in the day-time. It was as well, perhaps, that this was so, although the pains it cost him to make

out the writer's meaning drove him nearly frantic, for he thus arrived slowly at the truth.

His brother Shelby was an imbecile—for life, it was feared. The brain had never recovered from the shock of his severe fall. The fever that ensued had abated in nine days' time, and bodily health was slowly returning. But he had not spoken a coherent sentence. The attendant physicians were persuaded that the injury was beyond repair.

"It was all my fault," wrote the sick girl. "From first to last, I managed your affairs badly. But for me, you would not have been in the garden that night. In defending me from insult you threw Shelby down. My illness has kept your letters from your father. You will hate me when you think of it all, but you cannot hate me as I do myself. Nobody suspects how the thing happened. They all believe it was an accident—that he slipped, and falling, struck his head against the stone. It is best so. You did not mean to hurt him. No good can come of confession, or I would confess my share in the misfortune. You were not to blame. *Do believe and remember this!* I have not spoken to any one of your visit here or to Riverview, and I was the only person who saw you. This was providential. I am very weak and sick still. I think and hope I shall not live long. I trust that I shall not be here when you come home. The sight of me will be odious to you, for it is I who have done you more harm than all your enemies. Yet Heaven knows how earnestly I desired to serve you, Max! Recollect this and do not curse me when you have read this wretched story. Forgive me, if you can."

The next day's fight was bloody, but the new recruits



behaved well, most of them with the steady bravery of veterans. One performed prodigies of valor, exposed his life an hundred times, and in the thickest of the fray saved that of his colonel, who took him into favor from that hour. He got a lieutenant's commission after the third engagement; next a captaincy, and honorable mention in home dispatches. The publication of these in the newspapers carried the tidings of his promotion to Riverview. He had answered his father's letter by the respectful announcement that he had enlisted prior to its receipt, and that he should endeavor to do his duty in the position he had selected.

Hadassah also heard from him, but no one else saw the epistle meant to comfort her.

"I cannot bear that you should blame yourself in the least for what has happened," he wrote. "I know how honestly and earnestly you sought to serve one so unworthy as myself. I shall remem'ber this, and not your innocent failure. My false, inexcusable step—that for which you must in your heart despise me as I do myself, was in leaving you to bear the consequences of my passionate violence. Let me know from time to time how Shelby is. The brand of Cain is upon my soul, whether it is ever set upon my brow or not.

"I have returned Violet's latest token of interest in my guilty self, in a letter renouncing all pretensions to her hand."

Judge Humphreys cast aside the last remnant of resentful reserve in the glad glow that interfused his whole being at reading the paragraph which proclaimed his boy a hero, to whom his country's thanks were due. The dusty portrait was dragged from its hiding place, and the father

on his return from a circuit of his courts during which he had been overwhelmed with congratulations, sat himself down, and penned a long, loving letter to the absentee, acknowledging that he had been in the wrong in chiding him even indirectly for a fault which he had not committed; had acted weakly and unworthily in allowing any chain of circumstantial evidence, however strong, to disturb his confidence in his child's truth and sound principles, and imploring reconciliation.

"I have grown very old since you saw me," he said. "Shelby's sad condition is a heavier sorrow than his death would have been. I have but one pleasurable anticipation—the thought of the day when you shall stand again within the homestead you are to inherit—my pride and prop, as you were in other days my joy. I think to be balked of this would strike me into my grave. Your mother's health is infirm. She grieves over her boys—the afflicted and the absent. But the glorious news brought us by the late mails has lent her new life."

In due time arrived a reply—dutiful, affectionate, humble. Those who read it could not identify the writer with the reckless, light-hearted boy they had always known as brave and generous. He wrote like one whom heavy chastening had rendered distrustful of self and of Fate—as a sorrowing prodigal, falling at his father's feet with the cry, "I have sinned against Heaven and against thee!" not the warrior, flushed with victory and honors, compelling respect and admiration from those who had wronged him. Thenceforward, the correspondence was regular and voluminous.

The war was over now. There was a reception in

Louisville of the returned braves, and the Humphreys—father and mother, with Violet Hayne, more radiantly beautiful than ever, had gone up to bear their part in the ovation. This evening, they were expected home. Hadassah, having helped Miss Mahala make ready for the domestic jubilee, and seen Shelby, after a restless day, sink into a sleep she hoped would last far into the night, had brought her tired body and more weary spirit out into the pure air and mellow sunlight, to prepare as best she could for the dreaded interview which was none of her seeking. So far from this, she would have resisted all importunities to come to Riverview for the next year, if she could have done so without shirking the most painful and binding of earthly duties—the care of the semi-idiotic creature who was fast outgrowing all resemblance to the trim, sleek Shelby of old.

Hadassah's first visit to Riverview after her recovery was an era in the history of his malady. Up to that time he had known neither his parents, brother, or Violet; had seldom spoken at all, and then in broken phrases like a child, with much grimacing and mouthing; had refused food for days together, and been otherwise unmanageable. Miss Mahala literally dragged Hadassah into his presence. The girl's strong will and sterling sense had begotten in the housekeeper's mind respect and confidence, and she rated her intellectual attainments above those of the many doctors who had seen Shelby since his accident. Judge Humphreys had insisted strenuously that Hadassah should pass a week or two at his house. The change of scene would do her good, he urged; and her parents, flattered by his interest in their child, followed up his importunities with theirs until she yielded. If she were to re-

fuse to visit Shelby's chamber at all, during her stay, it would excite remark—perhaps awaken suspicion. And, since she must see him, the sooner it was over the better.

Thus encouraging her failing heart, she repressed the outward tokens of the trepidation that seized her when Miss Mahala dropped her arm and paused to unlock the lunatic's chamber-door. The sight of the key made Hassalah's flesh creep.

“Must you lock him up?” she whispered, fearfully.

“Obliged to, child! It won't do to let him wander about the house by himself! You've *no* idea!” with a significant shake of the head. “Now, I want you to tell me *exactly* what you think of him?”

He was in an easy-chair before the looking glass. He was never so well content as when he could sit, thus, for hours, mopping and mowing and slaving, the saliva running down his unshaven chin. He would not let a razor come near his face, nor wear a collar. His neck, as is often the case with men whose appetites are strong, was disproportionably thick for one so slender in waist and limb, and his shirt was open at the throat, displaying this peculiarity the more conspicuously because his hair had been cropped short at the back of his head to allow the attendants to dress his wound. In front it had tumbled down to his eyebrows, giving his physiognomy a still more bestial air. He was muttering or growling to himself but there was no articulate sound in the gutturals. Miss Mahala spoke to him.

“Shelby! I have brought a lady to see you.”

He did not withdraw his leaden eyes from the mirror, or cease to chafe his elbows with his hands, the arms

being crossed upon his breast, but went on with his mumble.

"If anybody can stir him up, it is you," said the house-keeper. "I've said all along I wouldn't give him up till you'd tried. I used to see him listenin' to every word you said, and watchin' you on the sly. Violet Hayne may b'lieve he was in love with her, but 'twas with her money. I hope I may be forgiven for sayin' so, but I know what I know. Say something right sharp to him, jest as you had a way of doin' when he bothered you, in old times!"

Instead of this, Hadassah knelt, by him, her eyes and soul filled with horror and pity that bowed her to the dust at sight of the wreck she felt she had helped make.

"Shelby!" she said, gently—it sounded to Miss Mahala tenderly—"do you know me?"

The hands ceased their mechanical friction, and the mumbling intermitted.

"Make him look at you! Shake him!" suggested Miss Mahala.

Shudderingly, Hadassah touched his arm.

"Shelby! I have come to see how you are to-day! Will you speak to me?"

Slowly the shaggy head turned—the lightless eyes rested upon her, and he laughed—the unmusical chuckle that had mocked her that fatal night.

"Haddie Todd! pretty girl, pretty girl!" he said, indistinctly, as if his tongue were tied down in the middle. "Clever girl! By Jove!" fawningly offering to stroke her head, as one might seek to appease a dreaded animal.

*That* she could not suffer. His touch was still an abomination.

"Try him again." Miss Mahala withheld her from ris-

ing. "He hasn't said as much at one time before since he was took. Nor known a living soul of us. You may be intended by the Lord to be the instrument of curing him."

"Oh! if I were!" broke in an anguished sob from the girl's lips. "I would exchange places with him this moment, gladly, thankfully! This is too dreadful!"

Shelby again moved his hand toward her.

"Pretty Haddie! good girl! She won't let anybody hurt poor me!"

Then he began to whimper, and could only be pacified by her promise to stay with and comfort him.

The singular influence of her presence and voice, and, as time went on, the implicit obedience he accorded her in his most ungovernable fits, became established facts, of which the family were not slow to avail themselves. If he were noisy or obstinate, if he were to be coaxed out for a ride or a walk, a messenger was dispatched to the Cross Roads for Hadassah, and she always obeyed the summons at whatever cost of personal convenience. Her father complained of this at length, when the novelty of his compassion wore off. The draught upon his daughter's sympathies, time, and strength was severe, he felt, and that there was degradation in the offices she rendered, even when their recipient was a Humphreys.

Hadassah silenced him.

"It is all I can do for him, father. I ought to be thankful it is so much. I may have doubts about other duties. I *know* that this is appointed me by Providence; that I can delegate it to nobody else."

"If it were your favorite cousin Maxwell, now, I could

understand your devotion better," Mr. Todd had said once. "But I thought you disliked this one."

"I did." Her face grew white in a spasm of pain. "I can't explain it, father; but don't hinder my performance of this task. It is *owed*."

The while her loathing senses shrank from seeing, hearing, or touching the mindless Thing—the gross body from which all perception of delicacy and neatness had gone with the finer intellectual qualities. This was part of her penance for her share in the irreparable wrong done him. Moreover, Max would have had her show all care and gentleness to his brother, had he guessed what was his need of the charitable offices she rendered. The burdensome cross had this one sorrowful wreath laid upon it.

"For *his* sake!" It was the watchword that impelled her to irksome labor; kept up her fainting spirit; hushed repining, when she would have cried out against the curse laid upon her free, young life as too grievous to be borne.

Shelby was very troublesome, as the season of Maxwell's return drew near. Without apprehending the meaning of the bustle of preparation that pervaded the premises, he was disturbed by it, and vented his excitement in loud cries, in walking up and down "the office," to which he had been removed early in the summer, and in breaking whatever brittle thing he could lay his hands upon. A stalwart negro man was his attendant by day and night, and, next to Hadassah, Miss Mahala had most control over him; but of late the combined efforts of the three were requisite to keep him tolerably quiet.

"I *do* hope he will behave himself the night Max gets

home!" said Violet, anxiously. "He mortifies me awfully by his yells and dreadful laughs when I have company. It is a real nuisance having him on the place. I don't see why uncle doesn't send him to the asylum."

"Judge Humphreys is not likely to send his son from home while he can be safe and comfortable here," rejoined Hadassah. "The care of him is a sacred duty."

Yet she inly echoed Violet's hope in this, the first leisure hour of the busy day. She would save Maxwell every pang that human affection and ingenuity could avert. Of sparing herself she did not think. The homecoming the others made a festival of, was to her a season of direst humiliation. Despite Maxwell's assurances that he did not censure her for her mismanagement and deplorable failures in judgment; for the deception she had practised upon him respecting the result of the combat that had so-nearly ended in fratricide, she was sure her place in his esteem was gone forever; that the eyes which had ever beamed brotherly kindness upon her would now be cold, his greetings such as a casual acquaintance might bestow.

"Why should he respect me?" she thought, leaning her aching head against a pillar of the piazza. "I have brought him nothing but sorrow and disappointment. I wish I had insisted upon going away this afternoon. I shall be the blot upon his triumphal reception; the shadow that must remind him of the living Horror shut up in the house out there in the yard. Yet if my remaining here will save him greater pain by controlling that poor mad creature, I ought not to shrink from the trial to myself. He is farther above me now than in the days we passed together before this trouble overtook us. He is



the popular hero, with his laurels thick and fresh upon him, who has found oblivion, if not consolation, in fame. I can never hope to be anything higher than a maniac's keeper; expect no reward save the secret consciousness that I am serving the man I love by performing this office."

Shining clouds of dust arose in the highway as the sun smiled "Good-night!" over the hills. The cavalcade was in sight—three carriages containing Morris' family and the Riverview party. Hadassah arose precipitately, possessed by sudden and unrestrainable terror, ready to flee anywhere, to avoid the meeting now that it was so close upon her. She could not hope for a cordial reception in the moment when Maxwell's return to his old home would revive poignant recollections of what he had undergone in his exile, and the causes that contributed to that suffering. And a stern look, a curt word, would cut her to the heart.

Pursued by this fancy, she fled through the yard into the garden, and by the nearest route to the "pleached walk." She went thither often when she wished to be alone; for everybody else shunned the place, as if the reason lost there had haunted it—a dispossessed and wandering spirit. She made it a part of her punishment to pace the lonely shades when remorse and longing were at their height, never dreaming that, from the Judge down, the household still nursed the figment of her attachment to Shelby; supposed that mournful and loving memories of him attracted her to the deserted spot, and, in this belief, kindly respected the privacy of her grief. She sought the retreat now, because, as she hastily reasoned, Max would not go near it. She would have

plunged into Tartarus to evade him and the mute reproach of his look.

The forsaken walk was no longer neat. The ground was strewn with rotting fruit, the odor of which hung in the breezeless air. The benches were littered with leaves, and the lower branches of the grape-vines trailed on the earth from one side to the other. It was no lovers' promenade now. The stained stone at the upper end guarded the fugitive from intrusion. The garden was long; but the evening air was still and clear, and she heard the far-off clamor of the arrival, the negroes' chorused exclamations of welcome, Leo's joyful bay of welcome—and all was quiet again. The honored guest had been escorted to his room, and Violet, in hers, was bedecking her comely body for a second wooing and fresh triumphs, perhaps for a speedy bridehood. She had greatly exulted in the honors her former lover had won, and, despite the fact of her present engagement to handsome, rich Rob Wharton, had not scrupled to avow to Hadassah her inclination to a return to the sentiment she had expressed the evening of Shelby's appearance with the evil tidings of his brother's disgrace, to wit: that she "could not do better than to marry Max." Perhaps the reconciliation was already accomplished; for Violet had gone to Louisville with the resolve to be irrevocable.

"I am glad I have grown prettier, and don't look a day older than when he went away," she said to her looking-glass in Hadassah's presence. "Won't he feel queer when he sees me? I have a great mind, just for the fun of the thing, to take up our engagement where we left off at our last parting; act as if nothing had happened to

alter my feelings. I did send him a rosebud, you remember, and a kind message when everybody else was crying him down. That was a lucky stroke."

"I thought you meant to marry Rob Wharton," said Hadassah curtly.

The time had passed when the absurdity of the belle's transparent vanity amused her as the trickeries of a child might do. Violet lamented openly that "Haddie loved her no longer," and was often "right down hateful in scolding her for her nonsensical talk."

"I did," she admitted with engaging openness. "I really like the fellow, and he just *adores* me! He is rich as cream, and is a darlingal together. I am by no means sure that I shall give up dear old Rob. But it can do no harm to try my hand on the warrior. I always did enjoy driving two in hand, you know. Don't you spoil my game by telling Max that I have said 'Yes,' to Rob. I am so glad I haven't let him ask uncle yet."

The probability was that she had won back her errant suitor, said Hadassah, to her miserable self. It was all right—just—inevitable, that parents, brothers, and betrothed should be gathered into the sanctuary of a happy home, and she be shut out, with her accusing conscience, into the stormy wilderness of memory. But, for all that, she bemoaned her fate, crouched upon the bench where Judge Humphreys had found her in her fever-sleep, her arms on the rustic elbow, embracing her head, and the bursting sobs deafening her to the hurried tread in the main alley behind her.

The newcomer saw her through the vines before she was aware of his vicinity. He was bronzed and bearded out of likeness to the handsome student, and habited in

the undress uniform he had donned to please his father. A splendid-looking soldier, but with the saddest depths in his eyes man can know for himself and live. He had the face and manner of thirty—not twenty-three. He stopped for an instant at sight of the lonely weeper, and a strange expression convulsed his features, a paroxysm that left him olive-pale. Then he put aside the boughs with ungentle movement, and before she, startled by the sound, could spring to her feet, he raised her and kissed her forehead.

"My poor Queenie! My dear, faithful girl! How much you have done and suffered for me!"





## CHAPTER XIII.

“CAN IT BE TRUE?”

**M**ISS MAHALA told me I should find you here,” said Maxwell, reseating his trembling companion, but keeping her hand fast locked in his. “Also, that you ran away after the carriages were in sight. Was it to avoid meeting me?”

“Yes!”

Hadassah’s head drooped and the monosyllable was spoken timidly.

“Am I so repulsive to you, then?”

He relinquished her hand, but there was a gleam, and not of resentment, in his eye.

“I thought you would not be pleased to see *me*, that I would remind you of what you would rather forget,” uttered Hadassah in sad humility, that went to his heart.

His face was glooming with driving shadows as he made reply.

“Remind me! As if I could forget! And were this possible, I ought to be kept ceaselessly in mind of the need of repentance and atonement. I have heard all

from my father and mother, Hadassah, how nobly you have acted as my representative while I was away—how bravely you have borne the cross that should have been laid upon my shoulders, and not upon those of another, from the first. I cannot thank you. Such services can only be repaid by deeds, and the devotion of my life to your happiness would still leave me in your debt. Don't interrupt me! I do not say this in the enthusiasm of gratitude. My father has written to me in every letter of your heroic goodness—tireless as self-denying. But, last night, we had a long talk when my mother had gone to bed, and I comprehended better than before the nature and extent of your labor and sacrifices. I came home to my native State with a settled purpose. I would confess all to my father so soon as I should stand face to face with him. I had written the story to him twenty times, and torn up the letters lest they should be his death-warrant. But I had studied how to break the news skillfully, and by degrees—counted upon the excitement of reunion to sustain him under the shock. Morris and I smoked together after dinner yesterday, and he imparted to me that which staggered my resolution. Did you ever suspect that my mother had a mortal disease upon her—enlargement of the heart?"

"I know she has been subject to fainting spells, and violent palpitations for two years and more. I did not suspect their cause."

"There is no doubt, he tells me, that her days are few, and that any unusual agitation may abridge these. My father understands this thoroughly, and watches to guard her from such danger. Her distress and anxiety within

the past twelve months have accelerated the progress of her malady. More of my work, you see!"

Hadassah—rallying from the surprise of the meeting, and the altered manner which had overawed her for a time—it was so foreign to her recollections of the gay boy with whom she had frolicked, and the frenzied exile she had guided at her will—lifted her head and would be heard.

"It was not your work," she said eagerly. "The disease would have had its way, in any circumstances. Nor do I acknowledge the need or expediency of confession to man. It is the prostration of the spirit, not the moan of the tongue, that finds forgiveness with Heaven. The rashness of a lad who had no malice in his heart, would not be visited by earthly justice with a severe penalty. Your grief and repentance, your deeds of valor and of mercy, have already made amends to your Maker."

Maxwell's imperative gesture arrested the words upon her lips.

"You do not know what you are saying, child! I *had* malice in my heart when I sprang at my brother's throat, and the fury of the murderer was in my clutch. I was sorry when I became cool, and thought of what might have happened. I was distracted by remorse when I learned what mischief I had done. But remorse nor good works can atone for, any more than they can undo, a crime. I have lost a man his reason. It matters not how often and how fervently I have wished it had been my life instead. The terrible fact remains unchanged. God knows it, and His angels, and you and I. It has been in my mind continually; in the camp, on the march, in the battlefield—a sleepless, avenging spectre—from the moment I

heard of it until now. Perhaps I had hoped that confession would make the load more endurable. I had heard of such things, and I was sadly weary. My determination to tell all, and to deliver myself up to merited punishment, may have had this strain of selfishness in it. If so, I ought not to regret that circumstances seem to discourage this for the present. I must receive my father's blessing, and my mother's kiss, and the applause of my old neighbors, without disclaim; conscious, the while, that love would change to loathing, praise to execration, if they suspected the dark secret I carry in my breast. One resolution, however, I can put into execution. I can strive, by painstaking love, to fill to my parents the place of two sons instead of one, and to the unhappy victim of my violence I can pay all the attention his condition will allow. It is little enough that can be done for him at the best. To remain at Riverview, to see and hear him daily, will be purgatory to me. There is, therefore, the more reason why I should accede to my father's proposition to study law with him, and eventually succeed to the practice he has for the most part relinquished. As my Uncle Maxwell's heir, I am, as you may know, independent of pecuniary assistance from my parents. My dreams of a brilliant career of travel, and adventure, and study in other lands are as if they had not been. It is just that I should put them all behind me, with other hopes and fancies innocent men may indulge.

"You wonder why I tell you all this now? It is the prolix introduction to a question I came to this spot, so memorable in both our lives, to ask you. Hadassah! knowing me as you do—all my errors and all my sins—my bitter



Past, and the yet more bitter Future which is my destiny—will you—can you marry me?"

She started away from him with an ejaculation of astonishment or indignation, but he checked her.

"Answer me one or two things frankly before I press my suit. Speak as if the Max who died last year—your cousin and playfellow—invited your confidence. My father and mother ascribed your severe illness to a secret attachment to their second son; are disposed to think that he reciprocated it, because your influence exceeds theirs, or that of any one else. He is docile to your eye and voice, they tell me, and that he must often have been uncomfortable—perhaps have died of cold or starvation, but for your control over his waywardness. They speak, futhermore, of your boundless patience and zeal in his behalf; but on this point I needed no assurance. I did not credit, for a second, the fiction of your hidden attachment. I believe, on the contrary, that you disliked and feared Shelby. The conversation I overheard gave me a clue to the reason. I am persuaded that, at heart, he loved you in his gross way, as well as it was in his nature to love any one."

Hadassah put out her hand with a gesture of aversion.

"Not a word more of that!" she said, faintly. "The thought of it makes me hate him yet!"

"Nevertheless, there may be some other love in your heart that may make it impossible for you to become my wife. Is this so?"

It was growing dusky in the shadiest corners of the arbor, but the sunset clouds cast light enough through the opposite arch to show him the crimson of the averted face, and the tremor that ran over her.

"You do love somebody else, then?" he said, with increasing gentleness, and the nearest approach to a smile that had lighted his face during the interview. "Don't be afraid of me, Queenie!"

"You are mistaken, entirely mistaken," she returned, impetuously. "But you are surely not in your right mind when you ask me to marry you. You cannot—you do not love me! I thought you would always love Violet!"

"Didn't I tell you that the boy whose confidante you were died thirteen months ago? Whether you cast in your lot with mine or not—and I could not blame you for refusing to do this—she and I are as widely sundered as if we had never fancied we loved one another. From you I can disguise nothing. As I have told you, every page of my life has been read by your eyes. I could not ask any light-hearted girl, ignorant of sorrow and the existence of crime, to share my labors and my cares. Least of all could I expect such self-renunciation, such steadfastness of duty as my wife must possess, from a darling of fortune like Violet Hayne. But the deed that overshadows my path has darkened yours also. You, being innocent, have been punished with the guilty. Yours is not a congenial home. If you will come to me, you shall be freed from the privations and homely tasks so unsuited to a woman of your mind and education. I will cherish you very tenderly, Hadassah, if only in memory of all you have passed through and performed in my behalf. My mother may die at any moment, and the old house be left without a mistress—"

"There is Violet," interrupted Hadassah, involuntarily. "It must still be her home."

He bit his lip, got up with an air of vexation, and walked quite to the lower end of the "pleached walk"—then slowly back to her, his eyes on the ground, his hand p'aying with his beard.

"You surely understand," he said, in forced calmness, and even more kindly than before, "that you have used an argument in favor of, not against, my speedy marriage. It would not be expedient for her, in the contingency I have named, to remain at Riverview without a matron or companion of the same sex. I have pledged myself never to leave my father while he lives. It would hardly be kind or sisterly in you to exile her!" trying to speak lightly.

"But she will—she may marry in time, herself," answered Hadassah, hardly knowing, in her confusion, what she said.

Maxwell strolled to the upper end of the walk, stood with his back to her, staring down at the stained stone step. His face was colorless when she again saw it.

"It is evident," he said, "that either the manner or the subject of my petition is displeasing to you. If my talk seems tame and practical, it is because I am too much in earnest to play upon words or dally with figures of rhetoric. Am I personally disagreeable to you, Queenie?"

The exceeding mournfulness of his half-smile looked like wounded affection, and the poor guard of caution, incredulity, and maidenly reserve she had striven in her bewilderment to raise, beaten down by the thrilling conviction that she was indeed beloved, she fell upon his breast with a cry of uncontrollable emotion.

"Do not tempt me beyond my strength! Max! Max! I have loved you all my life!"

He put both arms around her—held her closely, it seemed fondly, stroking the bowed head, silently—waiting, she thought, until she could listen further. But the dimming light fell upon features darkened and wrung as by mortal pain; eyes that looked drearily beyond her, first to the old mansion-house, then to the blood-stained stone.

“This is a sad betrothal for you, dear child,” he said, as her sobs abated. “You deserve a happier and a better bridegroom.”

She laughed with a hysterical gasp, but the gleam upon her tearful face was heart-sunshine. All the windows of her soul had been thrown open to the day of unspeakable beauty and gladness he had brought with him.

“His wife! his wife! always with him! nearest and dearest, forever and ever,” sang seraph voices in every chamber.

“Oh!” she sighed, lifting her face, while her head lay still upon his shoulder, “I have been heart-sick and hungry and faint for so long! I felt that I deserved all that; but what have I ever done that God should give me this glorious gift, your love? My king! my hero! *Can it be true?*”

Maxwell kissed her cheek gravely, but affectionately.

“Don’t delude yourself with the imagination that there is anything king-like or heroic about me, and my love is a gift not worth being thankful for. But it is true, dear, that I have asked you to be my wife, and I will try to make you happy. It is growing late, and the dews are heavy at this season. I will begin my duties as guardian by taking you into the house.” He drew her hand into his arm. “The sooner this is known by your relatives

and mine, the better for us both. The sooner you come to me for good and all, the better for me. I need you, Queenie! I will not press this point just now, but you must think of it, and give me an answer at an early day."

Through the garden they went, with the loitering step that becomes lovers—one hardly feeling the earth beneath her, conscious only of her exceeding joy, and Nature's sweet sympathy as expressed in the cool balminess of the air, the tender blue of the sky, and the kindling stars; hearkening with thrilling pulses to the pæan Hope sang in her heart, leaning, in restful ecstasy unknown and undreamed of until this hour, upon her beloved. The other treading silently, with bent head, and gray, set features, crushing hopes, memories, regrets, under his feet.

Violet floated out to them upon the back piazza, robed in filmy white, with a tricolored scarf crossing her right shoulder, and fastened under the left arm; a wreath of starry-eyed jessamine entwining the knot of hair at the back of her head, and trailing upon her neck. Her skin was dazzlingly fair in the uncertain glimmer of the swooning light—her eyes wide, limpid, dangerous. She put her hand, firm and pure as alabaster, upon Maxwell's, while she made up a tempting mouth for Hadassah to kiss.

"I am awfully angry with you both for running away. If I were not so happy to-night, I would give you *such* a scolding for monopolizing one another; you, especially, Haddie, when you know how we grudge losing one minute of our warrior's company, 'the soldier returned from the war.' But I forgive you this once, in consideration of the strength of the temptation and your old intimacy. You must have oceans of talk for one another, but you'll

let me hear it too, won't you? By the way, dearie, aunt was hunting everywhere for you just now. I asked her if I wouldn't do, but she laughed and said, 'No, indeed.' Somehow, I never will 'do,' when you are to be had," with whimsical pettishness. "It is very amiable and generous in me not to be jealous of you, you blessed old Haddie."

All this, while the cool, plump hand rested upon her former lover's wrist. She blushed at the discovery, which she did not make until Hadassah left them to seek Mrs. Humphreys.

"I beg your pardon!" withdrawing it hastily. "I hardly know what I am doing to-night. I am in such a flutter of delight, and it seems so deliciously natural to have you back, I cannot be proper and dignified as I should be. And it pleases me to fancy for a little while—to 'make believe,' as we used to say when we were children—that time has gone backward, and placed us where we were a year and more ago. Max!"—putting her hands together and raising her matchless eyes—an attitude copied from the print of "Saint Cecilia listening to the angel choir"—"have you forgiven me for doubting you for one instant? If you could know what I suffered in giving you up!"

"Suffered! you have no conception of the true meaning of the word!"

He moved impatiently away, not daring to trust himself to say more, but she kept at his side, slipped her hand into his arm, and drew him to the most secluded corner of the portico.

"Don't speak to me so harshly; you break my heart!" her voice shaking piteously. "You think because I was terrified by your father, and coaxed by Shelby's slippery

tongue into a half-promise to stop writing to you, that I was false! But I did love you all the time, although everybody except poor Haddie was against you. She can tell you how dreadfully I grieved."

"Say nothing more! I thank you for reminding me that one person was true to me throughout. It makes no difference now whether you joined in with the rest, or not. You let me go when you were bidden. I find no fault with you. That Past is dead and buried."

"Have you never heard of resurrections?" asked Violet softly, and coaxingly arch, pleased, moreover, with herself for what she considered a neat turn of speech and figure of fancy.

He caught her hands in his in a grasp that made her wince. "That can never be! I mean just what I say. If we are to live under the same roof, it must be with the understanding that we are acquaintances, nothing more, now nor ever. Henceforward, there must be no allusions, remote or direct, to the relations we once bore to each other. It would be folly and worse to talk or think of such things."

Violet read, as she believed, contradiction to words and accent in the tight clasp, the shaking form, the deep, fiery eyes she felt even in the dusk. She said to herself that he looked like a prince in his uniform; that he used to make love to her more beautifully than any other of her beaux, unless it were poor Shelby, who was now *hors du combat* for life, and that she meant to fall in love again, "right off." She had a graceful way of carrying out coarse ideas, as she showed now by sinking her face suddenly upon the fingers binding hers. Maxwell felt her warm, clinging lips, then a tear.

"I will obey you, Max!" with a sound of gulped sobs. "You shall not be annoyed by my *souvenirs*. I will make no advances, no complaints. But oh! it is not easy to forget! Remember this, and be patient with my weakness."

He had esteemed himself chastened in desire, impulse, and imagination by the furnace which had tried him. Honor and duty bound him to another woman, as true to him as this shallow-hearted girl had proved herself to be false. He had met Violet the day before, without the quiver of a nerve; talked to her courteously, and with composure, which surprised himself no less than it did her, and confirmed him in the belief that he had conquered the boyish phantasy which had hitherto seemed a real and absorbing passion. But neither the heart nor blood of twenty-three is to be tamed in two or three lessons. The hush of the twilight over the scenes he loved best on earth; the very spot in which he found himself, so often frequented by them during their betrothal, that they had known it as "Lovers' Corner," screened as it was from general observation by an angle of the library wing; the remembered breath of the white flowers in her hair, gathered, he guessed, from the vine he had planted for her by the library window, and from which he had cut sprays, a hundred times, to put in her hair and brooch with fingers all trembling with delight; above all, the plaintive cadence of her confession, and the pressure of the ripe lips upon his hand, drove him wild.

Without a word, he gathered her to his breast in an embrace, so passionate and strong, she was terrified into dumbness.

"It is my farewell!" he uttered then, hoarsely, putting her from him so roughly she reeled against the wall.



He sprang from the piazza to the ground and disappeared.

"Not so bad, after all," reflected practical Violet, catching her breath, shaking and pulling out her tumbled finery. "He is as crazy about me as ever, let him say what he may. Men don't so easily get out of love with me. I'll coax him back in less than three days, with all his high and sulky airs. Bless the man! He has broken my wreath in two! He is a perfect bear!"

Warbling in a melodious undertone, "The Soldier returned from the War," she presented herself in the parlor, where were Morris, his wife, and Judge Humphreys.

"Where is Max, Violet?" asked the doctor's spouse, nothing doubting but she had the best right to know of his whereabouts.

The artless creature blushed and smiled.

"We have been walking on the piazza. I left him there a while ago. He will be in directly, so he said."

"He won't pay a visit to Shelby to-night, I hope!" said Morris. "It would be a grievous damper upon his spirits. If he must go, he ought to wait until morning."

"Hadassah shall accompany him," the Judge decided. "Shelby is at his best under her management."

"Very singular, isn't it?" observed Mrs. Morris, for the thousandth time. "I never heard of another case like it."

"We as a family owe her a debt we can never pay!" The Judge spoke with feeling. "She is a noble woman. I tremble to think what effects would follow the withdrawal of her attentions from Shelby."

"Attentions few young girls would be willing to offer," said the daughter-in-law, with a shudder.

"But Haddie is so strong-minded, she doesn't mind it a bit," answered Violet, suppressing a yawn. It tired her to hear so much talk in which she was not mentioned. "I am afraid as death to go near him. And it makes me so sad to contrast him with what he once was! I don't believe Haddie has a nerve in body or heart. She is a perfect Stoic!"

"You are wrong there, my dear," said the Judge. "Her heart is worthy of her head, and both are admirable. I do not know her superior. I think we have all come to rate her more justly than we did before this calamity was sent upon us."

Hadassah, checked just without the threshold by Violet's mention of her name, overheard the latter portion of the conversation, and, changed in her purpose of entering, passed quietly upstairs, that she might be for a few moments alone with her wonder and gladness. Commendation from Max's father chimed in sweetly with the love-psalm with which her soul was resonant. What a wicked, ungrateful, faithless creature she had been all these hopeless years! She would try and prove herself a dutiful servant of the Being who had heaped upon her this affluence of mercies, would make her life a benefaction to all about her, a blessing and joy to him who stood so sorely in need of comfort.

The supper-bell called her from her knees. She was praying, she thought. She had thanked the Giver for His surprising boon—the love that had transfigured existence into glory—but that was when she first knelt. She could not tell how long she had crouched upon the floor, while her spirit was floating in waking dreams, more lovely than any which had ever visited her in sleep.

"Can it be true?" she asked herself, in awaking. "I dread to go down lest I should find it all a vision!"

Maxwell *had* been into Shelby's apartment, unattended except by the negro, who never left the maniac. He never spoke of the visit, but there was deeper gravity on his face, as he entered the hall from the back piazza, and saw Hadassah on the stairs.

"The lost is found!" cried Violet, gayly, beaming on him from the parlor door.

He passed her without speaking, offered his arm to his betrothed, and led her into the dining-room to a seat next his own at table.

"It would be ridiculous for her to misunderstand his civility, and set her cap at him, when he is only grateful for what she has done for his brother—wouldn't it?" whispered Violet to Mrs. Morris on their return to the parlor.

Laughing at the preposterous conceit, she sat down to the piano and sang bewitchingly, within hearing of Judge Humphreys and his sons, who were smoking on the piazza—

"I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,  
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art!"





## CHAPTER XIV.

### WEDDING-HASTE.

**I**F ever Hadassah knew for herself the sweet, restful sense of absolute dependence upon another; the novel delight of being cared for, and thought of continually; the consciousness of being surrounded by loving guardianship that kept far from her whatever could annoy or grieve, it was during the two months of her engagement. Maxwell managed everything. His energy was tireless, and he forgot nothing that could contribute to her comfort, present or future. She never asked how he broke the news of his betrothal to his parents, nor how they received it. If she had considered the subject in the abstract, regarded the case as she would that of a third person, she would have been more than doubtful of the approbation of the Humphreys clan as to this union; have recalled fearfully the circumstances of her connection with the Riverview household, and concluded that nothing short of a miracle could ensure for the *ci-devant* humble companion a hearty welcome from the reigning powers when she should essay to enter the homestead as their equal.

Yet it was with little surprise that she saw Judge Humphreys alight from his horse at her father's gate, three days after his son's return, and hand from the family carriage his wife—then Violet. Both ladies was attired for state visits, and wore an air of curious, not displeased, expectancy, which would of itself have told that their errand was an extraordinary one. Mrs. Todd was in Elysium, wrapped in a dressing-gown, tilted back in her rocking-chair, her feet upon a stool, a new novel in her hand, and a basket of delicious peaches within reach. Master Dunallan was deep in the discussion of a very ripe and juicy one prepared for him by his eldest sister. His mother had given it to him whole, fuzzy skin and all.

"It is such a bother to peel them!" she said, seeing what her daughter was doing. "And they say the fur assists digestion. But you were always more nice than wise, Hadassah!"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Elena, who was also reading and munching fruit. "There is the Riverview carriage at the gate! Haddie, it is lucky you are fit to be seen! You must meet them!"

She dashed off to her own room; Mrs. Todd dropped her peach upon the book, the book upon Edward Dunallan's head, and hustled him out of the back door in the arms of a negro nurse, that she might make her own toilette. Hadassah received the new-comers in the porch, as was the custom of the region when host or hostess designed to pay a distinguished compliment to guests. The day was warm, and in expectation of a visit from Maxwell she had put on a white dress, and bestowed more care than usual upon the arrangement of her rich brown hair. The color came to her cheeks and light to her eyes at

Mrs. Humphreys' maternal embrace, and there was a flash of dew-drops under the falling lashes when the Judge put his arm about her and kissed her.

"My dear daughter!" he said, formally, but not repellently, "I hope you will be very happy!"

"You are the wickedest cheat in Christendom!" cried Violet, boxing her friend's ears with her velvety palms. "I don't love you a bit! To think of your stealing such a march upon us all! I don't forgive you for fooling me, if I do kiss you. While I was telling you of every individual offer I had—Rob Wharton included! Oh! I don't mind talking about it in the family!" seeing Hadassah glance at the others. "He waited upon uncle in dutiful style this morning, and as he wasn't sent about his business, with a flea in his ear, I suppose we shall hear more of the affair one of these days."

The most accomplished mistress of *finesse* could not have covered a defeat better, and relieved, more than she would have confessed, by the gay banter of her late rival, Hadassah's spirits came up with a bound. Forgetful of everything but her new happiness, and that those before her were Max's nearest of kin, she talked and looked her best—was the "Queenie" whom he, and up to this time no one else, had known—a brilliant woman with whose liveliness was combined a self-poise and dignity which the Judge, in his gratified soul, attributed to the admixture of Humphreys blood with the plebeian current that ought, by virtue of her paternity, to run the more strongly in her veins.

"It is hard to kill out the traces of really good stock!" he said to himself. "The boy may be nearer right than we have feared."

Mrs. Todd, in her best black dress, her collar askew, her hair plastered down in front with a wet brush, and very frowzy behind, and Elena, seeking to hide her bashfulness under the second-rate affectations copied from Louise Kemp, could not lower Hadassah's crest. She lived to-day above the atmosphere of petty mortifications and false shame that had sometimes seemed to suffocate her in her own home, for she belonged to Max! The thought was armor of proof—gave life and glory to her being. Violet had less to say than the other ladies, but her manner was complacent, her visage unclouded. There was "no especial object in being lively in a hen-party," was one of her sayings, and she was liable to attacks of amiable dulness when anybody else was the centre of attraction.

She brightened up presently.

"Here comes Captain Max!" she said, looking out of the front window. "Not rigged out exactly as 'the frog who went a-courting and did ride, with sword and pistols by his side' was—but gotten up in good form, nevertheless. You'll be dying to have us go now, Miss Haddie, but I shan't budge! I mean to take lessons in behavior from you two. Isn't he the soberest-looking man ever seen outside of a meeting-house?" surveying him leisurely as he dismounted, tied his horse to the rack at the gate, and came up the walk to the house. "I should as soon think of coquetting with a tombstone as trying to warm up our old flirtation, so I won't interfere with you, Haddie!"

Elena tittered, and the rest smiled—Hadassah most pleasantly of them all. It did her good to hear the foolish prattle, and she had ceased, long ago, to expect delicacy of feeling or speech from Violet. She was glad the

spoiled child did not resent her interference with her late projects, and inclined to be very indulgent with her nonsense when she remembered how uncomfortable it would have been for both families had she taken the disappointment to heart. Maxwell knew just whom he was to meet, and while he would have shunned the scene, had it been kind or expedient, was resolved, in his grateful regard for the father whose will and prejudice had yielded in this case to his petition, to go through his part gallantly. He passed by the others, then, at his entrance, and paid his respects first to Hadassah, bowing over her hand with marked and deferential courtesy, and saying in his gentlest tone :

“I hope you are quite well, to-day?”

“For all the world like that horrid, fussy Sir Charles Grandison auntie used to make me read to her about!” Violet said afterward, in describing the interview to Miss Mahala. “I’m glad I’m not engaged to him since he has got to be such a prig. Such courting must be awfully pokey!”

“’Twouldn’t suit your kind! You’re right there!” responded the housekeeper. “But Haddie Todd ain’t one of the common sort of girls!”

It was certain that Hadassah felt no void in heart or life as Maxwell returned to her side after exchanging salutations with her mother and sister. In spite of her expressed awe of him, Violet was stimulated into more bewitching looks and sprightly sayings by the addition of an unmarried man to the group. Perhaps she still had hopes of bringing him back to her feet. She was too good-natured to bear Hadassah any actual ill-will for the astonishing conquest she had achieved, and too philo-



sophical in her cool, little soul to lament her own apparent failure, to say nothing of her real preference—all other things being equal—for “dear old Rob!” But single eligibles were her lawful game up to the moment of their marriage with some less divine creature, and the distant politeness of this one piqued her vanity when she recollected the twilight scene in “*Lover’s Corner*.” She led off in the talk now, by discussing a savory bit of neighborhood gossip with Mrs. Todd and Elena, with discursive appeals to the betrothed pair. The theme was a broken engagement on the eve of marriage, and the singular circumstance that both parties refused to make known the reason of the rupture. Sweet Violet’s rôle was a voluble defence of woman’s constancy as opposed to man’s fickleness and deceit. She had all the arguments and illustrations patent in Love’s court at her tongue’s end, and rehearsed them with amazing rapidity and animation. Mrs. Todd and her novel-reading daughter echoed the strain; Mrs. Humphreys opined that there was usually fault on both sides; and Hadassah, mindful of the chance that Violet’s thoughtless strokes might touch Maxwell in a still vulnerable point, played her part with elastic balls that struck aside those of her opponents. Maxwell’s share in the conversation was limited to inquiries into the facts of the case, and a cordial indorsement of the excellent character of the persons most nearly concerned, with an expression of regret at the occurrence. He was beginning to look the *ennui* he felt at the rain of wishy-washy platitudes from the busy tongues of the defence, when Judge Humphreys, who had been over to “the store,” reëntered, with Mr. Todd.

"Letters!" cried Violet, at sight of her guardian's hand. "Any for me?"

She flew up to him and snatched them, without waiting for a reply; began sorting them, rattling on vivaciously all the time.

"One for you, Haddie! Look at it, Captain Max, and see whether you think she ought to have it. It is in a gentleman's hand. You prefer to give it to her without so much as seeing the address—do you? Very well! You must take the consequences of such blind confidence. One for you, 'Lena! innocent-looking enough; but there's nobody to take you to task. Three for you, Max! Two from gentlemen—those you can have, but here's one directed in a lady's hand, and mailed in—. That's where you were at college—isn't it? I shall pass this over to Haddie. It looks mischievous, and my conscience wont allow me to wink at treason. Three—four—for me! I hope one is a declaration. I haven't had an offer in a fortnight!"

Hadassah passed the letter tossed into her lap to Maxwell, with a merry smile.

"I hope you won't propose an exchange," she said. "There may be secrets of weight in mine!"

His eyes rested upon hers for a second in gratitude and admiration, but he merely said, "Thank you!" and put the three letters into his pocket.

The bustle of leave-taking that followed almost directly hindered all but herself from observing that he grew yet graver and more taciturn. He let his father escort the Riverview ladies to their carriage, lingering behind in the parlor when the rest left it. Hadassah returned alone, presently, and seeing him engaged with his letters

at a far window, sat down, without speaking, to read her own, as naturally and pleasantly as if she were already his wife. Her tact in these matters was infallible, and soothed the soul, sore and hunted by remorse, as warmer demonstrations of affection and trust would not have done. He came over to her by and by, and glancing up with a smile as she folded her papers, she saw the harassed look in his eyes she was already learning to recognize; which she was to read there in years to come, until her heart should die within her with discouragement.

“Excuse me for keeping you waiting so long!” he began, but she was ready with a bright response.

“I did not wait. I had my letter, too—” and lest he should think she desired information respecting his, she went on quickly—“It was very kind in your father and mother to call on me so promptly. I do not expect them to believe that I am good enough for you. I should lose confidence in their judgment if they did—but I am very grateful for their cordial reception of me.”

“It was only just. Your home is ready whenever you will come to it. Of that we must talk at length, presently. First, however, I want to say that this letter—” showing it—“is from a woman, and that I cannot let you see it, or tell you what the contents are. When you are my wife, I shall have no secrets from you. Then, and perhaps before that, you will probably see other envelopes directed to me by the same person—for this one of my correspondents I must retain. Can you, knowing these things, still confide in my honor and fidelity?”

“Always!” The smile was bright and frank as before. “I should not be worthy of your love, could I doubt these.”

“You are worthy of the love of the best man upon earth, and that I shall never be.”

He kissed her hand, and still holding it, went on to state his plans for their united future. He was anxious that their marriage should take place early in December, and the interim would be a busy time with both. He was the bearer of a note from Morris' wife, who had returned to Louisville the preceding day. A sisterly, thoughtful epistle, offering her services in the purchase and preparation of the *trousseau*, and urging the propriety of a visit from the bride elect to herself, while the dressmaking, etc., was in progress. Hadassah's eyes swam in tears as she read.

“You make me behave like a baby among you all!” she faltered. “Every Hill Difficulty sinks into a mole-hill when you touch it; and I have had so many to climb in my life, that I hardly know myself under this new order of things. I was wondering to day—being an eminently practical young woman—how I was to make ready the wardrobe I should need. It frightens me to be so gloriously happy!”

He reasoned away tears and misgivings; led her to talk in her accustomed sensible, collected manner of the arrangements to be made at Riverview and in her present home, before she could come to him. He never mentioned Shelby's name when it could be avoided; but the first plan laid before her was one for the erection of a wing to the “Office,” and a complete remodelling of the interior of the building. The profound melancholy that always settled upon his features when the unhappy imbecile's condition was the topic under discussion, still rested there through the talk that ensued of bridal-gear

and wedded life. Hadassah did not comment upon this, but she felt creeping over the warm sunlight in which she basked, the premonitory chill of the shadow that was to follow them, whithersoever they went. She drove it away.

"It cannot affright me while we walk hand in hand," she thought, confidently. "And in time, Love will dispel it. I have faith and patience."

The days wheeled rapidly and glowingly by. Mr. Todd was not a rich man, but he opened heart and purse to their utmost capacity to his favorite child, that she might go bravely bedight to a home than which his ambition could ask nothing more aristocratic, even for her. He was proud of her noble suitor; prouder of her whose gifts of mind and person had won for her so exalted a station. He should miss her—he owned to himself, never exactly to her—as he would the sun from the day, the stars from the night. But feeling, as he did, that his gem had now but a sorry setting, he surrendered it without a murmur. His darling had done well. She deserved all her good fortune, and more. God bless her!

He did not say these words aloud, but their substance filtrated into his talk with Maxwell, on the afternoon preceding the wedding-day, as the two gentlemen paced the walk leading from the south porch to the garden gate, and Hadassah watched them through the window from her seat by the parlor fire. Maxwell had spent an hour with her, then, seeing Mr. Todd crossing the yard, had said something about wishing to speak with him, and excused himself for a little while. They had walked and talked together ever since, apparently upon excel-

lent terms with one another, their looks and gestures expressive of mutual esteem and sincere good-will. Hadassah, tired in body after the numerous cares and toils of the morning, lay back in her easy-chair and dreamed happily, her eyes following the two figures in their stroll. Her father did not compare unfavorably in form and physiognomy with the taller man. "Who is handsomer, of course," she mused naïvely, "but there are not many stronger, more intelligent faces than my father's. Their friendship is the overflowing drop in my cup. Dear father! the love must be mighty indeed that leads me away from him, rejoicing!" Her feet ached, her spine was stiff with much standing and stooping, her fingers felt sore and swollen, but she was to have a week's rest; a week in which Max would be all hers—when there would be no prying eyes, no impertinent tongues to warn them to guard the manifestation of their affection and their happiness in each other's companionship. That little golden week during which they were to journey together! Toward it, as the blessed goal of her hopes and desires, she had pressed courageously through the severe labors, the never-ending hindrances that had lined her path since she commenced "getting ready." And when they should come back, there would always be Shelby to think of and to serve.

"Not that I grudge what we do for him," she said, repentantly. "It is his due, and it is willingly paid. But I long for a brief breathing space—to tarry for seven days among the Delectable Mountains."

"I came in to ask what I could do to help you!" said Mrs. Todd, breaking in upon her reverie.

Hadassah could have smiled at the untimely offer.

Her mother had held herself as much aloof from the planning and working of the past few weeks as did Mrs. Jellyby from poor Caddy's wedding preparations. Most of the time she had had the toothache; had kept her bed in consequence, bundled her face in flannel, the weather being very cold, and lived upon candy, Eugene Sue, and laudanum.

"Mr. Todd and Hadassah have managed everything in the establishment so long that they would probably resent my interference," she said to Mrs. Humphreys, who marvelled at her ignorance of what was going on.

"Now, *I* cannot sleep at night for thinking of this, that, and the other thing which my Violet ought to have," said the more motherly matron. "But I suppose, as you say, that Haddie is abundantly able to do all this for herself. Mr. Humphreys says she has wonderful executive talent. He is more and more in favor of the match every day. She is the best manager I ever saw for one so young."

For all that, there were times when the child's heart ached for womanly sympathy, full though it was with the knowledge that she loved and was beloved; when she wept upon her pillow at the thought that her mother's eyes would be dry and cold on her wedding-day; that she, the first who had lain on her breast, and whose baby lips had named her "Mother," would not be missed from her daily life. Something of this, blent with the loving thoughts of her father passing through her mind, made her voice soft to affectionateness, as she replied:

"No, thank you, Mother dear, I believe everything is done. Even my travelling-dress and bonnet are laid out ready to be put on."

"How long do you mean to stay in Louisville?" interrogated Mrs. Todd, taking up the tongs to mend the fire; and Hadassah could not but notice that her hand trembled.

"Two days. We shall not be absent above eight days in all. We are working-people, Max and I, and our place is at Riverview."

"I was in hopes my Cousin Morris would settle you upon a plantation of your own. You have ruled here with such absolute sway, you will find a subordinate position very irksome."

"We do not desire a separate home," returned Hadassah, unruffled by the thrust. "It is our duty to form a part of Judge Humphreys' family."

"Violet Hayne's wedding is to take place at New Years, my Cousin Elizabeth tells me," pursued the mother. "I am glad she comes over now and then, or I should never hear any news. I dare say Maxwell will let you slave yourself to death, getting Violet ready."

The girl laughed a little, joyous, confident laugh, very musical in the quiet room.

"I have no fear of that. There is more danger of his spoiling me."

"He ought to take care of you," said Mrs. Todd, doggedly.

"He will."

The simple dignity of the reply seemed to check something upon the mother's lips. She sat silently studying the flaming logs, apparently listening to the hissing sap steaming out, drop by drop, from their cut ends upon the hearth, and the sighing of the wind around the corners of the house. Hadassah's eyes went again to the window,



just in time to see Max stop abruptly in his walk so near the porch she could almost hear what he said ; could mark the change in color and expression, as he faced her father and questioned him sharply in two or three sentences. Then he dropped his head, until the upper part of his face was hidden by his hat-brim, and stood for a long minute, boring into the frozen gravel with his cane, his left hand pulling hard at his beard.

“ I hope you will be happy, I am sure,” resumed Mrs. Todd, in the half-whine Hadassah knew so well. “ Marriage is a fearful risk. But there’s no use talking to you about that now. If you are bent upon doing anything, you will carry it through at all hazards. This gives you an advantage, however, over most other women. My parents were dead, or I should not have been allowed to rush headlong into matrimony as I did. You have no such excuse. You leave home because you wish it, and for no other reason. I couldn’t turn you aside from your purpose, if I were to try. You are infatuated about the man you are to marry. You have been this great while. Ah, well ! we mothers should expect just this sort of recompense. We bring up children at the expense of the wear and tear of soul and body, and as soon as they are old enough to be of some service and comfort to us, they run off with some man to whom they owe nothing of duty or gratitude, and we are mere nonentities in their sight, thenceforward and forever.”

Hadassah put her hand, which was cold, to the cheeks that would burn. Fancying that she detected the ring of suffering under her mother’s peevishness, she resolved that she would not be provoked into a retort in kind.

“ I shall be very near you, Mother. We shall see

much of one another, I trust. Perhaps I may prove an exception to most married daughters, in gratitude and usefulness. If you are lonely, or need me in any way, I shall always be ready to run over and lend a hand."

"I do not apprehend that I shall be lonely. I shall have my books, and the younger children, who are not yet alienated from me. Nor will the work be so heavy after you are married and Elena has gone to boarding-school—poor child! I trust *this* one of your father's projects and yours will result in her real good, but I am very incredulous. The family will be small, as I was saying, and your style of housekeeping and mine differ materially. We shall fall back into the old comfortable groove when you are out of the way. You have spoiled the servants sadly by your driving ways, but I shall soon get them in hand again, teach them that they are to be the slaves, and not I. There will be a pleasant variety in being once more mistress of my own house."

"I have tried to help you, Mother, to relieve you of care, knowing you were not strong," Hadassah contrived to say. "I am very sorry—"

She burst into tears.

"There you go!" ejaculated Mrs. Todd, fretfully. "I came in to have a pleasant chat with you, such as a faithful, loving parent might hold with a child on the eve of marriage, but as usual, you have frustrated my good intentions by an unseemly display of temper. There is Captain Humphreys! My prayer is that you may never crush his heart as often and as needlessly as you have mine."

As she flounced out of the room by one door, Maxwell entered from the porch. Hadassah had arisen, and was

in retreat for the stairs leading to her chamber, but he called her back.

“We will have no concealments, this evening,” he said, kindly, drawing her down to a seat beside him. “What are these tears for? Be honest with me, dear. Your heart is misgiving you at this, the eleventh hour, is it not? In your talk with your mother, you have felt how strong are the ties binding you to girlhood and home. It is not too late yet for retreat. A word from your own lips will set you free. And nobody would blame you. Nobody should! Least of all would I. The truth, and nothing but the truth, spoken now, may spare us years of woe. I am not so ungenerous as to wish to make you prisoner against your will.”

She cried out at that as if he had dealt her a mortal blow.

“Don’t ask me to give you up, my darling! my darling!” she sobbed, clinging to his neck. “You are all I have! I had rather live with you a slave, than reign over the proudest kingdom of the earth. You have talked of giving me a shadowed lot. You have never guessed how full of trial, and vexation, and disappointment, and heartache my life here has been. Forgive me!” she added, meekly, drying her tears, and looking up when he did not at once reply. “I would not have believed that anything could make me weep this evening, unless it were in joy, but my mother does not understand why I am willing to leave home; and I am unreasonable, I suppose. I ought to be glad instead; but it cut me to the quick when she told me she should not account my departure as a loss. I ought not to tell you this much,”—for his face darkened—“but to-morrow is

so near, and I could not speak of such things to my father. I have only you."

"Tell me everything. It is your right, and it is mine to hear. I can understand that your mother is capable of wounding you without compunction. What I have heard and surmised to-day has almost reconciled me to the thought of taking you from your father's house. He is one of Nature's noblemen, Queenie! I like to talk with him. There are in him a simple grandeur of character, straightforwardness of purpose and action, and, withal, tenderness and depth of heart that remind me continually whose father he is. Ah! I thought praise of him would bring back the smiles! As for the rest, dear, we must be patient for a little while—be patient and steadfast, believing in God, and in one another."

He leaned back on the lounge, his hand over his eyes, his countenance so haggard for the moment, that Hadassah's conscience smote her.

"You are not well!" she said. "Your head aches!"

"A little. It has troubled me a good deal, at times, ever since I had a sunstroke down in Mexico. It will be all right by morning. I must make the best of myself to-morrow—but I wish you could have a blither bridegroom. I feel so old! so old!"

"And I have troubled him with my petty grievances!" thought Hadassah. "Is this the way in which I help him bear his burdens? You want nothing else so much as judicious nursing and wholesome petting," she assured him cheerily, and would have put her prescription into practice forthwith by making him lie down upon the sofa, have his head bathed with cologne, and his nerves braced by a cup of hot tea, but he objected.

"I have not time," he said. "I grant you that the regimen would be delightful, and doubtless beneficial, but I must ride home to supper. There is still some work to be done, and Shelby has a heavy cold, about which I wish to consult Morris before bedtime."

"I had not heard of it. Why did you not send for me?"

"Not to-day, dear. I would not entirely ignore your claims to consideration in my desire to be of use to him."

They were standing by the window, and his next remark directed her attention to the December sky.

"Are you superstitious about stormy wedding-days? The clouds hang low and threateningly."

Her reply was the same slight, happy laugh that had answered her mother's insinuation touching his care of her.

"Not a bit! On the contrary, I enjoy a rousing winter tempest when one is snugly housed."

"But we shall be *en route*."

"Housed, nevertheless, for the carriage will be close and comfortable, and your ever kind mother has presented me with a nonpareil of a foot-stove. It is large enough to cook the meals of a small family, and handsome enough for drawing-room furniture. We shall have an abundance of shawls and"—with an upward glance at once shy and tender—"we shall be together!"





## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE HONEYMOON.

**T**HE morning dawned, gray and raw. There were brooding moans in the naked tree-tops, an air of patient resignation on the face of the dismantled earth, that betokened to the weather-wise the speedy coming of a settled storm. Yet at ten o'clock—the hourset for the ceremony—the clouds still held their wrath, biding their time. It was a sullen, dispiriting forenoon that made the coats of well-groomed horses rough, and their tempers fractious, and provoked their drivers to muttered oaths, as the restive animals plunged and broke through the ice-covered mud-holes in the four roads leading to the neat white dwelling opposite the “Store.” The wedding was to be a very quiet affair, in consideration, it was given out, of the fact that the Todds were yet in deep mourning. Judge Humphreys grumbled privately to his wife—others of the connection openly, that the Humphreys were not used to being married in such sober fashion, and Violet declared to everybody who would listen to her that she would “never forgive her friends, if her funeral were not a more festive occasion than the nuptials of this practical, everyday pair.”

"She isn't even to be married in white," she said to Miss Lydia Shelby on the road. "She will stand up in a silver-gray silk and a white bonnet—her travelling suit—and not a symptom of so much as an orange-blossom about her. They will set out at twelve o'clock, or one, at the latest, for Louisville, jogging along by private conveyance, twenty miles this afternoon over these roads. Just those two! And in that style they will jaunt about, here and there, seeing this, that, and the other for a week, and then home again. Don't you know that will be just too forlorn?"

"I should like it!" put in Rob Wharton from the front seat. It was to be strictly a family gathering, but Hadassah had sent the good-natured *fiancé* of her school-fellow a special and flattering invitation.

"I shouldn't!" retorted his charmer with an enchanting pout. "They will be yawning in each other's faces before they are a quarter through their trip; be fairly talked out. Catch me travelling for six or eight days shut up in a carriage, with nobody but one stupid man to entertain me! I should never want to see him after I got back."

"Max looks badly," said Miss Lydia, when Rob had finished his laugh at Violet's wit.

"He does, horrid!" interjected Violet. "He has fallen off ten pounds a day ever since he was engaged, and instead of resting like a sensible man last night, to be in fine trim to-day, he stayed with poor Shelby, took charge of him until six o'clock this morning, when Miss Mahala pounced upon him, and turned him out by main force. But for her, I don't believe he would have left his patient even to be married. It is very good and

Christian-like, and all that, to be such a pattern brother, yet he may be thankful that Shelby cracked his skull just when he did. He was doing Max all the harm he could at that very time."

Violet had never forgiven Shelby for having, as she phrased it, "made such a *faux pas* of her coming-out party."

"For the love of mercy," she continued, "don't let us forget that we are to say nothing about the poor creature's sickness to the bride. I believe, as true as I sit here, that she would give up her bridal tour and be content to spend the honeymoon in dosing and humoring him."

"Queer taste!" said Rob, with a shrug of his fine shoulders.

"She's a queer girl, good as gold, but too odd for anything. If you could but see her with that poor, silly fellow, you would understand better what I mean. I told Max yesterday, it was my opinion she was going to marry him that she might always be on hand when Shelby wanted her. He looked at me as if I were a—what-do-you-call-it—polyglot?—no!—animalculæ! and said, in that stately way he cultivates nowadays, 'I hope I should not be so selfish as to take advantage of such generosity.' Wasn't that a speech for a bridegroom? *Chacun à son goût!*" concluded the blonde with a villanous accent and a seraphic *moue* at her rapt adorer, who did not know bad French from good.

As may be supposed, the alliance they were called together to-day to sanction was not to the Humphreys' mind desirable, or even tolerable. But against the Judge's consent, and the stout determination of his distinguished son, the demur of uncles and cousins must



perforce be guarded, and as they had reasoned in the case of Hadassah's mother, they now agreed that a united front should be presented to the world. Profane gossip should not intermeddle with their internal disagreements. Accordingly, the day and the hour set for the union of the Connecticut Yankee's daughter—herself but a half-breed at best—with a genuine scion of their choicest stock, saw them assembled in goodly force and in wedding apparel.

It could hardly have been a merry party in such circumstances, had the day been less unpleasant; the aspect of the Riverview family less anxious at such moments as the seemly veil of cheerful decorum was wafted aside by some sudden gust of memory of the sick son and brother they had left in charge of Miss Mahala and two negro keepers, a suffering, intractable animal, who violently rejected food and medicine, and made the isolated building under the trees resound with his yells. The parlor and hall were full before the appearance of the bridal train, and Mrs. Todd, elate at the sight of so many of her aristocratic kindred under her roof, wound in and out, the Humphreys nose in the air, the Humphreys neck curved, languishing and smiling, rustling her new silk trimmed with crape, and rebuking with lofty nods and frowns her husband's serious mien. The greetings of arrival over, the talk was spasmodic, and divided by occasional pauses so profound that, in the one which immediately preceded the entrance of the principal actors in the drama, the first dash of the hail against the windows was distinctly heard. There were two bridesmaids—Elena and Violet, with their attendant groomsmen—a beggarly procession in a neighborhood from which Violet would,

in another month, cull twelve couples to precede her to the altar, and sweep after her from it, a glittering wake.

The bridegroom was pale, as Violet had said, yet bore himself well, confronting the officiating clergyman with a calm gaze, and evincing no sign of the embarrassment which often, and strangely enough, approximates stage fright in severity, in the incipient Benedict. Feminine cousins and aunts of all ages decided that he had never been more "interesting," and voted it a pity that he had been so hasty in his choice of a life-long companion. Had he sought further—a sigh told the rest, and was the "might-have-been" of more than one virgin heart. Even these censors forgot to carp after they fairly looked upon the bride's face. The shy, sweet tremors of the previous evening were gone with regrets and forebodings. She walked through the aisle left by the retiring throng on either hand, with head erect, level-lidded eyes, and a countenance so cleared and elevated by the outshining from her soul of love-full content, that a passing doubt of her identity crossed the minds of some who had known her from her birth as "poor Octavia's oldest girl." With the opening words of the ceremony, her eyes deepened and darkened into the glad solemnity of one, who, standing upon the threshold of a temple, searches the dim, religious depths with awed desire—halts to chasten thought and motion by prayer before he dare tread the holy ground.

"I never imagined Haddie could be so nearly beautiful as she is to-day," said candid Violet in her congratulatory speech to the young husband. "But there is something ghostly about her, too. I was almost afraid to kiss her. Are you afraid to kiss *me*? You are a mar-

ried man, now, you know, and I am your cousin and sort of sister. Hattie and I used to be twins. Isn't there something in the Bible about forgetting childish things? That means, with you and me, when we played at love-making. Let by-gones be by-gones!"

She put up her bright lips—red and fresh as June cherries—laughingly, and he touched them with his, which did not blench or quiver.

"He's a graven image!" said Violet to Will Shelby, who was her cavalier, *pro tempore*. "Good Heavens! It gives me the horrors when I remember that I was engaged to him once, and would have married him, had not Providence interfered."

She meant what she said. This serious, courtly gentleman was not to her taste, and she was thankful the Fates had assigned her Rob to her, instead.

"Poor Octavia has improved in housekeeping if this entertainment is a specimen," said one notable manager aside to another in the dining-room. "The collection is really elegant."

"It is all the daughter's doings," answered her crony. "She has had charge here since she was fifteen. Cousin Elizabeth will have in her a great help and comfort now that her own health is delicate, and Miss Mahala cannot oversee everything in a house like Riverview. Altogether, Maxwell has made a prudent choice, odd as it seems at first sight. There was some sort of understanding between her and poor Shelby, you know. That is the secret of her wonderful control of him in his worst moods. It will be an inestimable advantage to him to be constantly under her eye. Morris Humphreys was talking to me about it, just now."

"From what I hear I don't believe he will live long enough to get the benefit of her care," was the rejoinder. "He is dangerously sick, Cousin Elizabeth says, and she is very uneasy about him."

"'Uneasy!' As if his death would not be a mercy to all concerned!"

"True, my dear, but the Riverview Humphreys are an affectionate family. They really seem more fond of this unfortunate young man than they were before he was hurt."

Laura Todd—Hadassah's youngest and favorite sister, an intelligent child of eight, had packed herself snugly in a corner with her saucer of ice-cream, directly behind the gossips, and lost not a word of this dialogue. The major part of the company had taken their leave, made more punctual to the hour of departure by the increasing storm, and Hadassah, attended only by her sisters, was putting on her travelling wraps in her own room, when the eavesdropper broke forth with her revelation. It was detailed with a minuteness that left no ground for doubt of its correctness, and while Elena inveighed loudly against the backbiters' outrage upon hospitality, Hadassah stood as if changed to stone, every drop of blood stricken from her face, unable to think or speak for a moment.

"I see it all!" she said, then, slowly, and with difficulty: "Laura, run down stairs and tell Max I want to see him. Ask him to come up here at once!"

"Up here!" Elena was fastidious in conventionalities. "Why, Haddie! people will talk if you send him such a message! Why don't you wait until you go down to the parlor?"

"It is late in the day for me to mind what people say,

Elena! I am independent of etiquette now—can see him when and where I please. I must speak with him alone!”

Violet, bewilderingly beautiful in a white Opera cloak ordered for the occasion, and sadly unsuitable for country rides, her fair face smiling from some sort of fleecy, nebulous enfoldment of her head, leaned on the arm of the enamored Rob, and said sugary “Good-byes” to the bridegroom, when Laura came flying through the room, and delivered her message.

“There is obedience for you! I hope you’ll take pattern,” laughed the *fiancée* to her thrall as Maxwell made his bow, and turned to follow his conductor. “See what is in store for you, Mr. Rebel!”

Laura paused at the foot of the stairs.

“She’s up there, in her room, Cousin Max. I think she wants to see you alone about something. So I won’t go up.”

He took both her hands in his, scanned kindly the sensitive face, much prettier than Hadassah’s, but with her clear eyes and radiant smile.

“It must be ‘Brother’ not ‘Cousin Max’ after this, Laura! You’ll try to care a little for me, won’t you?”

“I love you dearly already. I couldn’t help it, because Haddie does! I feel *dreadfully* about her going away!” the tears springing fast to her eyelids.

“She is very good to care so much for me. I mean to make her happy if I can, little sister, and that you shall see her often.”

He stooped to kiss her, and went on up, forgetting the incident in less than five minutes after it happened. Laura remembered it always.

Hadassah was walking up and down her room, trying to quell her agitation.

"Max!" she said hurriedly, apparently oblivious of the fact that this was their first meeting without spectators since their marriage. "Is this true about Shelby? Is he really ill? Why have you kept it from me?"

"I wished you to have one untroubled day, dear child! Your holidays are so few, and broken in upon by so many cares, such cruel impositions!"

He had a habit of calling her "child," since he had grown "so old."

She shook her head.

"It was kindly meant, and I thank you for it, but you made a mistake. Now, let me hear exactly how he is. We can decide upon our course afterward."

Fifteen minutes later, the travelling carriage destined for the use of the newly-wedded pair drew up to the door, and Mr. Todd, with the sober, perplexed expression he had worn since his daughter had spoken a few sentences to him in private, handed her in, shut the door upon Maxwell when he had followed her, and stood in the falling snow at the gate, watching it until it was lost to sight at the bend of the road.

"You needn't catch your death of cold, staring after her, now!" said Mrs. Todd, crossly, when he returned to the house. "*She's* got somebody else to care for her, and your love's labor will be lost. You'd better spare a thought for me—with all this rubbish to clear away, and I am so tired I can scarcely move. But the turmoil is over, thank Gracious! The house has been in a whirl for two months."

Laura had pressed closely to her father, and laid her tear-stained cheek upon his hand.

"How far are they going to-day, Father? The snow is deep already."

"They have given up their wedding-trip, dear. They have gone to Riverview. Shelby is extremely ill, and your sister would not consent that Max should leave him."

"Another carriage!" groaned Miss Mahala, the weary-footed, pausing in her work of arranging the best china and silver upon the supper-table, at the sound of wheels in the avenue. "And a houseful already! To say nothing of nursing enough for half-a-dozen strong men, let alone one woman! If there was a solitary individ'al of 'em all that was worth the salt to her bread at a time like this, I wouldn't complain. But they're a pack of chattering dolls and monkeys—that's the truth! That Violet Hayne at the head of the list! The idea of her bringing home such a crew just now, when that poor wretch is screeching his lungs to pieces, and tearing the blankets into carpet-rags! *If I ever!*"

Her muttering ceased suddenly, as through the window she beheld a tall figure step from the carriage which had drawn up at the steps, and turn to help out a lady in a gray dress and white bonnet. The housekeeper rushed through the hall, nearly upsetting Violet, who had also seen the arrival, and run out from the parlor with a dozen young people at her back, brimful of amaze and curiosity. Before Max could hand his wife across the snowy floor of the portico, the raw-boned spinster had her in her arms, and lifted her bodily over the threshold, laughing and crying in a way she would have characterized in another as "scandalous."

“You’re the Lord’s own blessing to this house!” she said, without regarding the din of exclamation and inquiry ringing in her ears. “Don’t stand here a minute, dear, nor mind one of them!” pushing her way toward the stairs. “There’s a fire in your room. I meant to keep it up till you came back from your travellin’. You’re the right woman in the right place, for I’m out of my wits—clean! and so is everybody else who has got any brains or feeling. Things will come straight when you lift your finger. There isn’t another like her in creation, Maxwell Humphreys! You’ll know it some day, if you don’t now!”

He answered when the three were in the room fitted up for the occupancy of the young couple, and Miss Mahala had begun to loosen the bride’s cloak.

“I found that out, long ago! It was like you to have everything in readiness for her. Hadassah will tell you why we altered our plans. When I have explained the matter to those downstairs, and consulted Morris, I will come up for you, dear.”

She was ready when he returned, having exchanged her bridal silk for a dark merino. Her shawl was in her hand.

“I anticipated your discouraging report,” she said, composedly, after hearing it. “Miss Mahala had told me all. We have no time to lose.”

They went together down the staircase, past the closed parlor-door that muffled but imperfectly the hum of gay voices, through the hall and back-door to the rear piazza. The snow fell thickly, but the night was still, and piercing cold. They halted a moment, that Hadassah might draw her shawl over her head. By the reflected light



from the white ground, her husband could see her plainly—the pure, noble face framed by the dusky cowl—the brave, loving eyes still smiling into his.

By a swift caprice of memory, he went back to the fragrant September evening of his return from the war—recalled the siren-like fascinations that had plied him here; seemed to feel again the magnetic touch upon his hand—the warm tear and clinging kiss that had bereft him of reason. It was a strange time and place for scorn of the enchantment that had held him in bondage for so many years, and for the birth of a new love, but Maxwell recognized the one and the other in the emotion that shook him from head to foot—in the impulse that led him to bend one knee to the floor and raise the hem of his wife's robe to his lips.

“Queenie!” he said. “Will Heaven ever forgive me for having brought you to this?”

Ere her surprise found words, he had taken her in his arms, and carried her across the yard as easily as he would a child.

“Darling!” he murmured, in setting her down in the porch. That was all. But he had never said it to her before.

There was no more time for love-words that night, or in the week that followed. Shelby's malady was acute pleurisy, aggravated by his incessant ravings. Hours elapsed before Hadassah's presence and voice resumed their wonted influence. After he began to obey her, her confinement in his service was rigorous. Even in sleep he missed her. Opiates lost their-soothing power if she stirred from his bedside.\* Sometimes he fell asleep hold-

\* **Fact.**

ing her hand, and she dared not attempt to disengage it. How horrible was the ordeal to a woman, young, and of peculiar refinement of nerve and feeling, Maxwell appreciated better than did the others who were spectators of, or participants in, her labors. He did not comprehend one tithe of what she suffered. He was miserable at sight of her pallid cheeks and dim eyes, attributing them and her loss of appetite to bodily fatigue, and redoubled his efforts to spare her hardship, and guard her health. She never spoke of the battle raging within her—the rebellion of every spiritual and physical instinct, against the work to which Love for him, and her dauntless will held her.

“It is the most disgusting and unromantic thing I ever heard of, for you to spend your honeymoon in this way!” said bonny Violet to her more than once. “I would let the creature die, and get a divorce from the other one, before I would submit to all you do.”

She had no conception of the real loathsomeness of the task. Still less could she fathom the heroic devotion that would not let the wife swerve one hairs-breadth from the line of the duty she had accepted in pledging her troth to him, who was the cause of this wretchedness.

The author of it all! Maxwell said it to himself a thousand times in agony words could not express, during the week's watch they kept together in that fearful sick-room; anathematized the bullet and sword that had passed him by and slain happier men innocent of brother's blood; called that cruel mercy which had restored him to his home that he might see these horrors for himself, and bind shackles which could not be rent upon this woman's delicate limbs. Something of this escaped him as they sat by Shelby on the ninth night of his illness—that on which they

looked for the crisis. Maxwell had obliged his wife to walk with him in the open air for half an hour that afternoon, and taken her place in the sick-chamber, that she might sleep from supper-time until ten o'clock. He withstood her entreaties that he would leave her to watch the sleeper, whom she had lulled with the arts she, and she only, understood how to employ with him. Her husband would not quit the room, but he could do nothing except sit idly and sadly by, while she sang the nursery melodies Shelby liked; brushed his hair with uniform, drowsy motion, talking softly all the while, in such tautological prattle as babies enjoy. Her hand lay in his, when he at last slumbered, and Maxwell, without suspecting that she never left it thus, without likening the touch to the coil of a reptile, was won to ineffable compassion in gazing at her—the unbent lines of the countenance, usually so spirited; the patient bend of the head that had had so little rest of late, and recalling the glow of satisfaction with which she had pictured to herself and to him, “their one golden week.”

He hardly knew what was the language of his passionate protest, but her sorrowful petition hushed it into a great, solemn calm.

“Don’t regret that you lived and married me, Max! I should have done this, all the same, had you never come back. It is my right—a duty from which nothing but his death or mine can absolve me!”

They sat long after that, without speaking; the stillness of the midwinter night only broken by the faint crackling of the frost in the grass and tender twigs without, and the breathing of the sleeper. Hadassah spoke again by and by, in the subdued key habitual to the sick-chamber.

"It rests me when he sleeps. His disjointed ravings are the hardest things we have to bear. When I was delirious, I did not speak a word. I resolved, when I found myself slipping off the brink of Reason, that I would be silent. Do you remember the little French story you read to us once—' *Silence à la mort?*' That was the seal of my lips."

"Your father told me of this singular feature in your illness the evening before we were married—while we were walking in the yard," returned Maxwell, quietly. "I had not heard it until then. I meant to have said to you, before this, dear, that I have made my will, and that you are sole executrix and legatee. It was in reference to this that your father spoke of your strength of mind and wonderful self-control, citing the instance to which you have alluded, as a proof of the supremacy of resolution over the vagaries of delirium. I understood the phenomenon better than he. The fear of compromising me never left you."

Hadassah lifted her hand in warning.

"He is awaking," she said. "He has slept two hours, and the fever has left him."

She slipped her fingers from his relaxing clasp, stepped lightly across the room to wash them—a habit Maxwell had often noticed, without divining the full significance of it. At the plash of the water in the basin, Shelby opened his eyes.

"Hadassah!" called her husband in a low, hurried voice. "Come! quick!"

She saw what had happened. There was reason in the stare that settled slowly upon her. The turbid eyes cleared gradually, while she looked breathless with sus-

pense, and motionless as was he who stood by her: "awaiting their sentence," was the thought of both.

"Max! old fellow!" It was the lazy, insolent drawl they had last heard in the "pleached walk," that moonlight night. "Give me a drink of water, won't you? I am confoundedly dry." \*

The hand did not shake that held the glass to his lips. He drank, nodded with a supercilious smile, and was asleep again in an instant.

When assured of this, Hadassah came around to the chair on which Max had sunk, spent by the excitement of this supreme moment; knelt by him, and wound her arms about his neck.

"It is what we have prayed and longed for through these wearing months, darling. Let us not shrink from it. We will meet whatever remains for us to bear with humble, thankful hearts. We have each other still and always."

"Thank Heaven!" He drew a long breath of relief and gratitude. "Meet our fate! Willingly! gratefully! My wife! do you not understand that his recovery means the lifting of the curse from our souls and lives! gives us the right to joy in existence, and in love!"

And with his head upon her faithful bosom, the manly soldier wept like a woman.

Shelby still slept when Dr. Humphreys entered with his father, at sunrise.

"The crisis is over," he whispered, after feeling the pulse, and listening to his patient's breathing. "He may outlive us all yet."

"I ought to be rejoiced," said Judge Humphreys,

\* A true incident.

gloomily. "I am glad that his mother is spared the shock of his death. But for this consideration I could say, "Thy will be done!" more fervently if his misery were over for all time."

"I think he will be more rational when he awakes." Hadassah's heart leaped with pride in him, as Maxwell's, hopeful voice made the announcement. "He awoke at midnight and recognized me—called me by name, and asked, in his old tone and manner, for water. I have heard of cases similar to his, in which reason and memory were restored after a severe illness."

The four watched with intensest interest for the second awakening; the father and eldest brother standing before the couch, where his eyes would rest upon them so soon as they unclosed; Maxwell and his wife sitting in the background, his arm about her waist, their hands locked fast; their breasts heaving high and strong, in hope—not fear. Such courage and expectation as sustains the mother in the anguish she knows she will remember no more in the joy of the accomplished advent.

The drowsy lids lifted as the winter sunshine played upon the white coverlet through a gap between the curtains; the fingers dallied feebly with the clothes.

"Shelby! my son!" The father's voice was thick and uncertain, and Dr. Humphreys, with a look of keenest disappointment, beckoned to Hadassah. She obeyed the mute appeal by coming forward and taking her accustomed seat at the bedside. Her heart sank like a stone into bottomless depths, a mist floated over her eyes as she marked the vacancy of those they searched. Without a thought of the repugnance with which she was used to touch him, she folded the uneasy hand in both hers.

“Shelby! brother! speak to us again!”

A husky laugh responded—an idiotic leer distorted his features.

“Haddie Todd! jolly girl! jolly—jolly—polly! Pretty Poll!”

“Max looks like a fellow who had had his death-warrant served upon him!” Dr. Humphreys said to his father, in discussing the singularity of the one lucid interval preceded and followed by utter gloom. “He is young and new to such scenes. His wife has the courage of Hector, but she succumbed for a moment this morning, when she saw hope was gone.”

Mrs. Humphreys’ Bible lay open on the table at her husband’s elbow, and a text caught his eye. He read it aloud:

“They were confounded because they had hoped: they came thither, and were ashamed!”





## CHAPTER XVI.

“BUT FOR IT!”

**M**OTHER! I am amazed beyond measure!” Hadassah Humphreys spoke in indignant astonishment, dropping her work, and shedding the hot sparkles of her gray eyes upon the faded, yet august woman in widow’s weeds, who sat opposite. “How could you allow it? The man’s character is notorious, and has been for years. Where did Laura meet him? I never dreamed of the possibility of her being acquainted with such a person!”

“He is a distant connection of the Kemps, and from what Elena says, I do not believe he is so much worse than his neighbors, as rumor would make out.” Mrs. Todd stood manfully to her guns. “He has certainly excellent natural abilities, and generous impulses. Many and many a basket of game and fruit has he sent me when I was sick, and otherwise in need of the ministrations of my neighbors and friends. Indeed, for the past five years—since I have been without a protector—there is no one in the county from whom I have had more proofs of sympathy and good-will. His intercourse with me has been



marked throughout by true chivalry. These things count as nothing in your estimation, I suppose, but they have established a claim upon my gratitude which I cannot ignore."

"He has visited Laura in her own home, then?" said Hadassah imperatively. "And with your sanction?"

"I will not be schooled by you, Mrs. Humphreys!" The widow's eyes flashed. "Your exalted social position may give you the right to queen it over weak-minded parasites, but you will please remember that I, am a Humphreys by birth, and your mother. Now that my darling husband is no longer here to protect me, I may be compelled to submit to many indignities. I am made a cipher in society—my claims to respectful consideration being denied by my own children—but I trust I have still sufficient strength of mind to repel downright arrogance."

She drew out her pocket-handkerchief.

"If I have seemed arrogant, I beg your pardon," rejoined Hadassah, more temperately. Allusion to her father never failed to calm her. "But I am too much shocked at the thought of Laura's engagement to this fellow, Fred Wilbon, to take heed as to my manner of expressing it. I know him to be a gambler, a drunkard, and a libertine. I believe him to be a murderer. This is Elena's work, I suppose! Her own domestic misery should have made her more careful of her younger sister. I am afraid there is no doubt of the man's guilt. Judge Humphreys was saying, last night, that the evidence against him was fearfully strong. I

would not, for the world, that Laura's name should be mixed up in the disgraceful affair."

"Would you have her desert the man she loves because he is under a cloud?" interrogated Mrs. Todd, lowering the handkerchief from her wet eyes.

"Not if she knows him to be innocent."

Hadassah's reply was prompt and unembarrassed.

"I say, not even if she knows him to be guilty!" rejoined Mrs. Todd, stoutly. "I was re-reading 'Eugene Aram,' last night. He was far nobler, with the stain of blood upon his hands, than were those who convicted and condemned him. But Laura believes in her lover's innocence. She has his word for it, and even you could not convince her of the contrary. Her distress is terrible to behold. She is sick in bed to-day, or she would have come in person to intercede with you, slight as are the reasons you have given her to confide in your tenderness and charity."

Hadassah did not deign to notice the latter clause.

"Intercede with me! What can I do? What does she expect?"

"She *might* expect that you would use your influence with your husband not to prosecute this unhappy boy — to prevail upon him to refrain from attacking him wantonly, since the nature of the office he holds prevents him from defending the weak against their oppressors."

"Mother!" The wife flushed angrily—then made an effort to smile. "You misunderstand Maxwell and the character of his office. It is not the prosecuting attorney who attacks—as you term it—the criminal. The law arraigns him. The public prosecutor has no option. He must hold up the hands of justice."

"Humph!" said the other, contemptuously. "He needn't have accepted the position, I suppose, if he had not had a taste for such bloody and filthy work."

"Morrie, dear!" Mrs. Humphreys touched the curly head of a three-year-old, who sat on the floor beside her, trying to spin a humming-top. "Go down to Aunt Malala! there's a sweet child! Edith will help you spin it, and you can have a nice play together."

She kissed him fondly at the door she had arisen to open for him, and came back to her seat, pale but collected.

"You know, Mother, that Max would not have suffered his name to be used in connection with this position—would have declined the appointment peremptorily, had not his father urged the opposite course so warmly. He yielded his own preferences to Judge Humphreys', whose declining health just then compelled him to resign his own office. The desire that his son shall achieve a high rank in his profession is almost a monomania with him. I alone know with what reluctance Maxwell accepted the trust thrust upon him; how conscientiously he strives to perform all the duties connected with it, and the pain he suffers when forced to appear severe."

Mrs. Todd cooled down under this rational representation.

"In that case, you will have the less difficulty in persuading him not to push this matter too hard—to rest the case upon its own merits, and not plead strenuously against the poor fellow. If the jury see that he is half-hearted in the cause it will have a powerful effect upon them—may be the means of clearing him. You can make him comprehend that this low swindler, Derby,

had fleeced Fred at cards—actually won his watch away from him, and a watch-chain made of Laura's hair. They quarrelled about that, Derby insisting that he would keep and wear it, and let everybody know whose hair it was. Fred had taken several glasses of wine, and maddened by the insult to the woman he loved, knocked the other down. In the fight that followed, the fatal stab was given. Everybody says it was in simple self-defence, for Derby always went armed, although no weapons were found upon his body—"

"This is Wilbon's version of the affair," interrupted Hadassah. "He naturally puts the best face upon it. The affray was in Derby's room, and there were no witnesses present."

"Nevertheless, the story of the watch-chain will certainly be brought up by the defence, and the publicity of the *exposé* will kill Laura. I cannot tell you how she dreads it."

"I do not wonder—poor child!" said her sister sadly.

Encouraged by this evidence of sympathy, Mrs. Todd continued:

"The universal belief is, that if Maxwell speaks strongly against him, his fate is sealed. Your husband has the reputation of being conscientious to a fault, and his eloquence is too well known to leave a doubt as to which way the scale will turn when he uses it for or against a prisoner. Now—if you represent to him—he has great confidence in your judgment—if you can prevail upon him, in consideration of Fred's connection with our family"—

"*Don't* say that! I cannot bear to hear it. You ask me to do what I could not undertake were my own hon-

orable and innocent father the prisoner at the bar instead of this dissipated loafer, who has dared lift his eyes to a decent girl. Maxwell would do what he believed to be right, whatever and however I might plead. He has sworn to enforce the majesty of the law to the best of his knowledge and ability. I would not tamper with his integrity if I could. And even *I* cannot! He will be sorry to hear of Laura's entanglement, for we love the child, and hoped better things of, and for her. But I cannot give her any hope that the law will not be suffered to take its course."

"'Take its course!' That is the cant of lawyers and lawyers' wives?" burst forth Mrs. Todd, getting very red in the nose and cheeks. "It is well for some I could name that the law did not have its "course" more than twelve years ago"—

"Come in, my love!" Hadassah said to a young girl who stood hesitatingly upon the threshold, intimidated, it would seem, by the excited tones within the chamber. "Do you want anything?"

"Only Morrie's top-string, Auntie."

She was a delicate, pretty child, tall and slender for her age, which was perhaps thirteen. Mrs. Todd eyed her sardonically as she searched for and picked up the missing cord from the carpet, and with a loving smile back at Mrs. Humphreys, withdrew. Hadassah's mute response was cordial, but not bright, and it was gone from her countenance by the time the door closed again.

"I do not understand you, Mother!" she said, resolutely. "We had better drop the subject. It only agitates us, and may lead to intemperate speeches on both sides. I can have but one answer to accusations, entreat-

ies, and arguments. My husband is an honorable man and an upright, who is not to be diverted from the path of duty. If I could help or comfort Laura, I would—and I can promise as much for him—nothing more. He will be grieved with me when he hears that she is in sorrow.”

“You do not understand me, you say!” Mrs. Todd’s nose twitched ominously, and her neck was arched like a snake’s when he prepares to strike. “I could enlarge upon my meaning until it became your turn to entreat! You know—but you imagine that other people do not—what a hollow show is Maxwell Humphreys’ boast of honor and incorruptible principle. You do *not* know, perhaps, that you have deceived nobody, unless it were his father and mother, by adopting his illegitimate child, and passing her off as an orphan you picked up in one of your Northern tours; that everybody who had heard the story of his expulsion from college, put this and that together when you brought her here, four years later—a mere baby between three and four years old—with “Humphreys” stamped upon every feature! If you were imposed upon, your credulity was contemptible! But you are proverbially clear-sighted, and the presumption is that, fearing you would have no children of your own—as seemed then probable—you consented to condone your husband’s offence by receiving this girl as your child.”

“This is an old story, and a ridiculous one,” returned Hadassah, with grave composure. “I know who the child’s parents were. Nobody who is well acquainted with my husband credits the false rumor you have retailed to me. If I thought you believed it, I should find it difficult to overlook the coarse repetition of that which

insults us both. You ought to know *me* too well to suppose that, if it were true, I would receive and love the foundling as I do—would rear her with my pure, noble boy. I shall always think that he was sent to me in token of the Divine approbation of the affection which had grown out of what was at first only pity for her desolate orphanhood. I never professed to have 'picked her up.' She was given into my arms by her dying mother. Maxwell Humphreys' reputation is based upon a foundation too solid to be shaken by such idle breezes of slander."

Mrs. Todd was not a wicked woman, although passionate, and imprudent to recklessness while the heat was on. But her smile now was an evil gleam.

"Let him that standeth take heed, lest he fall!" she quoted, in a shaking voice, rising to go. "I came here upon an errand of mercy. You have turned a deaf ear to my pleading for your sister's happiness. Tell this to your husband, and say from me, that, as he deals with this unfortunate boy, whose only guilt, if he be guilty, is, that he struck a hasty blow in the heat of passion and liquor, may his fellow-man and his Maker deal with him in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed!"

"He will not shirk the test!" Hadassah said, her quiet dignity a marked contrast to the other's flurry and incoherence. "You will honor him the more for his steadfastness, when you are calmer."

"Calmer!" Mrs. Todd's fortitude dissolved at the imputation, and she wept profusely—the sobbing whine, with interjected "Ohs!" so exasperating to people of sense and nerve. "It is easy for you who have never known sorrow, never had so much as a whim crossed, to preach calm-

ness! My existence has been a livelong struggle. Unkind relations, poverty, hard work, ill-health, bereavement, and, sorest of all, thankless and undutiful children, have filled my cup of grief to overflowing. I wish I were dead and buried in your father's grave!"

She had dropped to the carpet in a shapeless bunch while she rehearsed her grievances, and Hadassah saw a stormier scene was at hand. She often pitied her mother. She as often asked herself if she loved her, so sharply did the growing absurdity of her humors tax her forbearance.

"We cannot judge of each other's trials," she said, patiently. "Each heart knoweth its own bitterness. I wish I could lighten yours. I think all your children love you, and strive to make you happy."

"Nobody does it but Laura, now that her blessed father is gone!" wailed the disconsolate. "She is his living image; she has been the light of my darkened home, my widowed heart. *She* appreciates my trials and my sensitiveness. *She* would heal my broken spirit if she could, and I must pierce her with this new grief—tell her there is no hope for him whom she loves with all the ardor of her young heart! that her brother and sister doom him to death, her to woe!"

Hadassah locked the door, took her parent by the arm, resolutely but not ungently; put her in an arm-chair, and bathed the discolored face in cool water, offering *sal volatile* to quell the hysterical symptoms.

"I am better!" Mrs. Todd swallowed her emotion with heroic strangulation. "My weakness shall not again master me in your presence. I am aware that you despise tears. May you never have to shed such drops as those you have drawn from your mother's eyes! I will go!"



She stalked forth, down the stairs, and out upon the piazza, beckoning the driver of her one-horse carriage to the door, and vouchsafing no further notice of her daughter.

"Good-bye!" said Hadassah pleasantly, when she was seated.

The matron looked straight between the horse's ears.

"Drive on!" she articulated, magisterially.

Hadassah watched the vehicle until it passed through the upper gate.

"Father! Father! your's was a blessed release!" she sighed audibly, in turning into the house.

He had been dead five years. It was ten since Elena made a runaway match with Junius Kemp, and came back to her father for money and forgiveness in less than two months from the elopement. The two older brothers were in Louisville, in business, and doing well. Of the three children left at home, Laura was the eldest—a sprightly, pretty girl of twenty. Fred Wilbon, the county "ne'er do well," had catered cunningly to the mother's foibles to win her to advocacy of his suit. Hadassah and her husband were very partial to their young sister; had her often at Riverview, and hoped the society she mingled in there, would implant in her finer tastes than she had acquired from her mother's talk and books, and from the boisterous gayeties of Elena's household. The intelligence of her engagement to Wilbon, coming as it did when the county was ringing with the story of the murder for which he had been indicted, was unwelcome as unexpected.

Mrs. Humphreys went to her own room to think it over. She had not owned to her informant that she was deeply

hurt at the concealment practised by Laura towards herself. The girl had spent a fortnight with her not long before, and never hinted at her engagement, nay, worse, had encouraged, in a modest way, the attentions of Maxwell's cousin, Alexander Shelby, who was undeniably smitten with her sweet face and agreeable conversation.

"I should be angry if I were not so sorry for the misguided creature!" Hadassah said, recollecting her pleasure in seeing this.

She would fain have persuaded herself that such reflections, and the impression of the scene through which she had just passed; her mother's childish exhibition of temper; her angry charges against herself, and vulgar accusations relative to Edith's paternity, had caused her perturbation. Any and all of these were enough to chase peace from her mind for a season, but they had not begotten the profound depression of spirit that fell upon her. An old sore, one that had never healed, had been probed ruthlessly. She had repelled insinuations and overt charges with dignified severity, but some of the darts were poisoned.

That Maxwell's fast-multiplying honors brought scant comfort to him, was no secret to her, but they were, at least, a wholesome distraction, a preventive to morbid brooding. She enjoyed them, exulted in his rapid rise in his profession; in the respect and adulation that everywhere waited upon his appearance; gloried in her love and in her wifehood, called him with heart, mind, and tongue—"lord." It irked her that he should be suspected of early excesses, even though in the same breath these were spoken of as peccadilloes common to youth. She did not tell her mother that she had seconded her father-

in-law's persuasions and arguments to his son, to induce him to accept the office of public prosecutor, with all her eloquence, had reasoned away, and borne down, with specious earnestness, the objections he urged to her in private

"I am more ambitious for you than you are for yourself," she frequently said.

Yet he was an ambitious man. He more nearly forgot the hidden canker in devotion to legal duties, and in public life, than at any other season. Excitement dulled the smart time had not cured. Popular applause drowned for the hour the ceaseless murmurs of conscience. He seldom spoke of the one fatal step of his career, even to his wife. He had not alluded to it directly in years, save upon the occasion of the decision to which I have referred, and then in such brief and caustic phrase as wrung Hadasah's heart.

"I maintain the righteousness of the law!" he exclaimed. "Is not my whole life now a hideous lie? Shall I heap up the measure of hypocrisy?"

"If you feel that, in any way, you have failed to satisfy Justice, is not the call louder to you to sacrifice individual inclination and morbid scruples in becoming the champion of the Right?" answered the wife. "And if the recollection of past errors, and heart-felt repentance for the same, shall temper judgment with mercy, you will not have suffered in vain."

If all were known, would he be harshly condemned? Would not his years of active beneficence, his virtues as son, brother, husband, citizen, suffice to win him acquittal with those among whom he had walked so long without reproach? Could it be decreed in the wise and merciful counsels of the Searcher of hearts, to whom her mother

had made appeal, that the “damned spot” should never “out”? She moved restlessly as under a burdensome weight. She had known the cross to be iron and sharp when she bowed her shoulders to receive it, but was it never to be lifted? Was “*But for It!*” to be stamped in blood-red letters across the face of every warrant for pleasure, for thankfulness, for hope? To her mother’s implied menace she gave not a thought. The secret was hers and Maxwell’s, and she had said truly that, with this mental reservation, his life would bear the severest scrutiny.

Edith’s modest rap interrupted her meditations.

“Aunt Mahala says Uncle Shelby is throwing the chairs about, and shouting, and nobody can manage him?” was her message, delivered with a tranquillity that told a sad story of the frequency of such occasions for the head-keeper’s intervention.

“Yes, love, I will come at once.”

She went quickly, but not in agitated haste, to the maniac’s cell. The old “Office” had been enlarged, and the wing designed by Maxwell added. It was a smaller apartment than the original building; fire-proof, well-ventilated and warmed, and had latticed panes that looked picturesque, and were an iron net-work. The house itself was a pretty cottage, with flower-beds on either side of the front door, and two porches overrun with vines. The trees had been cut away that once overshadowed it, lest they should make unwholesome damps for one who never left it, except for one hour’s walk or ride per day, attended by his guard. The exterior was comely and cheerful, the inside neat as hands could make

it, and comfortably furnished. But the centre-table was bronze, and screwed fast to the floor of the parlor; the frame of the lounge was iron, and it, also, was riveted in its place; the chairs were light basket-work, that could not be made to deal a murderous blow. The pictures were suspended above the reach of one standing on the floor, yet Mrs. Humphreys' first step into the room was upon broken glass from a fine print which hung by the door. In his most peaceable moments, Shelby seemed to derive enjoyment from these adornments of his lodge; would call horses, cows, and sheep by their right names, and was fondest of pictures of children at play, and of farm-life. Hence his guardians, who studied his fantasies as no paid warders would have done, had lined his walls with such.

He was rushing about the floor, taking the width of the room in three or four strides, and bellowing hoarsely—the bovine roar Hadassah could not yet hear without a shudder. The silver cup he had hurled at the picture lay battered and bruised under his feet, and as the servant-man who attended him stooped to pick it up, the madman kicked him. He was shod with slippers, but the negro lost his balance and rolled over.

"Shelby!" He had laughed idiotically at the success of his assault, but ceased as if he were shot, at the sound of his sister-in-law's voice. "You must sit down."

He obeyed, drawing down his head between his shoulders, like a tortoise, and, putting his arm over his eyes, began to cry.

"Don't scold! no! no! Will be good! will be good!"

While Miss Mahala and the servant repaired the dis-

order of the apartment, Hadassah directed Shelby to put on the coat and vest he had flung off, herself assisting in his dressing.

“You will take cold,” she said, kindly, buttoning his neck-band.

“He’s been enough to try the temper of a saint to-day!” ejaculated Miss Mahala. “Don’t you ever get out of patience with him when he goes on so like mad?”

“Never! For he *is* mad—poor boy!”

“Boy,” now and forever, although his hair was white as wool, and his figure portly as his father’s. A simpering baby at thirty-six! His mother had gone to her grave six years ago; his father, no longer hale and erect, was still the nominal master of Riverview. Maxwell and the wife he had compelled his kinspeople to receive with feigned complacency, which was soon exchanged for real satisfaction, ruled the demesne. Dr. Humphreys had had his portion—a goodly one—double what he had expected—a surprise for which he was suitably grateful when he learned from the judge that, at the youngest brother’s instance, the whole of the property once designed for Shelby had been added to Morris’ share.

“I have enough of my own, thanks to my uncle Maxwell’s bequest, and since you will have it that Riverview is to be mine also, give the doctor the rest,” Maxwell had advised. “He will need it all with his large family. As for Shelby, I will take care of him while I live, and make suitable provision for his comfort in the event of my dying first.”

To his wife he said, “I could not touch a dollar of it, you know.”

"I understand. You are quite right!" she replied.  
There was no need for either to utter the words—  
"blood-money!"





## CHAPTER XVII.

### FORGETTING.

**T**HE afternoon of Mrs. Todd's visit was chill and damp even for late November, and darkness brought rain. The winter parlor of the River-view family was a front room, with two large windows opening upon the portico.

"Don't close the shutters," said Hadassah to the servant, who, having replenished the fire, would have added to the snug comfort of the apartment by shutting out the sound of wind and rain.

"I know why you say that, auntie," smiled Edith from the carpet, where she was building block-houses for Morrie. "Because you want uncle to see the light of home when he turns into the avenue."

"A good and sufficient reason!" returned the old Judge, who was watching the children from his arm-chair in the corner. "I hope you will make as excellent a wife when you are grown as she does. And have a husband as well worth illuminating the windows for."

Hadassah looked pleased and touched. Despite the shadow upon their hearth-stone, her home was happy and



dear. She worshipped her husband; between herself and her father-in-law there existed the most cordial respect and affection; Edith was a sweet companion and pleasant charge, and her cup had run over when her boy, after nine years of childless wedlock, was given into her arms. Her skill as a housewife and manager was the theme of general praise, and being very human, she dearly enjoyed the importance of her station.

The responsibilities and duties that would have oppressed others were welcome to her enterprising and dauntless spirit. The cloud left upon it by the event of the afternoon had passed, and she felt more than usually serene and hopeful, as she sat amid her household gods, and awaited the coming of the chiefest. She had developed into a handsome woman since her marriage, and her matronly black-silk dress, at the throat of which Edith had insisted upon putting a bunch of holly berries, became her well. More scarlet berries and green leaves were in her hair, and her lap was full of gay, worsted balls. She was knitting a carriage-rug intended as a Christmas present for Maxwell.

“You will spoil that boy!” remarked the father, well-pleased nevertheless, when she answered his inquiry as to the object of her labor.

“That is impossible!” she rejoined, brightly. “The original material is too good to be injured by any amount of petting.”

“You are right. There are not many like him in this world. Who trusts him shows sound wisdom. His hands are clean, and his conscience void of offence. God bless and keep him!”

“Amen!” said the wife, solemnly.

She deemed them foolish tears that rushed into her eyes with the response, and lest they should be observed, arose, put by her work, and passed into the hall. The rain pattered fast upon the roof of the portico, and the wind whistled at the key-hole of the front door. Merry sounds they were to the snugly-housed party within, but with a solicitous thought of the traveller, she unclosed the door, drew it to after her, and stood upon the broad porch. The spray did not dash to her feet, but it was cold and wet. She pulled the shawl from her shoulders to her head, and began to walk lightly and briskly up and down, as she had often done on summer nights when awaiting her husband's return from court. Many fond and pleasant reveries had she enjoyed in these solitary promenades, but she had never tasted such fulness of content in the retrospect of her married life, as she did now. The early years of ecstatic happiness, but fitful, by reason of Max's seasons of terrible depression; the wearing struggles between her will which would have dragged him up to the light, and his load of remorseful misery that sometimes tempted him to suicide, had been followed by a period that seemed, by contrast, blissful calm. She had won him to effort and to action; had helped make him the man he had grown to be, and he knew it, blessed her hourly for it.

"I believe he thought it foolish indulgence to show his love for me in that dark, middle age," she said now, with a blush, although alone in the darkness. "He did not kiss me sometimes, for days together. He has been very different—more like himself, since our boy was born. My darlings!"

Her figure, fitting before the lighted windows, at

tracted the eye of him who was foremost in her thoughts as he rode down the pitchy dark avenue, chilled and tired, but less heavy of heart than it was his wont to be in the reaction after intellectual excitement or toil. His spring from the buggy to the piazza was as agile as a boy's, and his voice rang out cheerily :

“Naughty little girl! to be watching in the wet for a laggard husband.” But he thanked her with a kiss, adding, between a laugh and a sigh, “I wonder if I will ever be good enough for such a wife! Queenie! you are my guardian angel!”

He was not afraid to speak now of his love! The thought came deliciously to her as she rested for one blissful second in his embrace. Love had exorcised the baleful spirit; redeemed the victim of bootless remorse for a career of usefulness and honor, even of happiness. They paused before a window, and looked in. The snowy-haired patriarch still eyed the frolicsome children from his easy-chair, the rosy shine of the fire painting his noble features with youthful bloom, and making yet more beautiful the sunny-haired girl and cherub boy. Encircled by her husband's arm, Hadassah gazed until she could not see for the sweet moisture that came between her and them.

“We ought to be happy, Love!” she said, softly.

“We will be!” His accent was defiant, rather than declarative. “Thirteen years of penance should propitiate the sternest Deity.”

“We will take our bonnie boy as an earnest that our repentance is accepted,” responded Hadassah. “And Heaven has been kind in allowing us to be one in ou

suffering. Nothing is unendurable that we can bear in company."

He stooped to kiss her again, silently, but in exceeding tenderness. Then they went in together. Behind them, storm and night. Before them, love, radiance, warmth.

There was no apparent reason why that evening should be the happiest the wife had ever spent at Riverview. The children had been as sprightly and affectionate many times before; Judge Humphreys as genial, and her home as beautiful. Nor was this the first occasion on which Max had unbent from the gravity that had become habitual to his demeanor, and romped with his son and adopted daughter. The manner of the husband and wife to Edith was a puzzle to their acquaintances. There was a punctilio of kindly interest, a studied gentleness, that was not like the spontaneity of parental regard. Yet, that they really loved the child, no one that saw them with her could question. While Max trotted Morrie to market and back again on his knee, Edith stood by his side, pleased and quiet; and when he moved, it was with careful thought of the little hand he might displace from his shoulder. He never spoke shortly or sternly to her, handled her tenderly, and there was at times in his tone a pitying cadence, as though he deemed her fragile as precious. He told stories to the two, to-night, ingeniously simple, to suit Morrie's capacity, yet replete with incident which Edith could enjoy.

The shutters were closed now; the fire blazed high, and seated at her husband's knee, when the children's early bedtime had been followed closely by the old gentleman's withdrawal to his chamber, Hadassah spoke out her thought:

“Married life, true, wedded bliss, is like the tender light that shines more and more unto the perfect day. I have never been so happy before as I am to-night. I fancy I have reached the climax.”

Maxwell’s hand caressed the head leaning against his arm.

“Thank you, dearest!” he said, earnestly. “Your blessing should be abundant, for it is the reward of the generous giver. I am glad you do not regret that you married me.”

“Regret it! I have been happy and proud of it every day since that which made us one. It seems sinfully selfish in me to rejoice in my affluence of affection when others are so poverty-stricken, and some so miserable even, when they love and are beloved.”

With this preamble she told the story of Laura’s unhappy attachment, and her mother’s appeal to herself. Maxwell’s brow lowered as the tale went on.

“What rascally presumption!” he said, once. “He should have been flogged for daring to speak to, much less visit her!” And again, more gently, “Poor, deceived child!”

Hadassah’s deep eyes glowed with loving admiration as they dwelt upon his face, so handsome in its indignant sympathy.

“It is pitiable! Her life is completely wrecked!” she answered. “Yet it is beyond our power to help her.”

He gave her a quick, searching glance.

“You recognize the truth, then, of what you say? that we may not depart from the right, even to heal her breaking heart?”

“I told mother that you would perform your duty, let

what might come," was the reply. "That if my father stood at the bar, accused of a capital crime, you would stand to your post, and see justice meted out in righteous measure."

"You were right!" In a lower, musing tone, he added, "If I know myself. Who can say that he does! It is growing late," he subjoined, after a pause. "You had better go upstairs, I will follow presently."

Always the same suggestion and promise for twelve years. He did not spend a night at home without visiting Shelby the last thing before retiring. No one else was ever present at these interviews. Hadassah offered once to accompany him, but this was soon after their marriage, and his peremptory declinature forbade a repetition of the proposal. He went to-night, as was his custom, buttoning up his coat, and hurrying across the yard in the teeth of the storm. He let himself into the outer, then the inner chamber of the lodge with a pass-key he carried in his pocket. The negro on guard in the larger room looked up from his light slumbers, but did not rise or speak to the familiar visitant. Shelby, too, slept, and more soundly. The apartment was warmed by a fire from the one adjoining. It was never safe to have fire in his sight. He was stretched upon the iron bedstead, his head thrown back, the bull neck and heaving chest revealed by his open shirt, and one thick hand lay on the outside of the coverlet. From the high ceiling depended a lamp which burned all night, and this showed in all their uncomeliness the coarse features, shaggy white beard and mane. He snored, too, a wheezing grunt, like that made by a hog in rooting and eating

“Brute!” was written on every lineament, upon feature and limb.

Yet the prosperous scion of a haughty line, the man upon whom honors had descended more quickly than years, knelt beside him upon the bare, stone floor, and prayed—this evening, as never before, albeit the form was nightly observed. Hitherto, he had asked but for pardon from Him whose law he had broken, for deliverance in the hour of death, and at the Day of Judgment from the “primal, eldest curse.”

Now he said, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me! How long, Lord, how long? Shall I never in this life be able to lift up clean hands toward Heaven? For my child’s sake, for the sake of her who bore him, roll the burden from my soul! Look upon my affliction and my tears, upon the many and joyless years that separate me from my happy youth, and have mercy! have mercy! Wilt Thou be angry forever? Is Thy mercy clean gone?”

The admission of the possibility of forgiveness that should bring relief, even in this life, brought a strange, sweet sense of peace to his soul. There was light in his eyes, serenity in his aspect, as he arranged his brother’s coverlet, fastened the collar, and gently laid the exposed arm under the blankets. Then he lowered the curtain over the window against which the rain dashed most fiercely, and passed into the outer air. The heavens were inky, as he turned his face upward for one instant, his lips moving in prayer that was almost thanksgiving, and the storm dealt him a rude buffet, as he ran across the lawn, but he carried a smile to his wife’s room.

“After all—” he said, approaching her where she stood

before her dressing-table, her hair unbound and veiling her shoulders, giving girlish roundness to her cheeks. He put a hand on either side of her face, and looked earnestly, not sorrowfully, into her eyes. "After all, why should we not forget the things that are behind, and begin to live?"

"We will!" she returned, emphatically.

The short, happy week that followed, stood forever afterward in Hadassah's memory like a solitary mountain peak that had over-topped the clouds, and was crowned with eternal sunshine. The rapture of betrothal, the trembling, exquisite bliss of the honeymoon, were tasted by her in all their sweetness, during those seven brief days. It mattered not that the weather was wild and dark with rainy tempest; or rather, this but enhanced her delight, for Max studied at home, and few visited the plantation from the outer world.

The eighth day was clear and cold, and Hadassah had an "all-day" guest—one who arrived at ten A.M., and announced her intention of staying until evening. Max was with his wife in the sitting-room, lying at half-length on the rug, his head upon her knees, his arm about her waist.

"I ought to be at work, I know," he was saying, reluctantly. "But you have been a fearful snare to me of late. How can your conscience reconcile these wiles with—"

"Dear life!" said a simpering screech behind them. "How very romantic, to be sure!"

Mrs. Rob Wharton, *née* Hayne, swept into the room in the latest fashion of widow's weeds. Her bombazine was fresh, her *crêpe* deep, but she was *riante* and buxom.



"Voluptuous" was Maxwell's word, as he arose gayly to meet her. "Armed cap-à-pie, for a new conquest!" he added, also inaudibly.

"I am sorry I interrupted a love-scene!" she resumed, as Hadassah helped remove her wrappings. "I thought you two never indulged in such ridiculous luxuries! I recollect when poor dear Rob and I were first married—just a month after you were, you made me ashamed of our billing and cooing, you behaved so properly, and looked so sedate. I told Rob I knew you despised our foolish love-making."

"I am sorry you think it foolish. I call it a rational and agreeable employment," responded Max. "Where and how are the children?"

"At home. I won't be bothered with them!" airily. "My girls grow so preposterously, I keep them in the background, and boys are nuisances."

"We do not consider them such," began Hadassah, kindly.

Violet interrupted her.

"I wish I hadn't any! They are awfully troublesome, and the responsibility of raising them is fearful. If their poor, dear pa had lived, they might have been managed, but I am too soft-hearted. I am forever telling them they will come to the gallows. Just look at Fred Wilbon! *His* mother wouldn't marry again, I have heard, 'on account of her duty to her children.' And see what comes of her perverseness! All of them are turning out badly."

Max stood leaning against the mantel, looking much amused, while Hadassah was mortified at the widow's levity.

“I hope you do not mean to disregard the warning!” he said, laughing. “Each of the four young Wilbons is a beacon light to caution you against the perils of singlehood.”

“Widowhood, you mean!” corrected Violet. “You think I am joking, but I assure you there is no fun in trying to rule four harum-scarum children. It is worrying all the flesh off my bones. If Haddie here was “left” as I am, she’d feel lonely and awkward, too. There never was a human being more unfit to take care of herself than I am. I am as helpless as a baby. I was thinking, as I drove up the avenue, how oddly things had turned out with us. Here I am, mourning the loss of my dear, good husband, and Haddie, who, I was sure, would live and die an old maid, is mistress of Riverview. I was certain once I should marry you, or Shelby. I didn’t much care which,” laughing coquettishly. “To be sure, you and I were engaged, but poor Shelby was a dangerous rival. He was in dead earnest, and it was hard work to say, ‘no,’ to him. By the way, how is he?”

“About as well as usual,” Hadassah answered.

The coarse leaven always hidden under Violet’s prepossessing exterior had nearly leavened the whole lump. She was pretty still; her white teeth and bright complexion, her nut-brown hair and antelope eyes remaining unchanged by the years that had added as many pounds to her weight.

“This Fred Wilbon is a handsome fellow,” she pursued. “I have met him twice at Elena Kemp’s, and he impressed me as a gentlemanly person, considering his disadvantages of birth and education. He really paid me

some nice compliments, in a truly graceful manner Derby was a low, drunken vagabond. I hope you lawyers won't be hard upon poor Fred. He has rid the community of a pest."

Maxwell took out his watch.

"It is pleasant to chat with ladies, but I must go to my office."

"Stop one minute!" Violet jumped up and caught his hands, looking winning with all her might. "We, the ladies of the county, have set our hearts upon getting this unlucky boy out of the law's clutches, and they have deputed me to speak to you about it, fancying—" casting down her tell-tale eyes, and squeezing his fingers—"that I might have some influence *still* with you. But, indeed, he doesn't deserve a heavy punishment. Think how young, and good-hearted, and fine-looking he is, and what a scoundrel Derby was, and of his widowed mother! Just put your little Morrie into his place—or yourself! Say, for instance, that when you were a mere boy (*he* is just twenty-three!) you had got mad with a man and struck him, not meaning to injure him badly, you know—"

"Come, come!" Hadassah interposed, playfully, "I cannot have you interfere with the course of the law. It will do no good to tempt him to wink at injustice. You should try the effect of your pleading upon the jury. They will decide the case, not he!"

Still laughing, she pushed Max toward the door, but the seductive widow put herself in his path.

"The jury! Yes, after he has told them what to do! Everybody says he is an awful prosecutor, a perfect blood-hound! I have heard a dozen declare they believed he

liked to hunt men down and hang them, or send them to the State Prison."

Fool as she was, she had stabbed him to the quick.

"God is my witness that I do not!" uttered Maxwell, his face ghastly, and voice utterly changed from the pleasant resonance of a minute ago.

He turned and left the room by another door.

"O, Violet! how could you say such a cruel thing?" cried Hadassah, distressed out of her usual self-command.

"It will do him good when he comes to think of it," nodded the widow, who began to esteem herself a modern Portia. "He *is* hard upon these unfortunate prisoners. I stretched the truth when I said other people had told me, but *I* think so! It may teach him charity, to lean a little to mercy's side, at least in Fred Wilbon's case. Max was wild himself once, for all he sets up for a saint now. How d'ye do, my dear?" to Edith, who entered, with a message from the housekeeper to Mrs. Humphreys.

The child paid her respects with modest grace, then stated her errand, Mrs. Wharton staring at her meanwhile.

"I declare, Haddie," exclaimed the latter when Edith was out of hearing, "it is awfully unlucky that she should be such an out-and-out Humphreys! She is Max over again, and the resemblance is stronger every day! I wonder you submit to it."

There was no use flying into a passion with one whose sensibilities were so obtuse, but Hadassah spoke strongly.

"If you mean that she is my husband's child, you are altogether mistaken. Her real name is Ridley. I know who her parents were, and her grandparents. Both fami-

lies were respectable, and her antecedents were such as put the possibility of the relationship you suggest out of the question. She was born while Max was in Mexico. Her father was his classmate in college. She lost him before she was born, poor child! The marriage was secret, and the mother did not feel at liberty to call upon his relatives for assistance. She struggled on as best she could, with the help of her friends, until Edith was nearly four years old. She was poor, and an orphan, and on her death-bed bequeathed her daughter to our care, having heard of our desire to adopt a child. That is the story. You have heard it before. I ask, as an act of common justice, that you believe it."

"Bless your heart, my dear soul! I haven't a doubt *you* believe every separate and individual word of it. It's best you should, if you *can* be so awfully verdant. But men are shocking creatures. My sainted Rob used to say I was so pure-minded that I couldn't have an idea how wicked they were. And college students have all sorts of temptations. We ought not to be surprised that the steadiest of them go astray sometimes. I'll be perfectly frank with you. If I speak at all I must tell the truth, straight up-and-down. People will talk even about as popular a man as Max Humphreys. And this is the most charitable version-going of Edith's history. They say that Max was really married to her mother, that he got money from his father to buy her silence, and married you in a hurry to cover up the story better. That when he heard his wife was dying, he rushed off North, taking you along, to get the child, and told you the whole truth. That you were married over again, and legally, during

that trip. You needn't look so black at me! I didn't manufacture the story!"

"Who did?"

"Black" was not an inapt epithet to apply to the gradual change in the wife's face as she listened to the tale so indelicately narrated. It described the depth of anger she felt against the slanderers—her surprise at the boldness of the callous gossip who dared retail such things in her ears, and beneath her roof. But there was that in her look and manner shallow Violet did not interpret, and felt very vaguely, something with which her pulpy brain could not grapple—a horror of astonishment, such as may have dilated the seeress of Endor's eyes when she saw the mantled form uprise from the earth at her feet. It was gone before she trusted her voice to speak.

"Who did, then?" she demanded, sternly.

"Oh! I've heard it ever and ever so often! That was when you first adopted the child. People have found so many other subjects of gossip since that they've almost forgotten it. Now, Haddie! you really must not flare up in that way when I speak my mind to or about Max. He's my sort of cousin, you know. Then, we were engaged so long that I couldn't help finding out what a hot-headed, warm-hearted fellow he was. I'll just give you a proof of how he let his feelings run away with his judgment by telling you what I've never breathed to a living mortal before, except poor, darling Rob, who laughed himself sick over it, and was never tired of teasing me about it. The very evening Max came home from Mexico, you may recollect that I met you two on the back porch on your way in from your stroll in the garden and sent you to aunt? Well! Max asked me to

take his arm and walk up and down with him in the twilight, and somehow, we got to talking about old times. I saw he was getting agitated, but I didn't suspect what he felt—for I was as good as engaged to poor, blessed Rob, you know, until all of a sudden, he threw his arms around me and hugged me until I could hardly breathe. Then he said, all choked-up-like, 'It is my farewell!' and jumped over the railing, and out of sight.

"You are too sensible to mind hearing of such trifles now. They happened ages ago, and as my angel Rob used to say, a man must be more than a man who could resist *me*! I have no doubt Max has been as faithful to you since you were married, as the generality of husbands are; but dear me! a young fellow must sow his wild oats, and he put a big crop into the ground. And you must confess there was something very queer about his sudden engagement to you—the last girl in the neighborhood anybody would have thought of his fancying, and getting his father's consent so easily, and hurrying on the wedding as he did. But it's all right now, and the very ones who talked most then, agree that you have made him a nonesuch of a wife. So, you needn't worry over what's past and gone. Only, as I said, it must be aggravating to you to have that child around. Nobody could mistake her for anything but a Humphreys. What does Uncle think about her?"

"He has faith in his son's integrity and truthfulness!" returned Hadassah, loftily. "And so have I. If the whole world were to defame him, it would not alter my opinion."

"Of course not!" said complaisant Violet, hitching her rocking-chair farther from the fire. "Faugh! how *crêpe*

smells when it is heated! I am really afraid it is unwholesome wear. I've heard so; I should hate to lighten my mourning, but I must take care of my health for my children's sake. As I was saying—since we have to live with the men we marry, it is well to believe in them, if we can. And, law me! when we count up our own early scrapes, our flirtations, and the like, it does not become us to be too severe upon such frail beings as our lords and masters, does it? They are among the actual necessities of life, like houses, land, and money, and we must take some drawbacks with them."







## CHAPTER XVIII.

### “DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE.”

**H**ADASSAH'S declaration of confidence in her husband's rectitude, and the composure with which she hearkened to the concluding portions of Violet's narrative, were not affected. She knew the woman to be vain of heart, and light of speech, and set down the bit of melodrama she had described as a fabrication, or supposed it to be, at the most, an exaggeration of an unimportant incident, in nowise reflecting upon Maxwell's honor, or his constancy to herself.

Violet had unwittingly spoken the truth when she opined that her listener did not “mind” hearing such things—especially when she was the speaker. She did mind, however, the stuff with which the would-be Portia had plied Max before his escape from the room. One of the inconveniences of carrying about an unhealed wound, the existence of which the sufferer is loath to reveal, is that every rude and careless passer-by is liable to strike it. Maxwell should have been used to such encounters. Or, at least, it should not have been in Violet's power to hurt him to bleeding and fever. That she had tortured

nerves which must ache and throb for days to come, Hadassah divined by the time the flippant hypothetical case was stated. It was long since she had seen that look of white anguish upon the face she loved. She was not surprised when a message was presently brought that her husband wished to speak with her.

He was equipped for a horseback ride.

“Must you go? I thought you would not leave home before to-morrow!” she expostulated.

“I must! Do not expect me until night. I *think* I may be home, then. I must come back to you!”

His hand was clammy, his lips were cold. Hadassah clung to him when he had kissed her “Good-bye.”

“Come back to me! Of course you will! Or, I should go in search of you, you know. Darling! is it sensible to regard such babbling as you heard in yonder?”

She nodded backward toward the room where she had left the buxom beauty, rocking her comfortable self in her padded chair, and humming a little tune, a fat, white kitten purring upon the hearth-rug.

“I do not care for the babbler’s own opinions, but for the words of others, or those which an avenging spirit put into her mouth—”

“Which she acknowledged to me were her own inventions—a foolish, random shot!” interrupted Hadassah, warmly. “She is fast degenerating into an incurable gossip—a common infirmity with small minds.”

“Where there is a rent always gaping—not a chance opening in the harness—many random shots must enter,” was the rejoinder. “Queenie! when the sense of all this rolls in upon me like a new and horrid revelation, it is

only the thought of you that gives me strength to live. Tell me! look in my eyes! Be my conscience in my anguish and bewilderment! Can I—*dare* I prosecute this unhappy boy?"

"Is he guilty? And if so, of what?" queried the wife, steadfastly. "These are the questions you will have to deal with. You will discuss them impartially and dispassionately. The law prosecutes—not you!"

He seemed not to hear the last sentences.

"He slew a man—an enemy—in haste and passion," he said, reflective and moody. "Mine was the more heinous sin."

"I deny the analogy! But with that we have nothing to do."

How many, many times had she been over the same ground; reasoned, and pleaded, and controverted until heart and flesh were sick and faint! He always listened. He generally thanked and blessed her for her efforts to relieve him;—sometimes owned that the load was lighter for her help. She had not this recompense to-day. Only a silent shake of the head, a closer compression of the lips, and gathering of the brows; and, as she watched him go, she felt that the cloud had returned after the rain—a presentiment so forcible she could not repel it—that with the heart-sunshine of that happy week had departed all the joy she was to know for years to come.

"And all because a senseless woman could not hold her tongue!" she muttered, angrily, returning to the unwelcome guest.

Violet was at the window, drawn thither by the sound of hoofs.

"How awfully fast that man rides," she remarked,

lightly. “Dear Rob used to say Max Humphreys went as if the Old Harry was upon the crupper. I never see him on horseback without thinking of the odd, witty saying. He’ll be brought home to you with a broken neck some day. I hope he won’t be away very long. I must have another pull at him about Fred Wilbon. I could see that what I said to him told.”

In default of the son’s appearance, she poured out her eloquence upon the Judge all dinner-time, and beset him anew when the hour of her departure obliged him again to enter her presence.

“I go into the case with my whole soul, you see,” she said, fastening upon her old friend’s arm, and doing wonderful things with her eyes, while her tongue was tipped with honey. “I know that you are not upon the bench now, and can take no active part in court when the case comes on, but I am sure I do not appeal in vain to your big, loving, pitiful heart, dear uncle. You must positively use your influence with your stubborn boy and the community in behalf of my *protégé*. I have set my heart upon having him acquitted.”

“That used to be a moderately sensible woman!” observed the worried victim, when at last freed. “She has not fulfilled the promise of her early years. You, my dear, have far exceeded my expectations—another proof of the fallibility of human judgment. I was very desirous that my son”—he usually spoke as if he had no other—“should marry my ward. I thank Providence, this hour, that he listened to the dictates of his heart and reason—not mine. She has annoyed me fearfully with her sentimental officiousness and egregious ignorance of the

simplest forms of law. And you look as if the day had been a hard one."

He could not guess how hard, and Hadassah did not enlighten him. Nor did he surmise the cause of her increasing seriousness as night fell, and Maxwell was still absent. These long rides were always a bug-bear to her. He entered no house; spoke with no one while the fit was on him. Reports of his mad horsemanship—how he avoided the highways, and chose bridle-paths, and even went straight across the country as one would ride after the hounds—had reached the wife often enough to make her uneasy, and given reason for the saying that the devil sat upon his crupper. A haunting demon of remorse it was, who, she was now assured, would never be shaken off, who would hunt him to madness or self-destruction. The hopes of that halcyon week were fallacious as short-lived. Their dream of Lethe was a chimera that made reality the more hateful. While life lasted, they must remember and suffer. The plague-spot upon memory was corrosive as black.

Thus she meditated,—left alone in the fire-lit sitting-room, when the rest of the household had gone to bed. She could endure more than most women—or men. With a larger capacity for grief had been bestowed extraordinary elasticity and strength. But this disappointment racked her visibly. She looked aged and exhausted when, at midnight, the stroke of horse's feet in the avenue, then Maxwell's shout to the hostler, gave the tidings of his safe return. She met him in the hall with an attempt at a smile, untinged with reproach, although she could not quite banish the weary look from her countenance.

"I am glad you are home again! Are you very tired, love?" was her greeting.

He had galloped off his restlessness. Haggard and faint, wet and muddy from ford and fen, he had "come back to her!" Miserable and moody still; but he loved her. For her sake he lived. She could not be utterly discouraged while this was so. It might be a thread, this tie to existence and hope, but it drew him to her arms. Such love shone in her upward gaze at the thought, as could not escape his notice, dim as was his sight with fatigue and melancholy. It may have been the contrast of the warmth and heartiness of his home-welcome with the dreary wretchedness to which he had been a prey for twelve hours; or he may have taken in with one retrospective glance, the years of her matchless devotion to one he accounted unworthy of any good woman's affections; one whose hands she had seen dipped in his brother's blood. Whatever was the spring of the emotion that mastered him, it was genuine, and swept self-control before it, as a straw before a spring-freshet. He sank to his knees at her feet and bowed his face within his hands, quivering convulsively.

"Unclean! unclean!" said look and gesture. His tongue—"O wonderful love! passing the love of all other women! My only hope! my earthly saviour!"

"Yet that woman would have me believe that he did not marry me for love!" was Hadassah's thought, ere she bent to comfort him, raised him with many a fond and soothing word; ministered to him as only wives or guardian spirits can.

"This is killing you!" he said, at length, in sorrowful

self-accusation. "You have carried weight all your life!"

"The knowledge that you lean upon me helps me to stand," was the smiling reply. "When you withdraw your love I shall sink; not until then!"

"Your strength will never fail if that be true," he returned earnestly.

His love! That was her watchword—the keystone of her idolatry. The world and all other human loves were well lost if by resigning them she secured this.

Judge Humphreys saw nothing unusual in their demeanor at the breakfast-table, where the conversation was, for the most part, professional. Maxwell must be off to a court which sat twenty miles away, and could not return under three days. This was reason sufficient why his wife should be even more attentive to him than was her habit; address him in a softened voice; be doubly watchful and tender. The boy had a jewel of a wife, one who was a help to him in his career, not a hindrance, like the pretty ignoramus who had tormented himself at dinner-time yesterday.

"Wilbon's case will be called next week," he said aloud. "Shall you be ready?"

"Yes, sir," unfalteringly, and then—irrelevantly, as his father thought—

"Hadassah, love, you will not fail to see Laura to-day, and give her my message?"

"I will go over this afternoon."

Neither ate anything after that, a touch of sentiment that verged upon absurdity in people who had been married twelve years. This was the Judge's jocose comment upon their slender appetites. He was in good plight, men-

tal and physical, and had most of the talk and eating to himself. Maxwell bade him and the children farewell in the dining-room. Hadassah accompanied him to the piazza.

“You will be careful of yourself, be brave and hopeful for my sake, will you not?” she entreated. “Because your *wife* asks it?”

“If I do not know the meaning of that word, no man ever did,” he replied with feeling. “I will do all you ask. Our Father bless and keep my precious one safe and happy until my return!”

Once more her eyes looked into his, were flooded into glory with the unshadowed light of a great and satisfied love. Then they parted.

Laura was lying upon the parlor sofa at her sister’s visit, languid and feverish. She raised herself to a sitting posture, with the manifest intention of treating her with resentful reserve, but the elder frustrated her purpose by coming swiftly and eagerly up, and taking her in her arms.

“My dear girl! my precious little sister! What can I do to help you?”

“That is a singular question to ask!” sneered Mrs. Todd. “There is not another living creature who could do so much—who is disposed to do less.

“Look at that blighted blossom!” raising her voice tragically, and pointing to the girl who was weeping upon Hadassah’s bosom. “Reflect that you can revive her, can give her joy for mourning. Then prate, if you can, you and your flinty-hearted despot! of overstrained scruples and Draconian laws! affect to shed Tartuffian tears over her woes!”



This was a bold flight, even for the oratorical novel devourer, but Hadassah was not inclined to smile.

"Laura, dear," she said affectionately, "you know Max and I love you dearly; that if it were possible, we would spare you anxiety and distress. He sends you his warm love and sympathy. He is deeply grieved at your present sorrow. I wrote this to you last week. He begs you, again, to believe his assurance, that if the service you require of him were a sacrifice of personal feeling, time, or means, you should not have to repeat your request. We have been your true and fast friends since your childhood. Cannot you trust us now?"

"It seems so cruel, so unkind, so wicked!" wept Laura, yet holding her sister closely. "Why should you two be so bent upon injuring *him*? He never harmed you!"

"If he had, we would forgive him freely, fully. Nobody wishes to injure him. He has brought trouble upon himself. I wish it were not upon you also, dear lamb!"

Laura pushed her away irritably.

"There it is! Mother said you didn't care how much he had to suffer; that you were vexed because my name was linked with his, and at the disgrace it would reflect upon you and your children."

"Mother is mistaken!" Hadassah said, miraculously patient. "She will learn this some day, and so will you, dear. We can afford to wait, Max and I, so sure are we that Time will vindicate us from unjust suspicions. You are too weak and nervous for argument now. What you need is nursing and change of scene. I came over to-day to invite you to spend some days, or, what is better, some weeks with us. I am to tell you a secret, too, which your brother meant to keep for a birth-day surprise. He is

training the prettiest saddle-horse you ever saw for your use. It is to be entirely your own when you are twenty years old, but it will do you good to anticipate the date of ownership by a few weeks. We will put you in possession immediately, give you a ride upon him to-morrow, if you will go home with me. A dappled gray! Do you remember telling Max that you admired iron-gray? With mane and tail like spun glass! ‘The very pictur’ of a horse—’ Reuben, who has trained him, calls him. His name is ‘Beauty,’ but you can change that if you like, and he is gentle as a kitten.”

The child—she was hardly more—flushed scarlet with pleasure, and actually smiled.

“You are too kind! I don’t deserve it,” she said, tremulously.

“Fustian!” broke in Mrs. Todd, in a Sidonian contralto. “Bribery and corruption! And you, Laura Todd! are you an idiot or an ingrate, to be seduced from your allegiance to your persecuted lover by such contemptible devices as these people have concerted to employ? Do you not see that the next step, when you have gone over to their camp, will be to forswear yourself? that they are contriving to sever your connection with a man they mean to doom to a death of ignominy? that if you accept their presents and become their guest, you help tie the rope about the neck of your affianced husband?”

Laura screamed and stopped her ears.

Hadassah confronted her mother in such wrath as she had not displayed in many years.

“How *dare* you impute such motives to us! poison this credulous child’s mind against her best friends, those who would do her real service! If she had been guided

by us, she would have been spared what she is now enduring. Let the blame rest where it should: upon those who have encouraged the associations that have led to this evil. Let them answer for it! The mischief is not of our brewing. She never met this man at Riverview, nor any of his kind. You provoke me to say this, Mother, and the half is not told. I leave it to your conscience to decide who is the more censurable for this poor creature's misery—you or I!"

"Laura! my afflicted angel! my martyred child! do you hear that she curses your mother!" shrieked Mrs. Todd, tossing her arms aloft with a maniac laugh. "It is well! yes, it is well! Oh! if I were dead and buried in your father's grave!"

She rushed off into violent hysterics.

Laura, fainting upon the sofa, and her mother plunging and screeching on the floor, were too much even for Mrs. Humphreys' presence of mind, and active energies. She rang violently for assistance, and flew to Mrs. Todd's chamber for restoratives. These were kept in a closet near that lady's bed. One, two, three, brandy bottles were turned upside-down before she succeeded in getting half a glass of liquor. On the same shelf stood a large phial, two-thirds full, labelled "*Laudanum*," and a small box of dark paste.

"Opium!" decided Hadassah, smelling it. "Is this the meaning of it all? Max asked me once if I ever suspected that she was addicted to some such practice. It is horrible! And it is in her keeping that I must leave this mistaken girl! What can I do?"

She was stern and silent in the administration of remedies, using hartshorn and camphor with such determined

and unsparing zeal, that the sensitive widow came out of her fit with suspicious haste. By Hadassah's orders, Laura had been removed from the room, and the grave disapprobation of the elder daughter's tone and visage were not to be misunderstood by the convalescent.

"You see to what your inhuman conduct has reduced me," she gasped. "You have been the bane of my life since your babyhood. I wish I had died and been buried when you were born."

"You need say no more," retorted the other, dryly. "Frequent repetition on your part has made me tolerably familiar with the list of my faults. I might recriminate by a temperance lecture, but I forbear out of respect to my father's memory. This is childish vaporing, Mother, and wrong as foolish. We shall never agree. In thought, feeling, action, we diverge more widely every day. The evil is beyond repair. I had hoped to serve Laura. You have thwarted me, why, I cannot imagine; nor what you propose to gain for her or yourself by fostering this ill-starred fancy. I will not call it passion. I cannot believe that you covet for her the vulgar notoriety of mention in such a foul case as the approaching trial will be—mention that would ruin her prospects of a desirable settlement in this community. I do not accuse you or Elena of having counselled her against confiding the various steps of this disgraceful affair to Max or myself. I do know that, if left to herself, she would not have deceived us into believing that she returned Alex Shelby's attachment. I see, too, that she used him as a blind to mislead us more effectually. This is not like Laura. She is young, affectionate, plastic—but until now she has been ingenuous and upright. Something more

than a girlish fancy for a rakish, dashing fellow has warped her perceptions of right and wrong. Yet, as I have said, I bring no accusations against you. I would rather believe that your fault was negligence, or that you were ignorant of the real state of the case. Laura is worth saving, Mother! will you not help us root up this passion for a bad man? spare her a life-long sorrow? What would our father have said to this alliance? I need not tell you that if he had lived, Wilbon would never have dared cross the threshold of your door."

"There are worse men in the world than Fred Wilbon," interpolated Mrs. Todd, offensively.

"That may be, but mothers are not usually willing to give them their pure daughters," replied the younger matron.

"If the truth were known, your husband is a much greater villain. He has the cunning to hide his misdeeds, and fool the world into the belief that he is immaculate. That is the main difference between him and Fred. Yet you were crazy to marry him, and your father offered no objection."

"What are you talking about?"

The blazing eyes and livid face would have cowed a brave heart. The half-drunken woman quailed and whimpered.

"You fly out at me so furiously that I cannot collect my thoughts. There are many things I could have told you if you had relied upon my judgment, confided your sorrows and joys to me as other girls do with their mothers, as my heart-broken, darling Laura has done."

"That is not a fortunate illustration," Hadassah said, sarcastically.

Her temper was fairly aroused, and the taunt escaped her involuntarily.

“I never repine; but it is a cruel anguish to a loving mother, after all she has done and borne, to be repaid by revilings,” Mrs. Todd maundered on, snivellingly. “Wilful and haughty, and hard of heart as you are, the most thankless being I ever knew, you owe me more than all the rest of my family put together. I would not humble you by telling you of it, if you hadn’t goaded, and taunted, and outraged me out of all reason. For I *can* keep my own counsel, weak as you consider me. Your father was always your privy-counsellor, and you left no stone unturned to seduce his affections from me. You told me nothing; treated me as a peevish child who had no mind or discretion of her own, and all the time I knew that which would have shamed you to the dust, made you the laughing-stock of the county, had it been told!”

She hugged herself, and tittered so much, as Shelby was wont to do a hundred times a day, that Hadassah sat still, frozen to her chair with horror and disgust, fearful forebodings creeping in upon her mind. Was her mother then mad, instead of intoxicated?

“You tempted me to betray it, a thousand times, by your arrogant ways, and intolerable temper,” the other pursued. “And sometimes I was sorry for you; meant to tell you all. I went to you as you sat in the parlor, the evening before you were married, meaning to put you on your guard, lest he should throw it in your teeth some day. Maybe he has. Your abominable pride would teach you to hide it, if this were so. But you flouted me then, and I left you to reap the harvest you were sowing.

Your tyranny was insupportable in this house, and he ought to have known you pretty well. If he chose to take the risk, all the better for me. No other man had ever shown you any marked attention, and Maxwell Humphreys could tell you if he would, that he would never have thought of marrying you if I had not made him offer himself."

She laughed again, insultingly, as before.

"You do not know what you are saying, Mother! I had better go home now. I cannot help Laura by remaining."

A malicious gleam made lurid the watery eyes.

"You won't alter the truth by running away from it! My word is not enough without written proof. 'Documentary evidence,' as your distinguished lord would call it! He never has opened his lips to me on the subject—has hardly treated me with civility since he returned from Mexico. But you can show him that, and ask if he ever saw the original!"

From a pigeon-hole in an old desk she drew out a folded paper, yellow with time and dust, and flung it, still gigglingly, into Mrs. Humphreys' lap.

It was indorsed—"Copy of letter to *M. H.*, May 15th, 1847."

Hadassah opened it.

Her mother's chirography was sketchy—her style verbose, but the reader was not long in gleaning the meaning of the document. It set forth the "emotions of a Parent whose child was slowly dying of *unrequited* affection." She—the "Parent"—had learned from her daughter's ravings during an attack of brain fever—"caused, as you are aware, by *harrowing anxiety* on your

account,” that she loved him—Maxwell Humphreys—with all the fervor of her nature.

“She has never whispered it (even to me, her devoted Mother!) in her conscious moments, but the *Hapless Idolatry is undermining* her constitution. You can guess what is the Spring of her devotion to the poor *maniac* at Riverview; why she is wasting the Bloom of her Youth in the service of *your* kindred. Had I the *remotest* hope that expostulation would avail *aught* in effecting a Revolution in her feelings—could I by *any* means at my disposal Dam the Tide of misdirected Love, this step—*i.e.* addressing you on a Subject so *ineffably delicate*—should never be taken. But you know my child—*nobody better*—her Heroism of Self-sacrifice; her indomitable will, her *deep, warm, passionate, constant* heart. With her, to love once, is to love *Forever!!* From her earliest youth you have been her *Ideal*, her HERO. Too proud to show this, she has let ‘Concealment, like a worm in the Bud,’ gnaw heart and Brain until she is now a *Total Wreck!* The Physicians agree that her health and nerves can never be restored to their Normal State unless the Cause of her Malady can be removed. They are *baffled* in the attempt to discover this. I, only, the helpless, *agonized* Mother, have penetrated the depths of her Heart. My only dependence is in your Compassion and Honor. Consideration for another has kept me *silent* thus long. Not even to *save my Darling’s life* would I risk the happiness of that Other. But Violet Hayne’s engagement to Mr. Robert Wharton has removed the Obstacle to my Appeal. My Child loves you—you alone, and *always!!!* Shall she live for you—or die to all the World?



"Despise *Me* if you will, Maxwell Humphreys! For myself I ask *nothing* of your Conscience or Humanity! On my knees I *implore* you to rescue my tender, fond, high-spirited Daughter, who adores you in secret, yet who would expire of *Shame* did she suspect that another possessed the Knowledge of that Adoration.

"Should I apologize for revealing the secret she would guard with *her life* if need were? I know you to be an honorable Gentleman—a true Humphreys. I trust you to keep it! I am a distracted Mother, whose First-born draws *very near to the Tomb!*"

With one spasm of fury, Hadassah rent the sheet from top to bottom, and threw it into the fire.

"Mother!" her hand high in air, as if taking an oath, "do you think that Heaven or I can ever forgive you this thing!"





## CHAPTER XIX.

### DAMOCLES.

**W**P and down the pleached walk, so often mentioned in this history, paced Hadassah Humphreys, on a bleak morning one week after her visit of consolation to Laura. Her head was uncovered, and the bitter wind lifted her hair, but brought no color to her cheeks. With eyes that were both hungry and hopeless, and lips from which anguish had wrung the color, she walked alone, thinking over and over that which had been the plaint of her heart for seven weary days—"He never loved me!"

A fortnight since, she would have said that she could not survive such a suspicion; that the conviction, granting the idea were admitted, would drive her to sheer madness. She lived, and she was sane, assured though she was that her husband had married her out of compassion, and a mistaken sense of honor—that when he caught Violet Hayne to his heart on the evening of his new betrothal, it was in longing, not in a momentary fit of weakness, induced by the memory of a dead love. For twelve years she had lain in his arms, and asked no dearer haven of rest upon earth—marvelled within her-

self if Heaven had a more delicious joy than the knowledge that Max was all hers; lived upon his love-words and caresses; poured out the full fount of devotion without stint or shame, because she believed he valued the treasure. Where were her womanly instincts—where her boasted common sense, and the judgment that should have warned her against credence in aught so unnatural as his suddenly avowed attachment? This was the meaning of his strangely worded suit; of the fits of gloomy reserve so frequent in the early stages of their wedded life; the solution of withheld endearments, and sad taciturnity, and the wild, aimless gallops over the country. When she thought he was trying to get rid of his haunting Double, the remorseful phantom that dogged him at every step upon the Riverview estate, he was, in truth, escaping from her for a season.

She remembered now, with startling distinctness, the incidents of the evening preceding her marriage-day; saw, in the clear light of the lately revealed truth, Max's face as she had beheld it through the parlor-window, when he learned from her father that the story of her ravings was incorrect—the surprise, anger, doubt, resolve that chased each other in rapid succession over his features. He had made one deliberate and final effort to escape his fate; had caught at the circumstance of her evident sadness as a pretext for offering her freedom, and she had clung to him as with a death hold. It was madness to think of it now—of her blind infatuation, her cruel indelicacy! How could he have been otherwise than disgusted? How, in those early days of his bondage, did he endure her presence and fondness, except by the exercise of superhuman control over instinct, and

memory, and hope? Habit had inured him to the burden after a while, and it naturally followed that she became necessary to him. She made him comfortable as any judicious housekeeper might. Education had fitted her to be useful to him in many other respects. She understood, sympathized with, petted him, and he really liked her. The partiality had grown upon him with other customs consequent upon their constant companionship. In time, the glamour of his early passion for Violet vanished, and he saw her as she was—brainless, heartless, vain, and selfish. He was honest in his preference for the wife who was his best friend and valued counsellor. He had been very kind—

“Kind!” The word broke from her in a sharp cry  
“When I loved him so!”

In abandonment of woe, she cast herself upon the rustic bench where he had found her weeping in the September sunset, and asked her to be his wife. She wished he had never sought her out—that he had left her to the misery she then deemed so fearful—which was a bagatelle to what she now felt. She had contrived to see much less of him than usual during this terrible week. There had been two days in which to accustom herself to the weight of her new grief before he returned from court. When they met, the gravity and pallor she could not hide were accounted for by the plea of indisposition. Although extremely busy, he had evinced lively solicitude; tried to watch her, to guard her from fatigue and annoyance; begged her to consult a physician, and promised to take her from home and care as soon as the approaching term of court was over. She kept her room for hours together, feigning drowsiness and languor, yet

declaring her ailment to be a common cold, which time and dieting would cure, without resort to other remedies. Shelby had been very troublesome, and despite her husband's prohibition, she had spent much of her time in his lodge; stolen on several nights from Max's side while he slept, and gone out to quiet the maniac's clamor. His increasing disorder, making each day more palpable the inexpediency of keeping him in a private asylum, cast a gloom over the whole household. Max had assuredly enough to occupy his thoughts to excuse a little passing inattention to Hadassah's symptoms of bodily discomfort. He studied late and arose early, and was often plunged in reverie, during which he appeared oblivious of the fact that he had a wife. She saw it all. It would not have cost her serious uneasiness while her faith in him abode firm.

"Kind and generous as he is, he cannot feign forever. He must sometimes act as he feels. He has not the reason for watchfulness of my looks and humors that I have for regarding his. Duty is occasionally off guard. Love never sleeps."

Sitting idle and wretched, without hope as without fear, she heard Edith's light step upon the walk. The child's affection for her adopted mother was ardent, yet unobtrusive. She seldom spoke of it, or proffered an unsolicited caress, but nobody else was allowed to do anything for Mrs. Humphreys which was within the compass of Edith's ability. She ran errands, carried messages, and was so ingenious in contriving occasions for being near and serving her benefactress, that Judge Humphreys called her "*Hadassah's foreshortened shadow.*" Her mission now was to present a letter left by a passing negro.

“He said there was no answer, so he went right on,” she appended to her statement.

It was a dirty envelope, and the penciled superscription was nearly effaced by grimy fingers. Hadassah tore it open listlessly, and read as follows :

“Dear, *dear* sister :

“I cannot be certain that I am doing right in sending this to you, but my heart will not let me keep back that which may seriously concern you and your husband. Mother would be very angry if she suspected what I am doing. She has positively forbidden me to hold any communication with you. I ought to obey her, yet, darling sister, I cannot forget your unvarying kindness to me, and brother Max’s many benefits. I know you came over, last week, prepared to help and comfort me, shamefully as I behaved. I am almost crazy, at times, with turning things over in my mind, and the talking that goes on about me. Elena is here every day, and Mr. Naylor almost as often. You know he is poor Fred’s lawyer. They say he will get him off, if anybody can. Elena and mother are very sanguine. I hope fervently that he may, but they cannot convince me that it is right to injure a good man, even to clear Fred.

“Mother is terribly displeased whenever I say this. I happened to overhear her talking with Mr. Naylor about what he called a *coup d’état*—something brother Max did when he was young, before you married him. I couldn’t quite make out what it was—only that it had something to do with Mr. Shelby Humphreys’ derangement, and was, Mr. Naylor declared, ‘next door to homicide.’ It sounded dreadful to me, but he seemed delighted, and tried to prevail upon mother to tell all *she* knew about it.

She was frightened, I thought, at having told him anything, and begged him not to hint at it during the trial, 'unless the case were likely to go against the prisoner.' He promised that he would not, and he may keep his word. But I have many misgivings. He does not like brother; I can see that very plainly. I am afraid he will hurt his reputation if he can. You can judge better than I of his ability to do this. At any rate, my conscience will be the lighter for giving you warning.

"I write this in my room—which used to be yours. How well I remember that you let me help you dress on your wedding-day, and how pleased and proud I was when you sent me downstairs, after you were married, with a message to brother, and how he kissed me at the foot of the steps, and called me 'little sister!'

"I don't know what I have written, and what left unsaid—I am so lonely, and unhappy, and bewildered! I wish I could have gone home with you. You are stronger, and wiser, and better than anybody else, in the world—in *my* world, at least. Tell me what to do—what to believe! Mother tells me you and she quarrelled outright the other day. About me, and my wretched concerns, no doubt. I wonder why I was ever born!

"I shall try and send this by some one who is going your way. I dare not trust it to one of our servants, lest Mother should intercept it.

"Your loving, sorrowful            LAURA."

It was dated two days ago, and this was the third day of the trial! The messenger had forgotten, or neglected his trust.

Hadassah read the last page on the way to the house.

By the time she reached it, her mien was collected—her plan laid. She would entrust *her* warning to no ignorant hireling, to no chances of loss, of delay, or treachery. Judge Humphreys and Max had slept at the court-house village last night, but she had had a report of yesterday's proceedings from a neighbor. The case "was likely to go against the prisoner." The prosecutor's cross-examination had eliminated incontestable proofs that the deed was premeditated, and had, for its object, rather the recovery of money, and other valuables lost in gambling, than retaliation for insult to Wilbon or his betrothed. The name of the latter had not been mentioned in court, Mrs. Humphreys' informant added. There had been some story of a watch chain made of a lady's hair, but it was all hearsay evidence, gathered from the prisoner's talk, and the prosecutor had objected to the introduction of it. It was a black case for Wilbon, especially after it was proved that he appointed the interview and went to it armed, while no weapon of any kind was found in Derby's room, or upon his person.

Laura was right, as respected Naylor's feelings toward Maxwell. He did not like him better than a slippery, unprincipled pettifogger is apt to like an honest gentleman, who has distanced him in his profession. The wife could imagine what use he would make of the dirty weapon he had found. How and when it came into his possession she did not stay to think, while seconds were precious as fleeting.

Her ringing call brought the hostler, upon the run. In ten minutes after she finished the perusal of the letter, she was in the saddle, and Mazeppa, Maxwell's fastest hunter, was stretching away down the avenue, bound for the



shire town a dozen miles off. The day was raw and blustering, with occasional flurries of snow, but the fleet black's sides were streaked with white lather, his nostrils wide and steaming, when she checked him upon the courthouse green. The building was packed to its utmost capacity, and knots of eager listeners stood on the steps, craning their necks in the endeavor to gain some knowledge of what was passing in the halls of justice.

Hadassah's heart gave one sick bound of pain and dread, as she thought what might be the disclosures that excited their curiosity. A constable on the outskirts of the throng recognized her, and approached instantly, with respectful concern in his visage.

"Nothing has happened at Riverview, Mr. Mitchell," she said, promptly. "But it is very important that Mr. Humphreys should have this letter immediately. Is he engaged at present?"

"He has just begun his argument for the prosecution, madam. But I can give it to him while he is speaking, if you wish."

"He ought to have it at once!" repeated Hadassah, steadying her wits. "I think it has some bearing on the case. It was sent to him two days ago, but miscarried. I will trust it to you, then. Thank you!"

She saw him force an entrance, the crowd part and sway as he pushed through, and, with a long, hard-drawn sigh, turned her horse's head homeward.

The witnesses had had their say, and been dismissed by both sides, and amid a silence more expressive than any audible manifestation of interest, the prosecuting attorney began his argument. In the very prime of robust manhood, his commanding stature, patrician features and son-

orous voice gave him the advantage, in the eyes of the least discerning spectators, over the ferret-like man, with foxy whispers and shrill tenor pipe, who opposed him. Maxwell's introduction was calmly solemn. With a brief allusion to the fact that, in the short period during which he had occupied his present position, he had been engaged in no other trial of like painful interest to himself and the community, he passed to the review of the evidence. The witnesses without exception he named respectfully, and paid to their testimony the compliment of serious and candid consideration, but every sentence distinct and unimpassioned, as one bystander whispered to another—"drove a nail into the criminal's coffin."

He had held the floor for perhaps twenty minutes, when Mitchell, the constable, elbowed himself up, and gave him a paper. With an apologetic bow and word to the court, as he saw his wife's handwriting on the cover, Maxwell broke the seal, read the three lines, standing.

*"By some means Naylor has gained an inkling of what happened in the 'pleached walk' thirteen years ago. If hard pressed to-day, he will make all public. Be on your guard."*

The handsome, resolute face did not whiten or twitch. The tones that pursued the argument were full and resonant as before, and, as he spoke, the lawyer let fall bit by bit the scrap of paper he had taken from the envelope, tearing it as it were abstractedly, mindful of nothing, but the dread importance of the event depending upon his speech, and the reply of the defence. Yet the inner man, so long and sedulously veiled from the world, perceived in the glance that took in the import of the unsigned warning that the day of doom had arrived for him,

that ere the pale wintry light declined into evening, his name, now so honored, would be a byword and a hissing. This was his sentence, whatever might be that pronounced by the so-called tribunal of justice upon the prisoner at the bar.

The Humphreys race were thorough-bred, and by nothing was this ever more emphatically proven than by the gallant bearing of him who now faced that worse foe than Death—Disgrace, inevitable and irreparable. He had never reasoned more clearly and closely—never more successfully led his jury, step by step, toward complete conviction that his views were just—and this, without descent to personal defamation, without slurs upon the prisoner's general character, or the remotest allusion to Naylor in any other than his professional capacity. He never thought of escape from the impending sword. He had braced himself to sustain the fall as best he could. But in this his farewell to the public career that, however overclouded his private life, had been but one series of triumphs, he experienced somewhat the same feeling as prompts the dying man to part in amity from those who have hitherto been enemies, no less than to reaffirm his attachment to friends faithful and beloved. If he uttered no unkind or sarcastic word relative to his opponent, it was because the hour was to him pregnant with great issues, that excluded the thought of petty feuds and bickerings.

He said all the cause he had sworn to support demanded, and no more; thanked his audience for their patient and courteous attention, and sat down, glancing, as he did so, at the bench where the ex-judge sat, by invitation, at the right hand of the presiding officer of the court. The son

caught his gaze of prideful affection ; held it for a second, with eyes whose intense meaning many noted without interpreting. Then his lids fell, and a bluish-gray change swept over his complexion. He passed his hand across his face to hide this, or to check the evidence of emotion ; straightened himself, and looked up, respectfully attentive, to the mean figure opposite, who was slowly and with ostentatious solemnity getting upon his feet.

Naylor made pompous pretence of sorting a batch of papers in his hand, until the slight buzz which had succeeded the speech of the prosecution subsided. His countenance was decked in a lugubrious smirk, peculiar and indescribable, and his high, thin voice was lowered to a growl he meant should be tremendous, but which was only surprising.

“ May it please your Honor, and Gentlemen of the Jury — More than thirteen years ago, on a bland June afternoon, when Nature was holding festival over the bridal of the earth and sky, and wooing man to sympathy in her serenity and gladness, two brothers, collégians and graduates of a time-honored institution, returned to an ancient and spacious homestead not many miles remote from the spot on which we are now assembled. The elder came in the broad light of day, dejected, it is true, and with emotions painfully inharmonious with the calm beauty of the sweet sunset, but not because of his own fault ; doubtful of his reception in the home of his forefathers, but *not*, Gentlemen of the Jury, in the consciousness of his own demerits. The Benjamin of the household, the darling of his venerable father, had been dismissed with ignominy from the Alma Mater the parent had hoped he would adorn, and by other and graver

misdeemeanors than those for which this punishment was inflicted, had placed himself under the ban of the criminal law. These were the heavy tidings brought by the reluctant messenger, who nevertheless pleaded the cause of the delinquent with zealous eloquence and with fraternal affection, the more marvellous since the favorite younger son had ever scorned the modest virtues of his less brilliant senior. His efforts in behalf of the culprit were unavailing. The father, one of Kentucky's noblest sons, aroused to just resentment by the disgraceful tale, vowed that he who had brought shame upon his home and name should never more be son of his.

"On the night succeeding the elder son's return, the mansion was ablaze with light, and reverberant with the music of many and hilarious voices. From far and near the brave and beautiful of the country-side had come at the bidding of the fond parents; gathered in the anticipation of their sons' arrival. Now that one had been taken and the other left, the father yet, with the courage of a true Roman, bade his guests welcome, and presented to them the one and unsullied scion of his distinguished stock, with Spartan heroism, and a courtesy of which Lacedæmon had no exemplar in her palmiest days.

"The dance went on, Gentlemen of the Jury, and the glass went around, and mirth was monarch of the hour. When the festivities were at their height, the hero of the ball stole from the throng to seek rest and coolness in the garden walks. In one of these, the most remote and secluded, he was met by his brother. The details of the interview are unknown, save to Heaven and to one guilty breast in which they have been buried for thirteen long years.

“ Suffice it to say and to know, Gentlemen of the Jury, that the banished son had skulked about the neighborhood for a night and a day, instead of presenting himself with the boldness of innocence in his father’s presence, had lurked in ambush, seeking this encounter, bent upon revenging the injury he conceived his brother had done him by telling the story of his ill-fortune or misdeeds. Explanations were offered and refused, words ran high, and the soft moon looked shuddering down upon a scene akin to that at which creation groaned, six thousand years ago, when, upon the threshold of Eden, brother lifted up his hand against brother, and Earth refused to drink in the costly blood of martyred Abel. When the fell deed was discovered through the instinct of the fallen man’s faithful hound, the perpetrator had fled, leaving no token of his recent presence on the fatal spot. The victim of his mad hate lay weltering in his blood, and was borne to the house for dead.

“ But, Gentlemen of the Jury, it was ordained in the inscrutable providence of Heaven that he should live. Live—a mindless wreck! a slaving, gibbering maniac! He who had been the glass of fashion, and the mould of form! the strong staff, and the beautiful rod of his smitten parents! Answer, ye men who have souls and brains! who rate physical life a curse when the fire of intellect is quenched! Say to me, ye fathers, leaning upon the arms of loving sons adown the gentle declivity leading to honored graves! I appeal to you, young men, because ye are strong! which is the more guilty—he who, inflamed by wine and exasperated by insult; stung to madness by coarse abuse of her he holds dearest on earth, at one blind blow sends a worthless gamester into Eter-

nity, and in deep contrition surrenders himself into the hands of Justice to be tried by a jury of his peers, or the fugitive who waylays his victim by night, strikes with true aim and deadly purpose, and dashes out—not the poor taper we call animal life, but blasts into nothingness the reason of his mother's son!

“This done, Gentlemen of the Jury, the bleeding form prone upon the ground, what is his next step? Does he fly for help? cry, ‘I have slain my brother! Heaven and men be merciful to me, a sinner? Father! I have sinned! My soul and hands are red with my brother's blood! I am no more worthy to be called thy son!’

“No! under cover of the night he steals safely away, and when the tumult of horror and inquiry has subsided, and he is assured that no finger of suspicion has dared designate him as the destroyer, he returns, blatant of his warlike deeds; enters into possession of his insane brother's property; marries her whom the hapless senior loved as his own life (who even in the rayless night in which he is doomed forever to grope has not lost her hold upon him), and walks with crest erect and brow of brass among those who delight to honor—first the warrior, then the silver-tongued defender of the majesty of the Law—(Heaven save the mark!)

“I read horrible astonishment upon each visage before me, horror which does credit to your humanity. Brethren! Gentlemen of the Jury! I wot that through ignorance ye have done this thing. But this is no fancy sketch, nor can my poor pencil do justice to the darkest shadows of the picture. You have been told by the able and eloquent, the learned and honorable prosecutor—”

A review of Maxwell's argument followed.

Few listened to it. He had thrown judgment from her balance by his introduction, and when, after an address of three-quarters of an hour, he resumed his seat, and Maxwell arose to reply, a hiss, low, but sharply distinct, arose from the heart of the throng. The "thorough-bred" reared his head haughtily at the sound. There was fight left in him yet, despite the ghastly face bent toward him from the bench—the agonized inquiry of the dilated eyes.

"The counsel for the defence, in the very original and elaborate appeal to which we have listened," began the familiar voice, round and sonorous, with a mocking accent in the courteous intonations, "has led us so far from the question of the hour that I almost despair of recalling it to your minds with the force it should have. As I apprehend the case, the matter to be decided is not whether the eloquent clairvoyant, who undertakes to describe that which he has expressly told us is unknown to all except Heaven and the guilty man he holds up for our execration—the versatile advocate whose talents as a sensation-romancist would have achieved fame and fortune had he devoted himself to the profession for which Nature designed him, the subject for your decision is not, I say, whether this ingenious gentleman has digressed from the beaten track of evidence and argument to draw a fancy sketch, or a portrait from life.

"You are here to settle now, and for all time, the question I would urge upon your solemn and candid consideration—Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty of the crime with which he stands charged?"





## CHAPTER XX.

“GUILTY!”

**G**UILTY of manslaughter!”

There was a rustle through the court-room as the verdict was rendered, and every eye turned for an instant to the prisoner, who had grown fearfully pale at the first word spoken by the foreman of the jury. Naylor's carrotty foretop bristled, and his brow wrinkled in the wrath he dared not speak, while the widowed mother of the unfortunate boy burst into tears and sobbed audibly.

But the sensation produced by the utterance upon which so much of life and happiness hung, was secondary to that occasioned by what had prefaced the closing scene of the trial. When the presiding judge had spoken of the lateness of the hour, and his desire to bestow upon the case a careful examination before pronouncing the sentence of the law, as a reason for adjournment until the morrow, the crowd showed reluctance to disperse—rather thickened about the spot where the prosecutor stood, gathering up and binding his papers together, apparently heedless of the fact that he was the object of

universal notice. Whether he were aware of this or not, it is certain he did not care for scrutiny, curious or unfriendly. The blow had fallen, the shock dashed aside the screen that had hidden the hideous secret of his existence. His father knew it, and his neighbors, and the rest of the world would soon hear of it. There was nothing worse behind. He might be prosecuted for his crime; stand in the dock where that other murderer had awaited the result of his trial to-day. The fire of universal ignominy would but draw out in visible characters upon his brow the brand he had felt there and upon his soul all these weary years. A penal offence! He could have laughed as he thought how it would be named in his indictment. He had undergone the extreme penalty of his misdeed in the death-in-life which had been his since he read that fatal letter by the camp-fire, and learned what he was. His composure was not hardihood, as many believed, but the calm of one utterly hopeless and desperate. A minute elapsed after the adjournment before any one addressed him. He seemed to himself to be already cut off from his kind—and what wonder?

Then Mr. Sherrard, a brother lawyer, and for many years a warm personal friend, laid his arm over his shoulder—

"Humphreys! you must notice this thing as it deserves. Contradict it flatly and publicly, and make the lying scoundrel retract; then flog him out of the county! Somebody has hoaxed him, and he snapped at the bait too eagerly in his dislike of you—or he has been drinking."

Before Maxwell could reply, a voice was raised from the judges' bench, one so often heard within these walls,

and ever with such respect, that the slowly-retiring throng was motionless and silent ere the opening sentence was completed.

"Fellow-citizens! my neighbors and friends!" said the ex-judge, in commanding accents that betrayed none of the quaver of old age, "it would be idle for me to affect ignorance of the meaning and application of the extraordinary fiction to which we have, this afternoon, been forced to listen. In all my experience of legal life in this State and county, it has never before been my misfortune to hearken to such an unprovoked, malicious, and mendacious attack upon individual reputation as the counsel for the defence has fulminated. A thorough and formal investigation of his charges shall be made without needless delay. But I cannot let you go to your homes without entering my solemn protest against his conduct, and making public my denial of his story. I pronounce it false as it is insulting. You have my assertion, and you have his. Judge you which is the more likely to be true. I merely ask a suspension of opinion until this slander shall come to open trial. For the author of it shall learn to his cost, that in no circumstances and upon no pretext, can a villain in this day and this place, wilfully, and with impunity, defame an innocent gentleman, the latchet of whose shoe he is not worthy to unloose."

Sherrard led the applause that answered the unexpected outbreak of paternal indignation. It was hearty and prolonged. Even those whose minds were poisoned beyond cure by Naylor's statements joined in the acclamation. It was a tribute to the father—genuine appreciation of the beauty of his filial love—not a signal of

reviving confidence in his son's integrity. Two people understood this perfectly—Maxwell and his opponent. The smile with which the latter confronted Judge Humphreys was an unpleasant compound of servility and evil cunning.

“We bow with respect, involuntary and unfeigned, to the worthy, the afflicted, the venerable gentleman who has just addressed us,” he said, bending so low, it seemed a mockery of reverence. “We honor the strength of the natural affection which is the spring of his incredulity. But let it be borne in mind that there are some souls too great and pure to enter into the mystery of iniquity. If I have erred in my statements, I am more than willing to be set right. But denial and refutation must come from the son—not the father. I call upon Mr. Maxwell Humphreys to testify to the truth or falsehood of the tale I have told. Ten words from his lips are all we need.”

It was a stroke of effrontery of which no one had believed him capable. Still, not even at Sherrard's muttered curse upon the “upstart's impudence,” did the accused manifest any inclination to chastise the offender. He lifted his eyes—dark and heavy—from the bundle of papers he was tying up, with a weary, hopeless look which struck a chill to many hearts that would fain have believed in him still.

“When I am arraigned for offences, past or present, before a lawfully appointed tribunal, I shall be ready with defence or confession. To causeless enmity and idle curiosity, I am, and I shall ever be, dumb. It is for him who asserts to prove.”

Sherrard's hand fell from his shoulder, and his visage

denoted intensest chagrin. It was plain that with the major part of the audience this declaration was tantamount to a partial confession. Moderation and forbearance under injury were not Humphreys characteristics. There was something, and much that was suspicious, in the sudden assumption of these by one of the race. Heads were shaken sadly, and lips compressed in unuttered sagacity, as the assembly broke up. There were not a dozen men there who did not leave the courtroom crediting the accusation, monstrous as it had appeared five minutes earlier.

Judge Humphreys saw it all, and his heart heaved mightily under its load of grief and anger. But he quitted himself like a man—a champion undismayed, and stout of courage and purpose. Linking his arm in his son's, he walked down the steps, smiling, and bowing to the knots of acquaintances ranged to the left and right. Leaning on his boy's shoulder, he mounted his horse and rode away at his side, with an air of gay confidence that meant contempt of the slanderer, and absolute faith in the assailed. For three miles they were never out of sight of other horsemen, wending their way to their respective homes; and for that distance the Judge maintained a conversation upon indifferent topics with his companion, his composed demeanor a notable exception to the signs of agitation and excited interest that marked the behavior of the groups behind and before them. Then their road forked abruptly from the main thoroughfare. The Judge reined in his horse, and lifted his hat courteously to those nearest him.

"Good-evening, gentlemen! We are likely to have a

heavy storm to-night; I hope you will all be safely housed before it sets in."

He touched his steed with the spur, and hastened to overtake Max, who had not paused or bowed. The wayside fences had ceased, and tall pines, hoarsely prophetic of the coming tempest, lined the narrow track, made dreary twilight of the waning afternoon. They were alone at last, beyond the view and ken of the rest of their kind, and the father clutched the son's bridle with a suddenness that threw the mettled hunter almost upon his haunches.

"Why did not you thrust the lie down that scoundrel's throat? What is the meaning of this dog-like submission? No man of spirit should endure such insult. The wretch who offered it should not have left that place until he had retracted every word upon his knees!"

"I could not deny what he said. It was no lie, taken as a whole, although false in parts. I did not lie in wait with the intention of inflicting the hurt, but it happened as he said. I do not know how he gained his information. You ought to have heard the whole story years ago. I regret, for your sake, that it was told when and where it was."

Not another word was exchanged during the ride. The pine-tops lashed one another, and were entangled, and hissed and groaned in breaking loose, and the wind tore madly down the road at every break in the covert, bringing, when they were yet three miles from the Riverview gate, sharp, stinging showers of snowy rain. The mute riders recked naught of the outward storm that soaked their clothing and frosted their beards. Side by side

they entered the avenue, side by side dismounted in the lee of the portico.

Hadassah had opened the door as they alighted, and stood awaiting them, pallid as a ghost with suspense and fear, yet striving to smile a welcome. Judge Humphreys had his foot upon the lowest step, when the fierce wind that smote the four corners of the house bore to him, with terrible distinctness, the savage bellow of the imprisoned maniac. The parent may not have known that his horsewhip was in the hand he shook in his son's face, but the gesture only matched his countenance in passion and menace.

"That is *your* work, is it? May the curse—"

"No! O, no!"

With a cry of irrepressible love and horror, Hadassah sprang forward and threw herself upon her husband's bosom.

He held her as if he would never let her go; bowed his face upon her head, and a mighty convulsion shook his frame. But nothing was said until, raising themselves, they saw there was no one else upon the porch. The Judge had strode by to his own room; the servants had led away the horses. The fine, cutting spray poured in upon them from the north-east; the darkness was shutting closely down about the homestead. It was an evil night-fall, and Nature's frown heightened the inward desolation they felt, standing there alone, condemned, forsaken, without redress and without hope.

Max broke the dread pause.

"Everybody has turned against me but you, my poor wife! I cannot say, 'All is lost, save honor!' That went first, and long ago!"

She got him to their chamber, made him change his wet clothing, and set him in his own chair by the blazing fire; poured out a glass of brandy-and-water, and forced it upon him. Then, drawing her stool close to him, she took his right hand, kissed it, and raised it to her forehead in pantomimic affirmation of unchanged devotion and respect.

“Now, tell me all about it!”

He had not thought it would be a relief, but it was. To her, and to her only, could he recount the downfall which was to have no retrieval. Had the charge been false, he could have lived it down. Had the discovery of the bloody deed and the perpetrator been immediate, youth and hot blood had pleaded in extenuation. Concealment had been his ruin.

“We ought not to repine that this is so,” he concluded. “We have known from the beginning how it must be. There is nothing left for us but to sit still and bear whatever may be the further consequences of our tremendous mistake.”

Hadassah had been over the ground too often, that day, to gainsay the conclusion. She had her story in return for his. It was characteristic of her, that in place of going home to bewail herself in secret, she had repaired to the fountain-head of this newest calamity. Now that so much was discovered, she would learn all.

“I came home by way of the Cross Roads!” she narrated. “Laura was at Elena’s, and Mother was alone. I told her I had learned, no matter how, that she had made certain disclosures to Naylor which were intended to compromise you; that I was there for the single purpose of hearing from her lips by what means she had gained



the information she had lodged with him—that I would not stir until I did. I was peremptory, and I suppose harsh, for she was cowed by my speech and manner. I had less difficulty than I had expected in getting possession of the truth.

“It seems that on the night of your visit to me at the Cross Roads, after you had followed me home from River-view, she sat up late reading, as was her custom, and chancing to look out of the window about one o’clock, saw a gleam of light upon the fence of the yard. It came through a crack in the parlor-shutters, and knowing I had gone to my room several hours before, the circumstance excited her curiosity. She stole in her slippers along the front of the house, and listened. The sash was raised, and by cautiously widening the crevice between the slats of the blind, she had a view of us both. You sat upon the sofa, and I was insisting that you should spend the night there. She heard me engage to awake you in the morning; saw the light disappear, and after listening awhile longer went back to her room. Early as it was when I called you, she was on the alert. Anything that savored of romantic interest had irresistible fascination for her. Hidden behind the honeysuckle trellis at the corner of the house, she witnessed our parting, heard me bid you meet me in the grape-arbor at nine o’clock that night. She had not a doubt as to the real cause of the catastrophe of which she had news next day, and it fairly frightened her into discretion. She kept her counsel but indifferently, however, after the shock wore off, as I can see by recalling her many dark hints to me—her threats and ambiguous insinuations touching you. But, suspecting nothing of the knowledge

she had acquired by playing the spy, I passed these by as idle talk. I think she really pleased herself by dwelling upon the thought of the power she held—the concealed weapon that might be the means of humbling my pride and naughtiness of heart. It was unmotherly, but she never loved me. I wish"—with sudden passion flashing out in visage and tone—"I wish she had died before the opportunity was afforded of turning her sword against *you!*"

Max put his hand over her lips, as the bitter sentence passed them.

"Hush, my darling! it must have come in time. I forgive her with the rest of those who rejoice in my overthrow. I do not sue for charitable judgment, for I do not deserve it. It does hurt me that my father will never know how much the desire to spare him pain influenced me in keeping up the deception. But let that pass! It also is just. Where are the children? They are not afraid of me yet, are they!"

Hadassah repressed the throb of anguished pity the words cost her, and answered bravely, almost cheerfully,

"They are downstairs, impatient to see you, as usual." On the staircase, she added gently, "While *they* live, you will not be friendless or aimless."

"It might be better for them never to see or hear of me again. It would assuredly have been better for you, dear heart, had you never looked upon my face. My record is a black legacy for our boy."

"He will never be ashamed of his father!" And with these confident words, she opened the door of the sitting-room.

There was a joyous shout, a quick rush to the father's

outstretched arms, and on Edith's part, a silent, fervent kiss; a smile too happy for words; and when her uncle was seated, she slid her fingers into his, and leaned her head upon his shoulder in the fulness of peaceful content. She was wondrously womanly in the quickness of her instincts, and readiness of adaptation to the tone of feeling prevalent among those with whom she associated. To-night, while winsome and lovely, her manner was subdued; her unobtrusive watchfulness of the faces she loved, close and solicitous. Morrie romped and laughed about his father, roguish as usual, and full of monkeyish tricks, picked his pocket of handkerchief and purse, rode upon his foot, tickled his ear with a straw, and wound up the performances by climbing upon the back of his chair, and tumbling head foremost into his lap.

"My son!" exclaimed the startled mother. "Be careful! You might have broken your neck!"

"Papa wouldn't care if I did," said the saucy imp, flashing his great, laughing eyes into his father's face from his throne on his knee. "He'd like to have me *deaded!*"

"It is naughty to talk so! Papa loves his boy, dearly, dearly!" returned Hadassah hastily, lest Max's sore heart should feel the careless touch. "Morrie knows it, but he is a rogne."

"He's only a baby," apologized Edith, earnestly. "Don't you think, Auntie, it would kill you and Uncle Max if Morrie were to die?"

"It would be a terrible sorrow were we to lose either of our dear children," said the foster-mother, feelingly.

Max passed his arm about the girl's slender waist, and

drew her closer to him. As he did so, he felt a shudder creep over her.

"Are you cold, dear?" he inquired.

"Not exactly, sir, but the wind makes me afraid, somehow. It reminds me of all sorts of sad things. I always lie awake on stormy nights, and think of my mother, although I can hardly recollect her, and of my father, who died before I was born. It is foolish, I know, to be frightened when I know it is only the wind, but all the evening the windows have been rattling as if somebody was trying to get in, and sometimes I dare not look over my shoulder, lest there should be some dreadful creature near me."

"I'll beat him, if he comes!" vociferated Morrie, valiantly brandishing his grandfather's cane. "Don't you be afraid, Edie."

He had changed his tune, two hours later, when his mother passed his chamber on her way to that of her father-in-law. Hearing voices within, she entered.

"What is the matter?" asked she, in surprise. "Morrie! you ought to be asleep! Edith, *you* in here!"

"The wind kept him awake, Auntie," said the girl's liquid treble. "So I came to stay with him until he felt better."

The light Hadassah carried streamed over the low, white bed, and the two heads upon the pillow; glistened upon Morrie's wet cheeks, and was reflected in the depths of Edith's blue eyes, as she continued her plea.

"Just this one night, please, Auntie! He really needs me."

The boy looked abashed, but did not offer to lift his

head from his friend's arm. Hadassah stooped to kiss them both.

"You may stay with him this once, love. But I cannot have my man grow cowardly."

Edith caught her around the neck, kissed her twice, fondly.

"Dear, *dear* Auntie! I wish I could serve and help you in some way, just to show how I love you."

"You do help and comfort me, continually, my precious child. Our Father in Heaven bless and keep my darlings until morning!" responded Hadassah, much moved. "Morrie must remember that His dear angels are with him always, no matter how stormy the night is. Good-night again."

She left her lamp in the hall, and the door ajar. The night was wild with storm, and the ray of light would tend to quiet the children's nervous fears. Then she knocked at Judge Humphreys' door, which was opposite. He had refused to come down to supper, and also declined to receive the food sent up to him. Her first summons was unanswered, and she called, in repeating it—

"Father! it is I! Hadassah! I must see you!"

He admitted her ungraciously.

"What is it, now?" he demanded, as she entered without waiting for an invitation.

The room was dark except for the firelight. He went back to his chair—the same in which his wife had died—leaning his head on his hand. A solitary, disappointed, bereaved old man.

Hadassah touched his sleeve.

"Father, this is wrong! You are sitting here in your wet clothes! you will take cold."

“It makes no difference! the sooner I die the better, now! I have nothing to live for!”

“You must listen to me,” began the daughter-in-law, abruptly seating herself beside him. “You have reason to be angry with us both—Max and myself—but less, much less, with him than you think.”

Before he could forbid it, she ran rapidly over the incidents of Maxwell’s return to Riverview at the close of his college term; his interview with her, and the plot she arranged for the meeting with Violet, and reconciliation with his father; the misadventure of Shelby’s appearance in the arbor; the insult he offered her, and Maxwell’s interference; the struggle that ensued; the supposed slight nature of Shelby’s injury, by which she had induced the other to leave him to her care; her promise to send for him should the result of the encounter prove more serious than they then anticipated; her deliberate violation of the pledge, and Maxwell’s consequent ignorance of his brother’s condition until after his enlistment. Then followed the reasons, as stated by himself, to her, at his second home-coming, for still withholding the truth, namely, his mother’s health, and his father’s anxiety on her account.

“Still thoughtful for you; ever desirous to ward off the sorrow which has this day overtaken you, he has shut this dark and bitter secret within his bosom, and lived for others—chiefly for you and the unfortunate victim of his boyish violence. It was not necessary to proclaim in words a penitence that wrought such fruit as his blameless, beneficent life at home and abroad. He has meant, all along, to publish the truth at your death, should he outlive you. I have had for ten years, a sealed paper in my

desk, which he committed to my keeping, to be opened after your decease, should you live longer than he, and the contents given to the world. He will carry to his grave, not a scar, but an open wound which is never forgotten for a moment. In memory of the deep love which was the root of the concealment for which he will be blamed more than for the deed he hid; in memory of his dutiful service to you and to her who is gone; for the sake of the true nobility of character and action which show that his heart is unspotted by wilful crime, although there may be blood upon his hands, do not make his existence insupportable by your curse. He is willing to abide patiently the legal punishment of his crime. It is a debt he has long been anxious to pay. He believes that he also deserves the full weight of your displeasure. I know that he does *not!* Judge me harshly if you will. If he erred, it was in following my counsel."

She paused, but the figure in the great chair did not move. But for his breathing she might have believed him dead. The casements rattled, and through the gusty halls the wind arose and fell in long sighs, human-like in tone and mournfulness. The house had been still but for these, until, as Hadassah ceased speaking, a door opened and closed upon the lower floor, awakening strange echoes in all the corridors, as of stealthy footsteps and articulate whispers, gurgling moans, and low, sepulchral laughs, coming nearer and nearer the chamber in which sat the two mourners—unheard in the far study where he who was the cause of their grief bent over his table, busied in arranging such private papers as he wished to leave in order in the event of his speedy arrest

and long imprisonment; writing also, in anticipation of the same, a letter of farewell to his father, one of tender adieu, of gratitude, of wise and loving counsel, to his wife.







## CHAPTER XXI.

EDITH.

**I**T was a mad passion for you, then, that even while he was betrothed to another, led the wretched boy from the path of rectitude and honor!" said Judge Humphreys at length, slowly, and with grimmest displeasure corrugating his forehead, hardening his eye and tone. "This was the false light that lured him to ruin! He has proved himself weak as well as guilty. He let his infatuation for a girl outweigh truth, honor, natural affection! You are Delilahs, all of you. Woe to the man who lays his head in the lap of any woman!"

He pushed her hand from his knee, but she would not be repulsed.

"Father!" Her voice trembled as it had not in her plea for her husband. "If love led your son astray, it was love for you—not for me! Violet Hayne had no other rival when he stole home in the darkness to learn whether his father had indeed cast him off. He listened to and followed my advice, because we were old and fast friends. Perhaps he felt, vaguely, even then, that his

welfare was more to me than my own happiness. He knew, at least, that I desired earnestly to serve him; that I believed in his innocence in spite of the formidable mass of circumstantial evidence against him. I had divined the truth, where so many others had gone astray in judgment, and this wrought in him confidence in my opinion and advice. But he had never dreamed of loving me. Nor had he, when, having resigned all hope of marrying the betrothed of his happier days, not daring, as he told me, to bind an innocent, care-free girl, to his blighted life, he asked me to become his wife.

“I was acquainted with all his past mistakes and follies—with his ‘great sin,’ as he called it, although I never did; with his repentance and his misery; knew how dense and immovable was the cloud which must ever shut out the sunlight from his spirit. My control of Shelby’s least governable moods; his unaccountable attachment to me, pointed me out as the one best fitted to aid him in the work to which he must henceforward devote himself—the guardianship of his unhappy brother. I was sensible, practical, accustomed to deny myself the pleasures other young ladies considered their right. I had healthy nerves and a strong will—all excellent qualities in the custodian of a madman, and the manager of a large household. These, fairly stated, were my recommendations for the position in which he proposed to put me.”

“You are talking rubbish, now!” interposed the Judge, angrily. “You are not so simple as to suppose that any man urged his suit in this fashion, and was accepted by a sensible woman!”

“He said nothing that was not kind, affectionate, gen-

tlemanly. But he did not pretend to woo me as men court the favor of the woman they prefer above all others, and seek of their own free will. I read this now, but too clearly. I discerned nothing wrong then in his demeanor or language. I had never listened to a tale of real love, and he had been the idol of my secret worship ever since I could remember. No sacrifice was grievous that could benefit him. I would have worked as a bond-woman for him and his wife for the sake of living near him. I had striven faithfully and continually to conform his betrothed to what I knew was his standard of noble womanhood—been angered and mortified for his sake, not my own, at my ill-success. Still, he loved her as she was, and since he wanted her for his very own, I had done all in my power to bring them together. Had he sought her on his return, I should have felt no surprise, no chagrin. I could not believe the evidences of my own senses when he came to me, instead, with his suit. When he succeeded in convincing me that he needed me—that he meant to marry me, I looked for a solution of the mystery into my heart, not his.

“For twelve years”—she stopped for a second, put her hand to her throat and rallied her forces to finish the painful story—“for twelve years, I have nursed the delicious delusion of his affection, for he has been very careful not to destroy it, and always kind. You know how good and considerate, for you have seen us together daily. It is only a week since I discovered, through the disclosure of a third person, and that one my own mother, that he married me from an overstrained sense of honor and compassion. She made him believe that I was pining to death for love of him; that I had revealed this in my de-

lirium, and appealed to his pity. His pity! O Heavens!

The wail tore its way through her heart, and she swayed in a blast of passionate emotion, mortification, love, and longing.

“I never thought to reveal this to any one, but you must know all in order to do him justice, and my pride is crushed out of me. I do not entreat indulgence for myself. But if I have sinned, I have suffered. If I was presumptuous, as many thought and said when I married your son, my humiliation is surely complete.”

Her head sank lower and lower with the burden of her confession. The last words were spoken in a whisper, and again there was silence between them.

The rain hissed against the windows; the wind roared furiously through the naked branches of the grove; and wandering, halting steps echoed and re-echoed in the corridor. Once it was as if they paused at the door, as if fingers swept the panels, and a hand was laid upon the knob; but the rattle was drowned by the shaking sashes. They heeded naught of this—the pair crouching before the dying blaze. The funeral procession of thought-spectres thronging their souls left no room for the indulgence of superstitious fancies. For the first time within the memory of five generations, disgrace had entered the homestead, sat, gaunt and frowning, over against father and daughter, a skeleton arm about the neck of each, tightening to suffocation as time granted them space for reflection.

Had the long line of ancestors, without fear and without reproach, whose deeds of valor and statesmanship Maxwell had delighted to hear when he walked—a bright-

eyed, ambitious boy, through the family graveyard with his father, or gazed, on winter nights, upon the bearded faces that looked down upon him from the tarnished frames lining the walls—had these broken cerement and coffin to revisit, in sad and stern mourning, the desecrated halls?

“Yet you forgive him?” Judge Humphreys asked the question huskily, without lowering the hand that bridged his eyes. “It is more than I can say. I am thankful his mother did not live to see this day!”

“Forgiveness is not a word to be named by me with reference to him! I revere him as I have never revered another creature, not excepting my own father. He is upright, magnanimous, gentle, brave, and *good!* I would die to secure his happiness. Perhaps it would be well for him if I could pass away before I have the chance to injure him further. My pride in my own judgment, my rashness, my imperious will have wrought his ruin, from first to last. The marvel is that he can endure my presence.”

The Judge touched the bowed head.

“This is morbidly unreasonable, my child! It is not for me to say what motive prompted Maxwell Humphreys to join your life to his. All the phases of this affair are past my finding out. But, if I know anything of his heart, I am certain that he loves you fondly and entirely now; that his life and happiness are bound up in yours; that he regards you as his temporal salvation. No longer ago than last night, he was talking of your evident indisposition, and his solicitude on your account, attributing your failing health to overwork for others, and deploring the seeming necessity for the strain brought to

bear, by your daily life, upon your strength and nerves. This led him to speak, at some length, of your virtues; your heroism of self-sacrifice; your patience; sweet, yet spirited temper; your energy; 'all the traits that go to make up a perfect woman'—I quote his own language.

"She is the best, dearest, noblest wife Heaven ever bestowed upon sinful man," he said. "More beloved with each day that shows me new excellences in her character!"

"You are enthusiastic," I said, banteringly. "Many men outlive the romance of affection in the honeymoon."

"Not if they marry such women as my Queenie!" he rejoined. "She has grown into my heart and life, until both would be wrecked were I to lose her."

"But"—relapsing from the momentary self-forgetfulness into which he had been betrayed by his sympathy with her distress, into gloomy sarcasm—"as I have said, this labyrinth is too devious and dark for me. You can best judge how much importance to attach to his most solemn asseverations. I can never trust him again."

"I can!" returned Hadassah warmly, sitting erect. "He cannot lie. If he said all this, I will believe it, will thank God, and take courage. Be just to him, Father. I do not sue now for your mercy. If you but knew *all!*"

"There is more behind, then! more mystery and more shame!"

"Mystery and shame—but not of his making! Were I not bound by my promise to him that I would reveal nothing without his permission, I could tell you that which would mitigate the severity of your judgment. I have seen—I only, how meekly he has borne degrading insinuations; forborne to wipe the soil from his own

reputation, that he might cover the stain upon another's, because that other could not defend himself; how faithfully he has discharged duties conscience, and not the requirements of human law, bound upon him. I, and no one else now living, know of his generous guardianship of the wronged; his beneficence to the needy sufferers from another's baseness; the holy charity that soothed the dying hours of a woman who was worse than widowed, and succored her innocent child from a life of poverty and disgrace. This is the son you would banish, a second time, from your heart and home! If I believed—"

"Auntie! O, Auntie! come quick!"

The piercing scream was Edith's voice—raised, as no one had ever heard it before, and Hadassah, wrought up, she knew not why, to frantic apprehension by the call, with wild visions of her boy's sickness or death flashing through her brain, darted to the door.

The opposite chamber was ablaze with lurid light. The curtains of three large windows were in flames, and the tableau illuminated by the glare was enough to drive one mad with horror. Edith, in her white gown, stood between the bed and a wild figure, partly nude, with streaming, gray mane, and unkempt beard, who clutched her with one hand by the hair, while the other brandished an iron rod he had wrenched from his bedstead.

"Shelby! Shelby!" cried the distracted woman, rushing forward to catch his arm. "She is your own child!"

She might as well have spoken to the wind. As reasonless and swift was the blow that fell before she could reach him.

Max, alarmed by the outcry, felt some one brush past him as he ran through the lower hall, in which the light

had been extinguished, he supposed, by the draught from an open door—heard, as he recollected afterward, a sound like a snort or laugh on the back porch, by the time he gained the landing; but the sight that met him there blotted out all other sensations and thoughts. Columns of stifling smoke were rolling along the ceiling of chamber and entry, and beneath their folds knelt Hadassah—the lifeless child in her arms, the blood trickling in a bright tide from her temple, over the white night-dress and her adopted mother's arm.

“He has killed her, Max!” she shrieked, upon seeing her. “And Morrie, too, I think!”

The father leaned over the railing of the low bed, and threw down the coverlet—drawn, as by a careful hand, quite over the boy's head—lifted him out, warm, rosy, and sleeping sweetly.

Hadassah's lamentations burst forth at the sight.

“She died to save him! How she loved him! My murdered child! My precious daughter!”

The tears poured over Max's face, as, having carried Morrie into the adjoining room, he returned to take the limp form of his boy's devoted playfellow yet more tenderly in his embrace, and bore her across the hall to his father's chamber.

While the servants, instructed by Judge Humphreys—the only person who retained any presence of mind—put out the fire, the husband and wife, with Miss Mahala, strove vainly to stay the ebbing life of the gentle creature who had offered to her benefactors the last service of her short, lovely existence. One small and not deep wound exactly above the left temple was the only mark of violence upon her person. She had not moved or spoken



since it was inflicted, but her features were placid as if terror had never distorted them. The nearest physician lived three miles away, and although a trusty messenger, well-mounted, was sent for him, he did not arrive at Riverview until four o'clock in the morning.

There was no hope. They knew that before he told them. The hurt had been mortal from the first. Medical skill could not have saved her, but it might be a comfort to the afflicted family to state that she had not suffered—that she would never know pain of body again. Having said this, with other phrases of professional and neighborly condolence, he sat down upon one side of the bed, and while watchful of the patient's pulse, took observations of the singular scene, making up his mind shortly that there was some nearer bond of interest between the dying child and those who tended her, than the artificial link of adoption.

Hadassah had not quitted the bedside for a second since the priceless burden was laid upon it, and Maxwell paced the floor in speechless anguish, frenzied by the sight of the sweet, pale face upon the pillows; haunted by recollections of her thousand acts of loving-kindness to him and to his; her modest graces and winning ways—yet unable to tear himself from the place while life remained.

“My broken flower!” he said once, bending to kiss her sealed lips.

The physician, ashamed of himself for remembering in such an hour the idle talk of gossiping tongues, yet could not help turning his eyes to Mrs. Humphreys. It was not in the nature, even of a good wife, to see without a pang such love-full grief shown for another woman's child. He was more ashamed when Hadassah laid her arm about

the slight figure, buried her face in the pillow, her cheek touching the one that was now like marble in purity and chill, and moaned in her agony.

“My child! my child! Oh! if I had fallen in her place!”

Judge Humphreys stooped to her ear, with a whisper of caution no one else heard. She raised her head and gazed steadfastly into Edith's countenance—the look few but mothers give the dying—the anguished recall to the parting spirit from that which gave it birth, and claims it as a part of itself, battles for the dear right with the King of Terrors, knowing all the while that it is a bootless fight. All saw what happened while she still looked—the last tremor of the parted lips, the draperies above the chest grow absolutely still. It was Judge Humphreys, who, although but partially conscious of the full meaning of the revelation made by his daughter-in-law's frantic appeal to the maniac, crossed the fair hands upon the breast, and smoothed out the tangled curls in a last, long caress. It was the privilege of the nearest of kin to render these offices, and the solemn tenderness of his manner showed that he recognized the obligation.

“She is in Heaven, now!” he uttered, laying his arm about his son's neck, as he leaned upon the mantel, in a paroxysm of tearless sorrow. “We can do nothing more! Come with me, my poor boy!”

Thus, even in her death, did Edith enact the peace-maker's part.

Miss Mahala and the sobbing maid-servants prepared the corpse for the bier, Hadassah kneeling without sound or motion by the couch, her face hidden in the coverlet, in blank bewilderment of misery, noting nothing that

passed—feeling herself a second time a murderess, so certainly had this latest tragedy grown out of the former. She did not respond when Miss Mahala tried, at last, to persuade her to rise and seek some rest. The house-keeper sent the servants from the room, and her hard visage, softened by true womanly compassion, stooped to the crouching form, laid her hand upon her head.

“I’ve known all about her this great while, honey!” she said. “I mistrusted whose child she was when you brought her here, for she looked just like he did when he was a boy. You wouldn’t believe what a pretty child he was! You and your husband have acted noble about it! I know how people have talked, and how hard ’twas to bear when you were following out the Scripture rule, clear! And the Lord above—He saw and understood it all, too—and He’ll be your abundant reward. Abundant! That’s His own word, dear! For your shame you shall have double. I’ve been a-thinking, while I made her ready for her long, peaceful home, what a blessing it was that she was called away before the world had a chance at her—so to speak. It’s a cruel world, dearie, and it wouldn’t have showed her mercy, whether the truth was told or not. The whiter her garments was, the more dirt they’d throw at her. ’Twould a’ broke her heart.”

All this time she was patting the head that never moved—the love and pity in her eyes transfiguring the homely, bustling factotum into the likeness of a ministering spirit.

“If you will but look at the angel!” she entreated, seeing that her talk produced no visible effect. “You can’t mourn for her when you see the heavenly smile on her mouth. She’s best off where she is. There’s nobody to molest or make her afraid—no terror by night, honey!

I always felt she was too good to stay here long. The climate of this life didn't suit her, you see. They wanted her up there, and wanted her badly, or they wouldn't a' sent so soon for her. And quick as she went, she didn't suffer. She never felt the blow that killed her. The Good Father was kind to her and to us, in that. Won't you just raise your head and see her?"

Alarmed by the stony immobility of her she addressed, she would have lifted her by main force. Hadassah resisted violently.

"Let me alone!" she said stubbornly. "I shall lie here until I die. It is surely almost time!"

Without wasting more words, Miss Mahala went for Max. He was with the Judge in the study. The two were talking earnestly and freely, and Morrie sat upon his father's knee, hushed into solemnity by the tone and manner of his elders. At the report of his wife's condition, Max resigned the boy to his grandfather, and accompanied the messenger. Miss Mahala checked him outside the chamber in which she had left the dead girl and the delirious woman.

"I don't want to frighten you," she said, "but I've seen her just so before, and I remember what followed. She ought to be looked to, at once. 'Tisn't every brain that can stand two such attacks in a lifetime."

Hadassah still knelt on the floor; her face was still concealed. Her arms were thrown far above her head, and their rigid strain instantly attracted Maxwell's eye.

"Dear wife! my own darling!" he said, putting both arms about her waist. "Come to Morrie, will you not? Our daughter is in the angel's care. Our boy wants his

mamma. He does not know what he has lost, but he is lonely and frightened."

She stood upon her feet, mechanically obedient; stared fixedly at the still shape before her, evidently not understanding, for the moment, where she was, nor what had happened. Then her eyes fell on something upon the counterpane she had clutched with her tense fingers. It was the print of a bloody hand, strangely distinct, the index finger pointing to Edith. Miss Mahala's attention was directed to the spectrum by the fearful expression that agitated Mrs. Humphrey's features, and she hastily stripped the soiled cover from the bed.

Hadassah held out her hand—the palm uppermost, and smiled ghastly.

"Such spots never wear or wash out! I have carried the stain there," touching the right hand, "and here," tapping her bosom, "for years and years!"

She submitted to be led away by her husband, passive and apathetic, speaking but once while Miss Mahala undressed and put her to bed. That was when her dress was removed, and she espied the red-brown streaks and splashes upon it.

"You had better burn them out!" she said. "That is what I did to your skirt, and nobody suspected it!"





## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE STRAIGHT PATH.

**I**T was clear to those conversant with the peculiar symptoms of Mrs. Humphreys' former severe illness that she was now in imminent danger of a similar attack. She was living over, in imagination, the scenes stamped in lines of fire upon her memory during that other night of bloodshed and watching beside the wounded one.

The announcement aroused Maxwell's most active energies. From the hour it was made, he assumed entire control of her sick-room, by day and night, suffering no one to enter save the housekeeper and the physician; himself administering every remedy prescribed, and vigilant of each symptom. That one woman's life was the slender barrier between him and the outer darkness of despair. If he had never prayed before, he did now, in agony and abasement of spirit, that the consequences of his ill-doing might not include this costly sacrifice. What were remorse and degradation—what the desertion of friends and public obloquy, compared with the cruel weight of this bereavement? All through the long hours of that day he kept his watch, mindful but of her, hanging

breathlessly upon the doctor's sentences of advice, of warning and encouragement; forgetful of yesterday's defeat and exposure, and the consternation that reigned in other parts of the house; never inquiring whether the lunatic had been secured, or if he had done other mischief; not even mentioning his child. His world of fear and hope was bounded by the four walls of his idol's sick-room.

The search for the escaped madman, commenced at daylight, was prosecuted diligently by bands of negroes, and when they failed to find him near home, by organized mounted companies of young men drafted from the neighborhood. A coroner's inquest, held above the remains of the slain child, rendered a verdict in accordance with the facts laid before them. The maniac's keeper had been found upon the floor of the lodge, slowly reviving from the effects of a stunning blow dealt from behind, as he dozed in his chair in the outer room. The spring-latch upon the door of communication with Shelby's sleeping-apartment had been accidentally left fastened back, as it was usually during the day. The negro, when he gained his senses, stated that he "hardly ever thought of seeing to this, for Mars' Maxwell always 'xamined it partic'lerly, the last thing at night."

It so chanced, Judge Humphreys stated to the jury that his son had that evening omitted his visit of inspection, this being the first time such a thing had occurred in twelve years, unless he were absent from home. Armed with the iron rod he had contrived to loosen from his bedstead, Shelby had then passed out of the cottage, and, guided by the lighted windows, or some stray reminiscence of former habits, crossed the yard to the house,

which he entered by the back door. After prowling about in the parlor and dining-room, he went stealthily upstairs. His feet were bare, for there were wet footprints upon the polished oaken floor of the hall, and what slight noise he made was confounded with, or drowned by the temp-est. The room now used as Morrie's nursery had been his sleeping apartment when he was sane, and taking up the lamp Hadassah had left in the passage, he proceeded to examine the interior; in the wantonness of insanity set fire to the curtains, and then approached the children's bed. Edith, always a light sleeper, had doubtless been awakened by the glare, and opening her eyes upon the terrific apparition, had, with the quick, motherly instinct that distinguished all her behavior to Morrie, pulled up the coverlet so as to hide him entirely, and sprung out of bed to stay the intruder's progress, screaming at the same time for help. Why she should have divined that he was bent upon mischief, was not easy to determine, unless the sight of the blazing curtains forced it upon her. She had ever been fearless and familiar with the insane man; visited his cell several times each day, often asking, as a favor, to be allowed to carry "Uncle Shelby's" dessert to him. It was her nature to be helpful and tender to all helpless, suffering things, and she had seemed to recognize his need of forbearance and gentle treatment ever since she was first brought to the homestead, a four-year-old baby.

Judge Humphreys further testified that his unfortunate son had never before attempted to injure any one, although he was often destructive with regard to the furniture, etc., of his cell. He always associated Edith's coming with the delicacies she was in the habit of bringing



him ; invariably laughed at seeing her, and frequently fondled her in his uncouth way, as one might pet a favorite dog or other tame animal. She could induce him to walk in the open air, however unwilling he might be to accompany any one else. No other person had ever persuaded him to enter the garden, a place for which he had showed a strong aversion ever since his accident. Edith would lead him up and down the walks in the sunshine, stopping now and then to put a flower in his button-hole or to regale him with fruit, of which he was extravagantly fond.

“ Perhaps the child’s scream and evident alarm excited the savage within him ; perhaps he did not know her in her night dress ; or her attempt to arrest him alarmed him, and he struck her, to secure his escape. It is impossible to say what influence any or all of these things may have had upon his wandering mind and lawless passions,” concluded the doubly stricken parent, confronting his neighbors and friends with mournful fortitude and mien, sad but stately, surrounded though he was by the ruins of his household gods. “ Be that as it may, the unfortunate fugitive is not responsible for the fatal deed.”

There could be but one opinion on this head, and in their expression of it, the jury were restrained by their abundant compassion from reprimanding the head of the family for what they deemed insecure guardianship of a raving madman. They shared to a great extent the pride of birth and respectability that had led him to shrink from making his domestic afflictions more public than the nature of the case demanded. The Lunatic Asylum was a State institution, open to visitors at all times, and the blood of Shelby and Humphreys revolted

at the thought that one of their line should make a part of the show. They knew, moreover, these neighboring planters, of the exceeding tenderness shown the maniac son. Their visit to the lodge lately occupied by him, had drawn forth their hearty encomiums of the loving ingenuity which had ministered to his wants; striven by every means wealth could command to alleviate the hardships of his lot. He had been far more comfortable here than in any hired lodgings, and it was with manifest reluctance that they offered a respectful recommendation to the effect that he should, when captured, be more securely confined, lest the general safety of the community should be imperilled by a second escape.

Judge Humphreys bowed silently when the foreman, Mr. Sherrard, announced the verdict and the recommendation, and subjoined, in a few feeling words, the assurance of sympathy and offers of assistance he had been empowered to deliver. The inquest had been held in the upper chamber, and pending their deliberations, the father had shut himself up in the drawing-room, was walking restlessly up and down the floor when the lawyer entered. The latter was withdrawing so soon as his mission was performed, but the Judge's voice arrested him at the door.

"I have a duty, a painful duty, to perform!" he said, with a determined muster of dignified self-control. "One which should not be postponed for a day or an hour longer. Will you invite your companions into this room?"

They filed in quietly, and took their seats to the right and left of the fire, where chairs were set for them. The Judge, standing at the corner of the mantel, eyed

each searchingly in anticipation of the statement he was to lay before them. They were all good men and true; honorable representatives of the intelligence and moral influence of the community. Besides these, there were six or eight other gentlemen on the premises, relatives and friends, who had come to the smitten household at news of their calamity, to tender help and consolation. When these were added to the company assembled in the parlor, Judge Humphreys spoke:

“It is not what we confess, but what we hide, that makes us shun the gaze of honest men. I thank you for the delicacy and feeling with which you have discharged your duty to the dead; for your just compassion to the irresponsible cause of the disaster which has shrouded our home and hearts with mourning; for your kindly forbearance to those through whose neglect this thing has happened. I owe it to you, no less than to the honor of my house and the fair fame of my son, Maxwell Humphreys, to lay open before you, without gloss or reserve, the darkest page that has ever marred the history of my family. Heaven forbid that any one of you should ever be called upon to recite such a story of his name and blood!”

After this preamble, he told simply, without argument or appeal, of the brothers' encounter in the garden; how they had fallen together while wrestling, and the circumstances of Maxwell's flight, as related by his wife; the reasons for his continued concealment of the truth; his untiring devotion to the victim of his rashness; his remorse, and his willingness to surrender himself into the hands of the law, to suffer the full penalty of his fault. The history of Edith's parentage and life fol-

lowed. As he had refrained from excusing the passion and indiscretion of one son, he offered no extenuation of the other's graver misdeeds.

The dead child's mother, Edith Ridley, was the pretty dressmaker whose visit to Maxwell's room the evening before Commencement Day had given rise to such grave scandal. About the middle of his last college term, Shelby, who had for months visited her by stealth at the house of her blind and widowed mother, prevailed upon her to consent to a private marriage. She was young, simple-hearted and credulous, very much in love with him; proud of her conquest of one so much superior to her in rank, and dazzled by his accounts of the wealth of which he would one day be master, and the position she would occupy as his wife. Making a plausible excuse to her mother for the expedition, she accompanied him to a neighboring city, where the ceremony was performed by an unprincipled class-mate, in a hotel-parlor hired for the occasion. There were no witnesses, but the mock clergyman made out a certificate of marriage, worded in due form, and committed it to the bride's keeping. Tiring after a while of his pretty plaything, who had neither art, brilliancy, nor wealth to rivet her hold upon his fickle, sensuous nature, or fearful of discovery, Shelby visited her less and less frequently, and finally abandoned her altogether, without explanation or apology. In an agony of wounded affection, racked by apprehensions of the future, the girl forgot her timidity, and went, as she supposed, to his room, on the eve of his departure for Kentucky.

In her agitation, and in the semi-obscurity of the chamber, she mistook the person reading by the study-lamp

for the man she believed to be her husband. He was at that moment in the adjoining dormitory, having, as was strongly suspected by those best acquainted with his movements that night, just returned from the riot and fire, and cast away his disguise in the hall, where it was found by the party who arrested his brother. He overheard all that passed between Edith and Maxwell, and although the latter, suspecting whom she sought, refrained from inquiry, and only begged that he might conduct her in safety from the college buildings; although the poor girl, terrified and ashamed as she was, would have suffered death sooner than betray her betrayer,—Shelby's anger at what he chose to style her imprudence and disloyalty knew no bounds. He went to her house the following evening, upbraided her fiercely with what she had done, and when she implored him to allow her to divulge the marriage to her mother, he taunted her coarsely with her credulity, and avowed the deception he had practised, defying her to establish any claim upon him. He even went to the length of threatening, in the event of any attempt on her part to expose him, to cast the accusation upon his brother. Indeed, he reminded her there would be no need for him to do this. Her visit to the college, and her detection there by the police, her subsequent examination before the magistrate, and her stubborn refusal to reveal the name of the student whom she expected to see, the while she averred solemnly that it was not Mr. Humphreys, had already blighted her reputation beyond the hope of restoration. Nobody believed her improbable tale. There was nothing to corroborate it except the word of a disgraced boy, who was fast in the righteous clutches of the law.

This interview took place in the garden of the widow's cottage, and when the blind mother, startled by her child's wild outcry of despair, groped her way to the spot, she found her upon the earth in a swoon, and alone. The deceived girl never saw her lover again. But while the younger Humphreys tarried in the college town awaiting his trial, the widow sent for him, and disclosed all, appealing to him for help to see her daughter righted. He was impotent as herself, he frankly confessed, so far as punishment of the wrong-doer, or the establishment of Edith's innocence, was concerned—at least, until his own acquittal. He visited her a second time, when the result of his trial made it possible for him to return to his home; obtained a copy of the false certificate in which the real names of the contracting parties were used, while that of the pretended clergyman was fictitious; also, a written attestation from Edith, that she had believed the marriage to be genuine until within a few weeks—engaging to lay all the evidence before his father, should he find Shelby obdurate to his threats and reasoning. Shelby had good reason to quail before the indignant eyes that blazed suddenly upon him in the grape-arbor on the night of their meeting. He had played a clever but a desperate game. His main reliance was in Maxwell's detention in prison. He had never thought of the likelihood of his obtaining bail, and for a moment the apparition of the brother he hated and had done his best to ruin, must have been like the wraith of an accusing conscience or avenging fate. The father said nothing of this, but the imaginations of his auditors filled in the outlines of his rapid sketch. More than one shuddered at the thought of the horrors which had shaken the guilty soul in the

last moments of reason that were to be vouchsafed to it upon earth; wondered no more that the distempered brain had not rallied from the physical shock which followed.

Maxwell's benevolent designs in behalf of the injured women were frustrated by the mischances that combined to send him into exile, but after joining the army he sent them frequent supplies of money. From the period of his reestablishment in his old home, he maintained the bedridden parent and her daughter, who was a mother, yet no wife, and whose chances of earning an honest livelihood were destroyed by her misfortune. The reader hardly needs to be told that Edith was the correspondent whose letter Violet had tossed into Hadassah's lap with the admonition that she would do well to read such suspicious missives. Maxwell kept his word to his wife of perfect confidence on this as on other subjects. After their marriage, his share of the correspondence was transferred to the great-hearted woman, whose pity for the deserted creature, now utterly without redress, was commensurate with her love and reverence for him who had assumed the burden of his brother's crimes as well as the care of his person. Shelby had been a maniac for four years when Edith wrote to Hadassah from her death-bed, entrusting her child to her care. Husband and wife held a short consultation; committed their hapless charge, who was then comparatively quiet, to Miss Mahala, and travelled by rapid stages to the obscure Northern village in which Edith had taken refuge, arriving in season to receive the precious charge at her hands, and to soothe her last hours by engaging to conceal the circumstances of her darling's birth, and to rear her as their own daughter.

With what pious fidelity the pledge had been fulfilled, how sunny with love, and every blessing love and wealth could procure, the two had made the life of the gentle-hearted, grateful orphan, the grandfather told in a few touching words. He was himself ignorant of her parentage until her death; so jealously had the secret been guarded.

One of the late jurors put a question here, the first that had interrupted the narrative.

“You must have known of the rumors rife on the subject, Judge Humphreys? You were doubtless aware that she was believed to be the daughter of Mr. Maxwell Humphreys?”

The stately figure was majestic in repudiation of the suggestion.

“I take pride in declaring that the slander never reached my ears! If it had, I should have denied it on the spot. My son had told me she was the orphan child of a class-mate. I asked no questions.”

“Max heard the story again and again!” burst forth Sherrard impetuously. “Upon my soul, I think this man is the noblest that ever came from the hand of the Creator! the most patient and generous that his fellow-men ever belied!”

There was not a dry eye in the room, as his voice broke and was lost utterly upon the last word. Even the strong will of the father gave way momentarily, under the surprise of this tribute to his boy's worth. He struggled with the rising softness; was the first to speak again.

“I have set the case in order before you, Gentlemen! This is not a legal tribunal, but your opinion in this mat-



ter may be regarded as a correct exponent of the moral sense of the community. I have made this statement without my son's knowledge, but I am convinced that, were he in my place, he would ask only justice, not mercy."

He left them to themselves. In an hour more they sent to his study by the hands of their foreman, a paper to be revised and approved by himself, and then forwarded to his son. It contained a formal list of resolutions setting forth in cordial and eloquent terms their unaltered esteem for Maxwell Humphreys as man and citizen; their declaration that they had given the charges brought against him by the opposing counsel at the late trial careful consideration, and so far from being moved by them to reprobation of his conduct, past or present, they united in the expression of their admiration for the patient heroism with which he had atoned for an outbreak of boyish violence; his generous regard for the reputation of him he had unintentionally injured. The concluding resolution was to the effect that there should be no public prosecution for an offence which could hardly, except by a stretch of malignity itself, be brought under the action of law. The names of twenty gentlemen, the leading citizens of the county, were signed to the paper.

So far as the action of man could go, Maxwell was rehabilitated. He tried to be grateful for the unlooked-for release, as he read the communication at the window of his wife's room, most remote from the bed. Still holding the sheet, he returned softly to her side; stood gazing upon the locked lips, the fixed, vacant eyes, and rigid hands, in wretchedness that mocked the effort of man

to alleviate. It had come too late for her! Her knowledge of his misdeed, her voluntary participation in his punishment, had been a millstone about her neck. No other woman could have borne the incubus so long; warred so valiantly with the doom that had now closed her in. Brave, loving, helpful, she had stood by his side, careless of self, ever watchful of his comfort, jealous of his reputation (such a poor, flimsy, besmirched rag it was!). He had suffered as men seldom suffer, but justly. What had she done, that this intolerable misery should devour her life?

It was not until a hand was laid within his arm that he saw his father standing by him.

"There is no change?" he whispered.

Max shook his head.

Judge Humphreys touched her pulse.

"But no fever as yet!" he said, hopefully. "If only she could be aroused!"

"She did not notice her boy! She does not hear me when I speak to her! Nothing can reach her senses!" rejoined Maxwell, in hopelessness that could not be mistaken for calm. He gave back the paper to his father. "Say what you please in reply—what I ought! Some day, perhaps, I shall know it for a benefit. Just now, I would forego it all for one sign of recognition from her. *She* did not wait to weigh the evidence for and against me. In my stormiest day she was true as steel. What care I for sunshine which she cannot feel?"

In a rational moment he would not have dealt the stab at his father's heart; would have decried the thought that he would ever have brought by word or gesture to his memory the recollection that he had been among the

first to cast him off at Shelby's instigation; would have implored pardon for a thoughtless remark that could bring such a look of pain to the old man's face as moved it now, as he turned from the bed, and took his seat silently by the fire. He sat there while the daylight went out of the western windows, and, clouded by the muslin curtains of the eastern, the moonbeams streamed in more purely white from the snow-reflections; neither moving nor speaking, or so much as looking toward the figure that guarded the bed, "for he saw that his grief was very great."

Miss Mahala came in by and by, and approached Maxwell.

"Laura Todd has come," she said, in her usual tone.

It was not necessary to study pitch and volume of voice in that sick-room, where ear and brain were alike unimpressible as stone.

"Very well!" replied Maxwell shortly.

"Morrie is delighted to be with her," continued the housekeeper. "It's a comfort to feel he's somebody to look after him."

No reply.

"He's no care for his child—no thought for anything or anybody but just only her," thought Miss Mahala, despairingly. "Dear Lord! Our pitiful and long-suffering Father! hasn't this unhappy boy had trouble enough, without tempting the punishment of the idolater?"

The low sough of the wind in the giant elm outside the window was echoed by the heated blast on its way up the chimney; the moonlight on the floor was like a frozen lake of whiteness. Judge Humphreys in his chair at the fireside, and Maxwell, tall, dark, and still, stand-

ing sentinel over the bed; the changeless face upon the pillow, with its wide eyes staring straight upward at nothing, wrought mightily; even upon the insensitive imagination of the housekeeper. She was, as she would have phrased it, "all out of sorts," and the eeriness of the hour and scene made her flesh creep. She was a true woman, and a pious, with a rich fund of common sense to fall back upon in the hour of need. She had spent twenty-five years, the best years of her life, in the service of the Humphreys family; identified her interests with theirs; believed in, as earnestly as she worked for them. But gossiping women had been coming and going all day in the homestead, wondering, lamenting, and croaking. More than one had whispered that there was "an evil spell" upon this generation of the ancient and honorable line in which she took such pride; had prated in sing-song cant above Edith—lying dead with the smile upon her face in the hushed chamber overhead—of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children, and the curse of shed blood, until, what with their sinister hints, her grief for the child's death, her horror at the news of Maxwell's downfall, the lurking dread she dared not express, that the vagrant might do other horrible and murderous deeds upon other innocents while at large, and her anxiety about Hadassah, she was scarcely her sagacious, practical self, was far more disposed to cast her tired, distressful body across the couch she felt would soon be the bed of death, than to seek out ways and means for helping those about her.

In her extremity she did that which seemed, for a moment, ill-timed, if not senseless.

"Although"—she took great comfort in reflecting,

afterward—"I know the Lord put it into my head—for I was crying mightily in my soul to Him at that very minute."

Myra, Morric's nurse, and Edith's constant companion when she was not with her aunt, entered on tiptoe to put some wood on the fire, and was stepping out as softly, after one awed glance at her mistress' still features, when Miss Mahala wheeled upon her.

"What is the hymn your Miss Edith was always singing with you in the nursery?—the one your mistress stopped in there to hear the other day? I saw the tears in her eyes as the blessed child sung it to her. Something about this world not being your home? I want you to come right here, close to her, and sing it!"

"Me! Miss Mahala! I darasn't!" expostulated the woman in a low voice, shrinking back.

"Don't be scared!" ordered Miss Mahala, in the same imperative whisper. "Something's got to wake her up, or she'll never speak again in this world! David's harp drove the devil out of Saul, you remember. Sing, girl! and I'll kneel down over there by her and pray, all the time, that the Blessed Master will rebuke the deaf and dumb spirit—make it come out of her!"

There was nothing strained or fanatical in this adjuration to the mulatto's apprehension. She was familiar with Scripture figures; believed in charming away sickness of mind and body. Before the gentlemen had any warning of her intention, she advanced to the foot of the bed, folded her hands meekly before her, looked heavenward, and began the hymn. Her voice was sweet and clear, with the plaintive tremor on certain tones, peculiar

to the singers of her race, and which is far more effective than artistic trill or quaver.

“O Land of Rest! for thee I sigh—  
 When will the moment come,  
 When I shall lay mine armor by,  
 And be in thee, at home?  
 Oh! this is not my home!  
 This world is not my home!  
 This world's a wilderness of woe,  
 This world is not my home!”

Miss Mahala, kneeling on one side of Hadassah, and Maxwell, from his post on the other, saw her raise her hands slightly, then let them fall.

“Go on!” said the housekeeper, in a choked whisper,

“Long nights and darkness dwell below,  
 With scarce one blessed ray:  
 But in the world to which we go  
 Is everlasting day.  
 Oh! this is not my home!  
 This world is not my home!  
 It's but a wilderness of woe,  
 This world is not my home!”

“Max! Max!” The wailing cry went through the listeners like an electric shock. The wife's arms were about his neck, her tears mingled with his in a plenteous, remedial stream. “Can it be true, darling, that our Edith has gone! our daughter!”

“She is out of the wilderness now, dear!”—Miss Mahala said, between her sobs—“is singing the glories of the Land of Rest with the other angels. O Father of mercies, the mourner's Trust!” cried the earnest Christian, lifting hands and eyes toward heaven in the energy of the supplication she could not restrain, “look down

upon the sorrows of these poor children, and comfort them with the pardon and peace the world cannot disturb or take away. Teach them there is but one Atonement for guilt! that not even the sacrifice of the fruit of one's body could remove the sin of his soul. It's been slow and hard work for them, finding this out, dear Lord! Visit them with Thine own salvation, then show them the straight path of duty—the only right one!—and keep them in it, for they have stumbled and bruised themselves terribly in the crooked by-roads of their own devising. Throw the mantle of Thine all-abounding charity over their mistakes and shortcomings. They meant well, O Lord, as Thou knowest better than their best earthly friend. Blot out the sins of their youth from their consciences, as from Thy book; remember them no more, and let them forget them too. They've borne the yoke, and a heavy one, that has galled and tired them almost to death. Fit thine easy and light one to their necks, and give them peace, for they need it sorely!"





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TIME THE HEALER.

**T**HE sods upon Edith's grave were joined into velvet turf by the busy fingers of Spring. Another "Maxwell" had brought back something like cheerfulness to the shadowed home of Riverview; was rejoiced over with exceeding joy by Morrie, whom the advent had promoted to the position of elder brother. The evenings were so mild that the convalescent mother sat on the piazza in the twilight, her hand folded in her husband's, her head upon his shoulder, and talked hopefully of the prospects of the pair of plighted lovers strolling in the avenue under the budding poplars.

Laura had never returned to the Cross Roads, except for a day or two at a time, since the long visit she paid her sister after Edith's death. Elena had quarrelled with and left her husband at about that date, and taken refuge with her three children in her mother's house, and the younger daughter was but too thankful to accept Hadasah's cordial invitation to remain with her. Her residence at Riverview did more to quiet the buzzing scandal creeping through the county of her secret engagement to



the convicted felon, Frederick Wilbon, than volumes of spoken contradiction could have effected. When Alex Shelby, undismayed by the discreditable rumor, offered her his honest heart and strong hand, she told him all, with many penitent tears; how she had been flattered and hurried into the disgraceful entanglement she thought was romantic; how she had suffered horribly by reason of the manner of her disenthralment; how, having listened to and replied favorably to the suit of this man, she was unworthy of his (Alex's) love, and wound up the sad recital by imploring him to forgive and forget her, and seek some better girl to share his lot. We have seen how he obeyed, and how inexorable was her purpose of dismissal.

Mrs. Rob Wharton had rolled the responsibility of managing her "nuisances" of both sexes off upon a second husband—as well-looking and good-natured as her first. Not so wealthy, being the fourth son of a neighboring planter, but, as she sensibly put it—"After putting her ever-to-be-lamented Rob's fortune and her own together, they had enough to live upon handsomely; to educate the boys and give each a farm, and to make each of the girls quite a 'catch'—and what more could any reasonable woman want?" She facetiously styled her new bridegroom 'No. 2' in conversation with her intimates, and with her accustomed frankness made no secret of the fact that he was her junior by several years.

"But then, you see, Haddie, dear, I can bring him up to my hand, and, moreover, I always did take to gay young fellows. I should die of the horrors if I had such a sobersides as Max here for a standing-dish at the foot of my table three times a day! Now my Dick is

in capital training! I've taught him to fetch-and-carry like any other nice spaniel!" she would chuckle until her fat, white shoulders shook under the lace covering she wore "to please Dick, who *so* admired her shoulders, he couldn't bear to have them out of sight!" and there were merry dents all over her peachy cheeks, as if the brace of fascinating dimples a super-fanciful admirer had once likened to "twin stars, always radiating smiles," had been shivered and scattered *à la* asteroid.

Births, betrothals, bridals and spring-time! What was the meaning, then, of the anxious, waiting, half-fearful look in the wife's eyes; the gray hairs that gleamed in Maxwell's dark curls; the fast-growing infirmities of the father—the fruit of a fainting spirit, not failing health? In all these months no word had been brought to them of the fugitive. Since that awful night when he had sped away, half-naked, laughing and gibing, into the storm, he had not been seen or heard of at the homestead. Advertisements had gone far and near; princely rewards been offered for his apprehension or for any definite information respecting his fate, but in vain. A silence as of the tomb rested upon his history from the moment in which his hand had dealt his child's death-blow—uncertainty, rayless as the midnight that had swallowed him up. In his headlong flight he might have fallen into the swollen river; been carried down and onward beyond the range of the search-parties, that left not a hill, or cave, or ravine unexplored. It seemed hardly possible that he could have gone far and survived the inclement night; more likely that he had sought shelter near home. In this persuasion the hunt was close and prolonged—renewed from time to time by false rumors of the appearance in

this or that locality of some mysterious wayfarer, who might be the missing man. Still the three watchers hearkened and hoped for tidings that were never brought; prayed at morning and evening that the Father's care might follow the wanderer if he were yet alive; talked softly and pityingly of him to one another, and of his return as a desirable and probable event.

The months clustered into years; the years filled, and ripened, and fell into the broad bosom of the Past. Judge Humphreys was followed to his grave by a mighty concourse of those who had delighted to honor him in his lifetime. Mrs. Todd dawdled out of existence through a previous stage of semi-imbecility, induced by opium and novels, and was laid beside her husband in another part of the Riverview burying-ground. Miss Mahala desisted from active duties, and sat enthroned in the easiest chair the house afforded, by her own bright fire-side, and spoiled Hadassah's children with all her heart, soul, and strength. And there remained yet that vacant space in the extensive "God's Acre" of the Humphreys family, next a short mound where the flowers were always brighter and fresher than upon any other of the motionless waves which made up that green sea of rest;—the gentle swell of earth marked by an altar of purest marble.

"EDITH, *only child of*  
SHELBY HUMPHREYS *and* EDITH RIDLEY, *his wife.*"

—said the inscription.

Tardy and insufficient reparation for the mother's wrongs; but it was all man could do.

Husband and wife had ceased now to expect news of the lost one; but the lodge was tenantless, and furnished

just as he left it. Strange stories were told around cabin fires, on windy nights, of moans and laughs that were heard by passers-by, and lurid lights that lit up the windows of the vacant cottage, in the full of the moon, until he was esteemed brave to recklessness who ventured within the shadow of the walls after sundown.

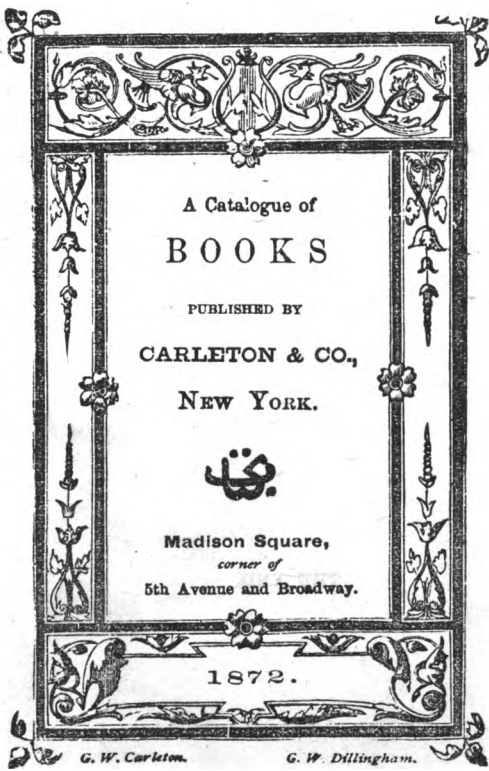
Maxwell Humphreys reigned in his father's stead, master of the noble domain of Riverview. Public life knew him no more from the day of Fred Wilbon's trial. As a planter, he was enterprising and successful; as a neighbor, kindly, beneficent, and true, although averse to mingling in general society. In his home he was beloved and honored the more for the tenderness and dignity which are the outgrowth of genuine repentance and sanctified sorrow. But his hair silvered fast; and the wife, who was privy to his every thought, could have told how heavily pressed the undying memory of the one act that had changed the whole current of his life; of grief, the poignancy of which years could not assuage.

Children grew up about his knees. Maxwell the second, and sturdy John, his grandfather Todd's namesake, and lastly, twin girls. One, dark-haired, robust, and merry as the day was long, was Esther—another "Queenie," imperious in her way, yet a veritable sunbeam, scattering light and gladness as she danced along. The other, fair as a snow-drop, with soft blue eyes and pensive smile, crept into all hearts by her clinging loveliness; was oftenest close to the mother's side, and cradled in the father's arms.

They spoke her real name but seldom. She was "Baby," and "Dove," and a dozen other endearing appellations, to all the family.

But when no stranger was by to intermeddle with, or restrain by listening to the twilight talks of parents and children in the still Sabbath evenings; when she said her prayers at "Mamma's knee;" always, when her sob or cry in the dead of night, telling of terrifying vision or bodily pain, brought her fond guardians to her crib,—they addressed her in low, fervent, reverent tones, such as one uses in prayer, as—"EDITH."

**THE END.**



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