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Title: Men, Women, and Ghosts

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Release date: January 1, 2004 [EBook #10744]
Most recently updated: December 20, 2020

Language: English

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by

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

1869.

University Press: Welch, Bigelow, &., Cambridge.

Note.

Of this collection of stories, "Calico," "The Day of my Death," and "Night-Watches" (the last under the title of "Voices of the Night") have appeared in *Harper's Monthly*; "One of the Elect," (under the title of "Magdalene,") in *Hours at Home*; and "Little Tommy Tucker," in the *Watchman and Reflector*.

E. S. P.

Andover, April, 1869.

Contents.

No News.

None at all. Understand that, please, to begin with. That you will at once, and distinctly, recall Dr. Sharpe—and his wife, I make no doubt. Indeed, it is because the history is a familiar one, some of the unfamiliar incidents of which have come into my possession, that I undertake to tell it.

My relation to the Doctor, his wife, and their friend, has been in many respects peculiar. Without entering into explanations which I am not at liberty to make, let me say, that those portions of their story which concern our present purpose, whether or not they fell under my personal observation, are accurately, and to the best of my judgment impartially, related.

Nobody, I think, who was at the wedding, dreamed that there would ever be such a story to tell. It was such a pretty, peaceful wedding! If you were there, you remember it as you remember a rare sunrise, or a peculiarly delicate May-flower, or that strain in a simple old song which is like orioles and butterflies and dew-drops.

There were not many of us; we were all acquainted with one another; the day was bright, and Harrie did not faint nor cry. There were a couple of bridesmaids,—Pauline Dallas, and a Miss—Jones, I think,—besides Harrie's little sisters; and the people were well dressed and well looking, but everybody was thoroughly at home, comfortable, and on a level. There was no annihilating of little country friends in gray alpacas by city cousins in point and pearls, no crowding and no crush, and, I believe, not a single "front breadth" spoiled by the ices.

Harrie is not called exactly pretty, but she must be a very plain woman who is not pleasant to see upon her wedding day. Harrie's eyes shone,—I never saw such eyes! and she threw her head back like a queen whom they were crowning.

Her father married them. Old Mr. Bird was an odd man, with odd notions of many things, of which marriage was one. The service was his own. I afterwards asked him for a copy of it, which I have preserved. The Covenant ran thus:—

"Appealing to your Father who is in heaven to witness your sincerity, you …. do now take this woman whose hand you hold—choosing her alone from all the world—to be your lawfully wedded wife. You trust her as your best earthly friend. You promise to love, to cherish, and to protect her; to be considerate of her happiness in your plans of life; to cultivate for her sake all manly virtues; and in all things to seek her welfare as you seek your own. You pledge yourself thus honorably to her, to be her husband in good faith, so long as the providence of God shall spare you to each other.

"In like manner, looking to your Heavenly Father for his blessing, you … do now receive this man, whose hand you hold, to be your lawfully wedded husband. You choose him from all the world as he has chosen you. You pledge your trust to him as your best earthly friend. You promise to love, to comfort, and to honor him; to cultivate for his sake all womanly graces; to guard his reputation, and assist him in his life's work; and in all things to esteem his happiness as your own. You give yourself thus trustfully to him, to be his wife in good faith, so long as the providence of God shall spare you to each other."

When Harrie lifted her shining eyes to say, "I *do*!" the two little happy words ran through the silent room like a silver bell; they would have tinkled in your ears for weeks to come if you had heard them.

I have been thus particular in noting the words of the service, partly because they pleased me, partly because I have since had some occasion to recall them, and partly because I remember having wondered, at the time, how many married men and women of your and my acquaintance, if honestly subjecting their union to the test and full interpretation and remotest bearing of such vows as these, could live in the sight of God and man as "lawfully wedded" husband and wife.

Weddings are always very sad things to me; as much sadder than burials as the beginning of life

should be sadder than the end of it. The readiness with which young girls will flit out of a tried, proved, happy home into the sole care and keeping of a man whom they have known three months, six, twelve, I do not profess to understand. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. But that may be because I am fifty-five, an old maid, and have spent twenty years in boarding-houses.

A woman reads the graces of a man at sight. His faults she cannot thoroughly detect till she has been for years his wife. And his faults are so much more serious a matter to her than hers to him!

I was thinking of this the day before the wedding. I had stepped in from the kitchen to ask Mrs. Bird about the salad, when I came abruptly, at the door of the sitting-room, upon as choice a picture as one is likely to see.

The doors were open through the house, and the wind swept in and out. A scarlet woodbine swung lazily back and forth beyond the window. Dimples of light burned through it, dotting the carpet and the black-and-white marbled oilcloth of the hall. Beyond, in the little front parlor, framed in by the series of doorways, was Harrie, all in a cloud of white. It floated about her with an idle, wavelike motion. She had a veil like fretted pearls through which her tinted arm shone faintly, and the shadow of a single scarlet leaf trembled through a curtain upon her forehead.

Her mother, crying a little, as mothers will cry the day before the wedding, was smoothing with tender touch a tiny crease upon the cloud; a bridesmaid or two sat chattering on the floor; gloves, and favors, and flowers, and bits of lace like hoar frost, lay scattered about; and the whole was repictured and reflected and reshaded in the great old-fashioned mirrors before which Harrie turned herself about.

It seemed a pity that Myron Sharpe should miss that, so I called him in from the porch where he sat reading Stuart Mill on Liberty.

If you form your own opinion of a man who might spend a livelong morning,—an October morning, quivering with color, alive with light, sweet with the breath of dropping pines, soft with the caress of a wind that had filtered through miles of sunshine,—and that the morning of the day before his wedding,—reading Stuart Mill on Liberty,—I cannot help it.

Harrie, turning suddenly, saw us,—met her lover's eyes, stood a moment with lifted lashes and bright cheeks,—crept with a quick, impulsive movement into her mother's arms, kissed her, and floated away up the stairs.

"It's a perfect fit," said Mrs. Bird; coming out with one corner of a very dingy handkerchief—somebody had just used it to dust the Parian vases—at her eyes.

And though, to be sure, it was none of my business, I caught myself saying, under my breath,—

"It's a fit for life; for a *life*, Dr. Sharpe."

Dr. Sharpe smiled serenely. He was very much in love with the little pink-and-white cloud that had just fluttered up the stairs. If it had been drifting to him for the venture of twenty lifetimes, he would have felt no doubt of the "fit."

Nor, I am sure, would Harrie. She stole out to him that evening after the bridal finery was put away, and knelt at his feet in her plain little muslin dress, her hair all out of crimp, slipping from her net behind her ears,—Harrie's ears were very small, and shaded off in the colors of a pale apple-blossom,—up-turning her flushed and weary face.

"Put away the book, please, Myron."

Myron put away the book (somebody on Bilious Affections), and looked for a moment without speaking at the up-turned face.

Dr. Sharpe had spasms of distrusting himself amazingly; perhaps most men have,—and ought to. His face grew grave just then. That little girl's clear eyes shone upon him like the lights upon an altar. In very unworthiness of soul he would have put the shoes from off his feet. The ground on which he trod was holy.

When he spoke to the child, it was in a whisper:—

"Harrie, are you afraid of me? I know I am not very good."

And Harrie, kneeling with the shadows of the scarlet leaves upon her hair, said softly, "How could I be afraid of you? It is *I* who am not good."

Dr. Sharpe could not have made much progress in Bilious Affections that evening. All the time that the skies were fading, we saw them wandering in and out among the apple-trees,—she with those shining eyes, and her hand in his. And when to-morrow had come and gone, and in the dying light they drove away, and Miss Dallas threw old Grandmother Bird's little satin boot after the carriage, the last we saw of her was that her hand was clasped in his, and that her eyes were shining.

Well, I believe that they got along very well till the first baby came. As far as my observation goes, young people usually get along very well till the first baby comes. These particular young people had a clear conscience,—as young people's consciences go,—fair health, a comfortable income for two, and a very pleasant home.

This home was on the coast. The townspeople made shoes, and minded their own business. Dr. Sharpe bought the dying practice of an antediluvian who believed in camomile and castor-oil. Harrie mended a few stockings, made a few pies, and watched the sea.

It was almost enough of itself to make one happy—the sea—as it tumbled about the shores of Lime. Harrie had a little seat hollowed out in the cliffs, and a little scarlet bathing-dress, which was surprisingly becoming, and a little boat of her own, moored in a little bay,—a pretty shell which her husband had had made to order, that she might be able to row herself on a calm water. He was very thoughtful for her in those days.

She used to take her sewing out upon the cliff; she would be demure and busy; she would finish the selvage seam; but the sun blazed, the sea shone, the birds sang, all the world was at play,—what could it matter about selvage seams? So the little gold thimble would drop off, the spool trundle down the cliff, and Harrie, sinking back into a cushion of green and crimson sea-weed, would open her wide eyes and dream. The waves purpled and silvered, and broke into a mist like powdered amber, the blue distances melted softly, the white sand glittered, the gulls were chattering shrilly. What a world it was!

"And he is in it!" thought Harrie. Then she would smile and shut her eyes. "And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that Moses' face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him." Harrie wondered if everybody's joy were too great to look upon, and wondered, in a childish, frightened way, how it might be with sorrow; if people stood with veiled faces before it, dumb with pain as she with peace,—and then it was dinner-time, and Myron came down to walk up the beach with her, and she forgot all about it.

She forgot all about everything but the bare joy of life and the sea, when she had donned the pretty scarlet suit, and crept out into the surf,—at the proper medicinal hour, for the Doctor was very particular with her,—when the warm brown waves broke over her face, the long sea-weeds slipped through her fingers, the foam sprinkled her hair with crystals, and the strong wind was up.

She was a swift swimmer, and as one watched from the shore, her lithe scarlet shoulders seemed to glide like a trail of fire through the lighted water; and when she sat in shallow foam with sunshine on her, or flashed through the dark green pools among the rocks, or floated with the incoming tide, her great bathing-hat dropping shadows on her wet little happy face, and her laugh ringing out, it was a pretty sight.

But a prettier one than that, her husband thought, was to see her in her boat at sunset; when sea and sky were aflame, when every flake of foam was a rainbow, and the great chalk-cliffs were blood-red; when the wind blew her net off, and in pretty petulance she pulled her hair down, and it rippled all about her as she dipped into the blazing West.

Dr. Sharpe used to drive home by the beach, on a fair night, always, that he might see it. Then Harrie would row swiftly in, and spring into the low, broad buggy beside him, and they rode home together in the fragrant dusk. Sometimes she used to chatter on these twilight drives; but more often she crept up to him and shut her eyes, and was as still as a sleepy bird. It was so pleasant to do nothing but be happy!

I believe that at this time Dr. Sharpe loved his wife as unselfishly as he knew how. Harrie often wrote me that he was "very good." She was sometimes a little troubled that he should "know so much more" than she, and had fits of reading the newspapers and reviewing her French, and studying cases of hydrophobia, or some other pleasant subject which had a professional air. Her husband laughed at her for her pains, but nevertheless he found her so much the more entertaining. Sometimes she drove about with him on his calls, or amused herself by making jellies in fancy moulds for his poor, or sat in his lap and discoursed like a bobolink of croup and measles, pulling his whiskers the while with her pink fingers.

All this, as I have said, was before the first baby came.

It is surprising what vague ideas young people in general, and young men in particular, have of the rubs and jars of domestic life; especially domestic life on an income of eighteen hundred, American constitutions and country servants thrown in.

Dr. Sharpe knew something of illness and babies and worry and watching; but that his own individual baby should deliberately lie and scream till two o'clock in the morning, was a source of perpetual astonishment to him; and that it,—he and Mrs. Sharpe had their first quarrel over his persistence in calling the child an "it,"—that it should *invariably* feel called upon to have the colic just as he had fallen into a nap, after a night spent with a dying patient, was a phenomenon of the infant mind for which he was, to say the least, unprepared.

It was for a long time a mystery to his masculine understanding, that Biddy could not be nursery-maid as well as cook. "Why, what has she to do now? Nothing but to broil steaks and make tea for two people!" That whenever he had Harrie quietly to himself for a peculiarly pleasant tea-table, the house should resound with sudden shrieks from the nursery, and there was *always* a pin in that baby, was forever a fresh surprise; and why, when they had a house full of company, no "girl," and Harrie down with a sick-headache, his son and heir should of *necessity* be threatened with scarlatina, was a philosophical problem over which he speculated long and profoundly.

So, gradually, in the old way, the old sweet habits of the long honeymoon were broken. Harrie dreamed no more on the cliffs by the bright noon sea; had no time to spend making scarlet pictures in the little bathing-suit; had seldom strength to row into the sunset, her hair loose, the bay on fire, and one to watch her from the shore. There were no more walks up the beach to dinner; there came an end to the drives in the happy twilight; she could not climb now upon her husband's knee, because of the heavy baby on her own.

The spasms of newspaper reading subsided rapidly; Corinne and Racine gathered the dust in peace upon their shelves; Mrs. Sharpe made no more fancy jellies, and found no time to inquire after other people's babies.

One becomes used to anything after a while, especially if one happens to be a man. It would have surprised Dr. Sharpe, if he had taken the pains to notice,—which I believe he never did,—how easily he became used to his solitary drives and disturbed teas; to missing Harrie's watching face at door or window; to sitting whole evenings by himself while she sang to the fretful baby overhead with her sweet little tired voice; to slipping off into the "spare room" to sleep when the child cried at night, and Harrie, up and down with him by the hour, flitted from cradle to bed, or paced the room, or sat and sang, or lay and cried herself, in sheer despair of rest; to wandering away on lonely walks; to stepping often into a neighbor's to discuss the election or the typhoid in the village; to forgetting that his wife's conversational capacities could extend beyond Biddy and teething; to forgetting that she might ever hunger for a twilight drive, a sunny sail, for the sparkle and freshness, the dreaming, the petting, the caresses, all the silly little lovers' habits of their early married days; to going his own ways, and letting her go hers.

Yet he loved her, and loved her only, and loved her well. That he never doubted, nor, to my surprise, did she. I remember once, when on a visit there, being fairly frightened out of the proprieties by hearing her call him "Dr. Sharpe." I called her away from the children soon after, on pretence of helping me unpack. I locked the door, pulled her down upon a trunk tray beside me, folded both her hands in mine, and studied her face; it had grown to be a very thin little face, less pretty than it was in the shadow of the woodbine, with absent eyes and a sad mouth. She knew that I loved her, and my heart was full for the child; and so, for I could not help it, I said,—"Harrie, is all well between you? Is he quite the same?"

She looked at me with a perplexed and musing air.

"The same? O yes, he is quite the same to me. He would always be the same to me. Only there are the children, and we are so busy. He—why, he loves me, you know,—" she turned her head from side to side wearily, with the puzzled expression growing on her forehead,—"he loves me just the same,—just the same. I am *his wife*; don't you see?"

She drew herself up a little haughtily, said that she heard the baby crying, and slipped away.

But the perplexed knot upon her forehead did not slip away. I was rather glad that it did not. I liked it better than the absent eyes. That afternoon she left her baby with Biddy for a couple of hours, went away by herself into the garden, sat down upon a stone and thought.

Harrie took a great deal of comfort in her babies, quite as much as I wished to have her. Women whose dream of marriage has faded a little have a way of transferring their passionate devotion and

content from husband to child. It is like anchoring in a harbor,—a pleasant harbor, and one in which it is good to be,—but never on shore and never at home. Whatever a woman's children may be to her, her husband should be always something beyond and more; forever crowned for her as first, dearest, best, on a throne that neither son nor daughter can usurp. Through mistake and misery the throne may be left vacant or voiceless: but what man cometh after the King?

So, when Harrie forgot the baby for a whole afternoon, and sat out on her stone there in the garden thinking, I felt rather glad than sorry.

It was when little Harrie was a baby, I believe, that Mrs. Sharpe took that notion about having company. She was growing out of the world, she said; turning into a fungus; petrifying; had forgotten whether you called your seats at the Music Hall pews or settees, and was as afraid of a well-dressed woman as she was of the croup.

So the Doctor's house at Lime was for two or three months overrun with visitors and vivacity. Fathers and mothers made fatherly and motherly stays, with the hottest of air-tights put up for their benefit in the front room; sisters and sisters-in-law brought the fashions and got up tableaux; cousins came on the jump; Miss Jones, Pauline Dallas, and I were invited in turn, and the children had the mumps at cheerful intervals between.

The Doctor was not much in the mood for entertaining Miss Dallas; he was a little tired of company, and had had a hard week's work with an epidemic down town. Harrie had not seen her since her wedding day, and was pleased and excited at the prospect of the visit. Pauline had been one of her eternal friendships at school.

Miss Dallas came a day earlier than she was expected, and, as chance would have it, Harrie was devoting the afternoon to cutting out shirts. Any one who has sat from two till six at that engaging occupation, will understand precisely how her back ached and her temples throbbed, and her fingers stung, and her neck stiffened; why her eyes swam, her cheeks burned, her brain was deadened, the children's voices were insufferable, the slamming of a door an agony, the past a blot, the future unendurable, life a burden, friendship a myth, her hair down, and her collar unpinned.

Miss Dallas had never cut a shirt, nor, I believe, had Dr. Sharpe.

Harrie was groaning over the last wristband but one, when she heard her husband's voice in the hall.

"Harrie, Harrie, your friend is here. I found her, by a charming accident, at the station, and drove her home." And Miss Dallas, gloved, perfumed, rustling, in a very becoming veil and travelling-suit of the latest mode, swept in upon her.

Harrie was too much of a lady to waste any words on apology, so she ran just as she was, in her calico dress, with the collar hanging, into Pauline's stately arms, and held up her little burning cheeks to be kissed.

But her husband looked annoyed.

He came down before tea in his best coat to entertain their guest. Biddy was "taking an afternoon" that day, and Harrie bustled about with her aching back to make tea and wash the children. She had no time to spend upon herself, and, rather than keep a hungry traveller waiting, smoothed her hair, knotted a ribbon at the collar, and came down in her calico dress.

Dr. Sharpe glanced at it in some surprise. He repeated the glances several times in the course of the evening, as he sat chatting with his wife's friend. Miss Dallas was very sprightly in conversation; had read some, had thought some; and had the appearance of having read and thought about twice as much as she had.

Myron Sharpe had always considered his wife a handsome woman. That nobody else thought her so had made no difference to him. He had often looked into the saucy eyes of little Harrie Bird, and told her that she was very pretty. As a matter of theory, he supposed her to be very pretty, now that she was the mother of his three children, and breaking her back to cut out his shirts.

Miss Dallas was a generously framed, well-proportioned woman, who carried long trains, and tied her hair with crimson velvet. She had large, serene eyes, white hands, and a very pleasant smile. A delicate perfume stirred as she stirred, and she wore a creamy lace about her throat and wrists.

Calicoes were never becoming to Harrie, and that one with the palm-leaf did not fit her well,—she cut it herself, to save expense. As the evening passed, in reaction from the weariness of shirt-cutting she grew pale, and the sallow tints upon her face came out; her features sharpened, as they had a way of

doing when she was tired; and she had little else to do that evening than think how tired she was, for her husband observing, as he remarked afterwards, that she did not feel like talking, kindly entertained her friend himself.

As they went up stairs for the night, it struck him, for the first time in his life, that Harrie had a snubbed nose. It annoyed him, because she was his wife, and he loved her, and liked to feel that she was as well looking as other women.

"Your friend is a bright girl," he said, encouragingly, when Harrie had hushed a couple of children, and sat wearily down to unbutton her boots.

"I think you will find her more easy to entertain than Cousin
Mehitabel."

Then, seeing that Harrie answered absently, and how exhausted she looked, he expressed his sorrow that she should have worked so long over the shirts, and kissed her as he spoke; while Harrie cried a little, and felt as if she would cut them all over again for that.

The next day Miss Dallas and Mrs. Sharpe sat sewing together; Harrie cramping her shoulders and blackening her hands over a patch on Rocko's rough little trousers; Pauline playing idly with purple and orange wools,—her fingers were white, and she sank with grace into the warm colors of the arm-chair; the door was opened into the hall, and Dr. Sharpe passed by, glancing in as he passed.

"Your husband is a very intelligent man, Harrie," observed Miss Dallas, studying her lavenders and lemons thoughtfully. "I was much interested in what he said about pre-Adamic man, last evening."

"Yes," said Harrie, "he knows a great deal. I always thought so." The little trousers slipped from her black fingers by and by, and her eyes wandered out of the window absently.

She did not know anything about pre-Adamic man.

In the afternoon they walked down the beach together,—the Doctor, his wife, and their guest,—accompanied by as few children as circumstances would admit of. Pauline was stately in a beach-dress of bright browns, which shaded softly into one another; it was one of Miss Dallas's peculiarities, that she never wore more than one color, or two, at the same time. Harrie, as it chanced, wore over her purple dress (Rocko had tipped over two ink-bottles and a vinegar-cruet on the sack which should have matched it) a dull gray shawl; her bonnet was blue,—it had been a present from Myron's sister, and she had no other way than to wear it. Miss Dallas bounded with pretty feet from rock to rock. Rocko hung heavily to his mother's fingers; she had no gloves, the child would have spoiled them; her dress dragged in the sand,—she could not afford two skirts, and one must be long,—and between Rocko and the wind she held it up awkwardly.

Dr. Sharpe seldom noticed a woman's dress; he could not have told now whether his wife's shawl was sky-blue or pea-green; he knew nothing about the ink-spots; he had never heard of the unfortunate blue bonnet, or the mysteries of short and long skirts. He might have gone to walk with her a dozen times and thought her very pretty and "proper" in her appearance. Now, without the vaguest idea what was the trouble, he understood that something was wrong. A woman would have said, Mrs. Sharpe looks dowdy and old-fashioned; he only considered that Miss Dallas had a pleasant air, like a soft brown picture with crimson lights let in, and that it was an air which his wife lacked. So, when Rocko dragged heavily and more heavily at his mother's skirts, and the Doctor and Pauline wandered off to climb the cliffs, Harrie did not seek to follow or to call them back. She sat down with Rocko on the beach, wrapped herself with a savage hug in the ugly shawl, and wondered with a bitterness with which only women can wonder over such trifles, why God should send Pauline all the pretty beach-dresses and deny them to her,—for Harrie, like many another "dowdy" woman whom you see upon the street, my dear madam, was a woman of fine, keen tastes, and would have appreciated the soft browns no less than yourself. It seemed to her the very sting of poverty, just then, that one must wear purple dresses and blue bonnets.

At the tea-table the Doctor fell to reconstructing the country, and Miss Dallas, who was quite a politician in Miss Dallas's way, observed that the horizon looked brighter since Tennessee's admittance, and that she hoped that the clouds, &c.,—and what *did* he think of Brownlow? &c., &c.

"Tennessee!" exclaimed Harrie; "why, how long has Tennessee been in? I didn't know anything about it."

Miss Dallas smiled kindly. Dr. Sharpe bit his lip, and his face flushed.

"Harrie, you really *ought* to read the papers," he said, with some impatience; "it's no wonder you

don't know anything."

"How should I know anything, tied to the children all day?" Harrie spoke quickly, for the hot tears sprang. "Why didn't you tell me something about Tennessee? You never talk politics with *me*."

This began to be awkward; Miss Dallas, who never interfered—on principle—between husband and wife, gracefully took up the baby, and gracefully swung her dainty Geneva watch for the child's amusement, smiling brilliantly. She could not endure babies, but you would never have suspected it.

In fact, when Pauline had been in the house four or five days, Harrie, who never thought very much of herself, became so painfully alive to her own deficiencies, that she fell into a permanent fit of low spirits, which did not add either to her appearance or her vivacity.

"Pauline is so pretty and bright!" she wrote to me. "I always knew I was a little fool. You can be a fool before you're married, just as well as not. Then, when you have three babies to look after, it is too late to make yourself over. I try very hard now to read the newspapers, only Myron does not know it."

One morning something occurred to Mrs. Sharpe. It was simply that her husband had spent every evening at home for a week. She was in the nursery when the thought struck her, rocking slowly in her low sewing-chair, holding the baby on one arm and trying to darn stockings with the other.

Pauline was—she did not really know where. Was not that her voice upon the porch? The rocking-chair stopped sharply, and Harrie looked down through the blinds. The Doctor's horse was tied at the gate. The Doctor sat fanning himself with his hat in one of the garden chairs; Miss Dallas occupied the other; she was chatting, and twisting her golden wools about her fingers,—it was noticeable that she used only golden wools that morning; her dress was pale blue, and the effect of the purples would not have been good.

"I thought your calls were going to take till dinner, Myron," called
Harrie, through the blinds.

"I thought so too," said Myron, placidly, "but they do not seem to.
Won't you come down?"

Harrie thanked him, saying, in a pleasant *nonchalant* way, that she could not leave the baby. It was almost the first bit of acting that the child had ever been guilty of,—for the baby was just going to sleep, and she knew it.

She turned away from the window quietly. She could not have been angry, and scolded; or noisy, and cried. She put little Harrie into her cradle, crept upon the bed, and lay perfectly still for a long time.

When the dinner-bell rang, and she got up to brush her hair, that absent, apathetic look of which I have spoken had left her eyes. A stealthy brightness came and went in them, which her husband might have observed if he and Miss Dallas had not been deep in the Woman question. Pauline saw it; Pauline saw everything.

"Why did you not come down and sit with us this morning?" she asked, reproachfully, when she and Harrie were alone after dinner. "I don't want your husband to feel that he must run away from you to entertain me."

"My husband's ideas of hospitality are generous," said Mrs. Sharpe. "I have always found him as ready to make it pleasant here for my company as for his own."

She made this little speech with dignity. Did both women know it for the farce it was? To do Miss Dallas justice,—I am not sure. She was not a bad-hearted woman. She was a handsome woman. She had come to Lime to enjoy herself. Those September days and nights were fair there by the dreamy sea. On the whole I am inclined to think that she did not know exactly what she was about.

"*My* perfumery never lasts," said Harrie, once, stooping to pick up Pauline's fine handkerchief, to which a faint scent like unseen heliotrope clung; it clung to everything of Pauline's; you would never see a heliotrope without thinking of her, as Dr. Sharpe had often said. "Myron used to like good cologne, but I can't afford to buy it, so I make it myself, and use it Sundays, and it's all blown away by the time I get to church. Myron says he is glad of it, for it is more like Mrs. Allen's Hair Restorer than anything else. What do you use, Pauline?"

"Sachet powder of course," said Miss Dallas, smiling.

That evening Harrie stole away by herself to the village apothecary's. Myron should not know for what she went. If it were the breath of a heliotrope, thought foolish Harrie, which made it so pleasant

for people to be near Pauline, that was a matter easily remedied. But sachet powder, you should know, is a dollar an ounce, and Harrie must needs content herself with "the American," which could be had for fifty cents; and so, of course, after she had spent her money, and made her little silk bags, and put them away into her bureau drawers, Myron never told *her,* for all her pains, that she reminded him of a heliotrope with the dew on it. One day a pink silk bag fell out from under her dress, where she had tucked it.

"What's all this nonsense, Harrie?" said her husband, in a sharp tone.

At another time, the Doctor and Pauline were driving upon the beach at sunset, when, turning a sudden corner, Miss Dallas cried out, in real delight,—

"See! That beautiful creature! Who can it be?"

And there was Harrie, out on a rock in the opal surf,—a little scarlet mermaid, combing her hair with her thin fingers, from which the water almost washed the wedding ring. It was—who knew how long, since the pretty bathing-suit had been taken down from the garret nails? What sudden yearning for the wash of waves, and the spring of girlhood, and the consciousness that one is fair to see, had overtaken her? She watched through her hair and her fingers for the love in her husband's eyes.

But he waded out to her, ill-pleased.

"Harrie, this is very imprudent,—very! I don't see what could have possessed you!"

Myron Sharpe loved his wife. Of course he did. He began, about this time, to state the fact to himself several times a day. Had she not been all the world to him when he wooed and won her in her rosy, ripening days? Was she not all the world to him now that a bit of searness had crept upon her, in a married life of eight hard-working years?

That she *had* grown a little sear, he felt somewhat keenly of late. She had a dreary, draggled look at breakfast, after the children had cried at night,—and the nights when Mrs. Sharpe's children did not cry were like angels' visits. It was perhaps the more noticeable, because Miss Dallas had a peculiar color and coolness and sparkle in the morning, like that of opening flowers. *She* had not been up till midnight with a sick baby.

Harrie was apt to be too busy in the kitchen to run and meet him when he came home at dusk. Or, if she came, it was with her sleeves rolled up and an apron on. Miss Dallas sat at the window; the lace curtain waved about her; she nodded and smiled as he walked up the path. In the evening Harrie talked of Rocko, or the price of butter; she did not venture beyond, poor thing! since her experience with Tennessee.

Miss Dallas quoted Browning, and discussed Goethe, and talked Parepa; and they had no lights, and the September moon shone in. Sometimes Mrs. Sharpe had mending to do, and, as she could not sew on her husband's buttons satisfactorily by moonlight, would slip into the dining-room with kerosene and mosquitoes for company. The Doctor may have noticed, or he may not, how comfortably he could, if he made the proper effort, pass the evening without her.

But Myron Sharpe loved his wife. To be sure he did. If his wife doubted it,—but why should she doubt it? Who thought she doubted it? If she did, she gave no sign. Her eyes, he observed, had brightened, of late; and when they went to her from the moonlit parlor, there was such a pretty color upon her cheeks, that he used to stoop and kiss them, while Miss Dallas discreetly occupied herself in killing mosquitoes. Of course he loved his wife!

It was observable that, in proportion to the frequency with which he found it natural to remark his fondness for Harrie, his attentions to her increased. He inquired tenderly after her headaches; he brought her flowers, when he and Miss Dallas walked in the autumn woods; he was particular about her shawls and wraps; he begged her to sail and drive with them; he took pains to draw his chair beside hers on the porch; he patted her hands, and played with her soft hair.

Harrie's clear eyes puzzled over this for a day or two; but by and by it might have been noticed that she refused his rides, shawled herself, was apt to be with the children when he called her, and shrank, in a quiet way, from his touch.

She went into her room one afternoon, and locked the children out. An east wind blew, and the rain fell drearily. The Doctor and Pauline were playing chess down stairs; she should not be missed. She took out her wedding-dress from the drawer where she had laid it tenderly away; the hoar-frost and fretted pearl fell down upon her faded morning-dress; the little creamy gloves hung loosely upon her worn fingers. Poor little gloves! Poor little pearly dress! She felt a kind of pity for their innocence and

ignorance and trustfulness. Her hot tears fell and spotted them. What if there were any way of creeping back through them to be little Harrie Bird again? Would she take it?

Her children's voices sounded crying for her in the hall. Three innocent babies—and how many more?—to grow into life under the shadow of a wrecked and loveless home! What had she done? What had they done?

Harrie's was a strong, healthy little soul, with a strong, healthy love of life; but she fell down there that dreary afternoon, prone upon the nursery floor, among the yellow wedding lace, and prayed God to let her die.

Yet Myron Sharpe loved his wife, you understand. Discussing elective affinities down there over the chessboard with Miss Dallas,—he loved his wife, most certainly; and, pray, why was she not content?

It was quite late when they came up for Harrie. She had fallen into a sleep or faint, and the window had been open all the time. Her eyes burned sharply, and she complained of a chill, which did not leave her the next day nor the next.

One morning, at the breakfast-table, Miss Dallas calmly observed that she should go home on Friday.

Dr. Sharpe dropped his cup; Harrie wiped up the tea.

"My dear Miss Dallas—surely—we cannot let you go yet! Harrie! Can't you keep your friend?"

Harrie said the proper thing in a low tone. Pauline repeated her determination with much decision, and was afraid that her visit had been more of a burden than Harrie, with all her care, was able to bear. Dr. Sharpe pushed back his chair noisily, and left the room.

He went and stood by the parlor window. The man's face was white. What business had the days to close down before him like a granite wall, because a woman with long trains and white hands was going out of them? Harrie's patient voice came in through the open door:—

"Yes, yes, yes, Rocko; mother is tired to-day; wait a minute."

Pauline, sweeping by the piano, brushed the keys a little, and sang:—

"Drifting, drifting on and on,
Mast and oar and rudder gone,
Fatal danger for each one,
We helpless as in dreams."

What had he been about?

The air grew sweet with the sudden scent of heliotrope, and Miss Dallas pushed aside the curtain gently.

"I may have that sail across the bay before I go? It promises to be fair to-morrow."

He hesitated.

"I suppose it will be our last," said the lady, softly.

She was rather sorry when she had spoken, for she really did not mean anything, and was surprised at the sound of her own voice.

But they took the sail.

Harrie watched them off—her husband did not invite her to go on that occasion—with that stealthy sharpness in her eyes. Her lips and hands and forehead were burning. She had been cold all day. A sound like the tolling of a bell beat in her ears. The children's voices were choked and distant. She wondered if Biddy were drunk, she seemed to dance about so at her ironing-table, and wondered if she must dismiss her, and who could supply her place. She tried to put my room in order, for she was expecting me that night by the last train, but gave up the undertaking in weariness and confusion.

In fact, if Harrie had been one of the Doctor's patients, he would have sent her to bed and prescribed for brain-fever. As she was not a patient, but only his wife, he had not found out that anything ailed her.

Nothing happened while he was gone, except that a friend of Biddy's "dropped in," and Mrs. Sharpe, burning and shivering in her sewing-chair, dreamily caught through the open door, and dreamily repeated to herself, a dozen words of compassionate Irish brogue:—

"Folks as laves folks cryin' to home and goes sailin' round with other women—"

Then the wind latched the door.

The Doctor and Miss Dallas drew in their oars, and floated softly.

There were gray and silver clouds overhead, and all the light upon the sea slanted from low in the west: it was a red light, in which the bay grew warm; it struck across Pauline's hands, which she dipped, as the mood took her, into the waves, leaning upon the side of the boat, looking down into the water. One other sail only was to be seen upon the bay. They watched it for a while. It dropped into the west, and sunk from sight.

They were silent for a time, and then they talked of friendship, and nature, and eternity, and then were silent for a time again, and then spoke—in a very general and proper way—of separation and communion in spirit, and broke off softly, and the boat rose and fell upon the strong outgoing tide.

"Drifting, drifting on and on," hummed Pauline.

The west, paling a little, left a haggard look upon the Doctor's face.

"An honest man," the Doctor was saying, "an honest man, who loves his wife devotedly, but who cannot find in her that sympathy which his higher nature requires, that comprehension of his intellectual needs, that—"

"I always feel a deep compassion for such a man," interrupted Miss Dallas, gently.

"Such a man," questioned the Doctor in a pensive tone, "need not be debarred, by the shallow conventionalities of an unappreciative world, from a friendship which will rest, strengthen, and ennoble his weary soul?"

"Certainly not," said Pauline, with her eyes upon the water; dull yellow, green, and indigo shades were creeping now upon its ruddiness.

"Pauline,"—Dr. Sharpe's voice was low,—"Pauline!"

Pauline turned her beautiful head. "There are marriages for this world; true and honorable marriages, but for this world. But there is a marriage for eternity,—a marriage of souls."

Now Myron Sharpe is not a fool, but that is precisely what he said to Miss Pauline Dallas, out in the boat on that September night. If wiser men than Myron Sharpe never uttered more unpardonable nonsense under similar circumstances, cast your stones at him.

"Perhaps so," said Miss Dallas, with a sigh; "but see! How dark it has grown while we have been talking. We shall be caught in a squall; but I shall not be at all afraid—with you."

They were caught indeed, not only in a squall, but in the steady force of a driving northeasterly storm setting in doggedly with a very ugly fog. If Miss Dallas was not at all afraid—with him, she was nevertheless not sorry when they grated safely on the dull white beach.

They had had a hard pull in against the tide. Sky and sea were black. The fog crawled like a ghost over flat and cliff and field. The rain beat upon them as they turned to walk up the beach.

Pauline stopped once suddenly.

"What was that?"

"I heard nothing."

"A cry,—I fancied a cry down there in the fog."

They went back, and walked down the slippery shore for a space. Miss Dallas took off her hat to listen.

"You will take cold," said Dr. Sharpe, anxiously. She put it on; she heard nothing,—she was tired and excited, he said.

They walked home together. Miss Dallas had sprained her white wrist, trying to help at the oars; he drew it gently through his arm.

It was quite dark when they reached the house. No lamps were lighted. The parlor window had been

left open, and the rain was beating in. "How careless in Harrie!" said her husband, impatiently.

He remembered those words, and the sound of his own voice in saying them, for a long time to come; he remembers them now, indeed, I fancy, on rainy nights when the house is dark.

The hall was cold and dreary. No table was set for supper. The children were all crying. Dr. Sharpe pushed open the kitchen door with a stern face.

"Biddy! Biddy! what does all this mean? Where is Mrs. Sharpe?"

"The Lord only knows what it manes, or where is Mrs. Sharpe," said Biddy, sullenly. "It's high time, in me own belafe, for her husband to come ashkin' and inquirin' her close all in a hape on the floor upstairs, with her bath-dress gone from the nails, and the front door swingin',—me never findin' of it out till it cooms tay-time, with all the children cryin' on me, and me head shplit with the noise, and—"

Dr. Sharpe strode in a bewildered way to the front door. Oddly enough, the first thing he did was to take down the thermometer and look at it. Gone out to bathe in a temperature like that! His mind ran like lightning, while he hung the thing back upon its nail, over Harrie's ancestry. Was there not a traditionary great-uncle who died in an asylum? The whole future of three children with an insane mother spread itself out before him while he was buttoning his overcoat.

"Shall I go and help you find her?" asked Miss Dallas, tremulously; "or shall I stay and look after hot flannels and—things? What shall I do?"

"*I* don't care what you do!" said the Doctor, savagely. To his justice be it recorded that he did not. He would not have exchanged one glimpse of Harrie's little homely face just then for an eternity of sunset-sailing with the "friend of his soul." A sudden cold loathing of her possessed him; he hated the sound of her soft voice; he hated the rustle of her garments, as she leaned against the door with her handkerchief at her eyes. Did he remember at that moment an old vow, spoken on an old October day, to that little missing face? Did he comfort himself thus, as he stepped out into the storm, "You have 'trusted her,' Myron Sharpe, as 'your best earthly friend'"?

As luck, or providence or God—whichever word you prefer—decreed it, the Doctor had but just shut the door when he saw me driving from the station through the rain. I heard enough of the story while he was helping me down the carriage steps. I left my bonnet and bag with Miss Dallas, pulled my water-proof over my head, and we turned our faces to the sea without a word.

The Doctor is a man who thinks and acts rapidly in emergencies, and little time was lost about help and lights. Yet when all was done which could be done, we stood there upon the slippery weed-strewn sand, and looked in one another's faces helplessly. Harrie's little boat was gone. The sea thundered out beyond the bar. The fog hung, a dead weight, upon a buried world. Our lanterns cut it for a foot or two in a ghostly way, throwing a pale white light back upon our faces and the weeds and bits of wreck under our feet.

The tide had turned. We put out into the surf not knowing what else to do, and called for Harrie; we leaned on our oars to listen, and heard the water drip into the boat, and the dull thunder beyond the bar; we called again, and heard a frightened sea-gull scream.

"*This* yere's wastin' valooable time," said Hansom, decidedly. I forgot to say that it was George Hansom whom Myron had picked up to help us. Anybody in Lime will tell you who George Hansom is,—a clear-eyed, open-hearted sailor; a man to whom you would turn in trouble as instinctively as a rheumatic man turns to the sun.

I cannot accurately tell you what he did with us that night. I have confused memories of searching shore and cliffs and caves; of touching at little islands and inlets that Harrie fancied; of the peculiar echo which answered our shouting; of the look that settled little by little about Dr. Sharpe's mouth; of the sobbing of the low wind; of the flare of lanterns on gaping, green waves; of spots of foam that writhed like nests of white snakes; of noticing the puddles in the bottom of the boat, and of wondering confusedly what they would do with my travelling-dress, at the very moment when I saw—I was the first to see it—little empty boat; of our hauling alongside of the tossing, silent thing; of a bit of a red scarf that lay coiled in its stern; of our drifting by, and speaking never a word; of our coasting along after that for a mile down the bay, because there was nothing in the world to take us there but the dread of seeing the Doctor's eyes when we should turn.

It was there that we heard the first cry.

"It's shoreward!" said Hansom.

"It is seaward!" cried the Doctor.

"It is behind us!" said I.

Where was it? A sharp, sobbing cry, striking the mist three or four times in rapid succession,—hushing suddenly,—breaking into shrieks like a frightened child's,—dying plaintively down.

We struggled desperately after it, through the fog. Wind and water took the sound up and tossed it about. Confused and bewildered, we beat about it and about it; it was behind us, before us, at our right, at our left,—crying on in a blind, aimless way, making us no replies,—beckoning us, slipping from us, mocking us utterly.

The Doctor stretched his hands out upon the solid wall of mist; he groped with them like a man struck blind.

"To die there,—in my very hearing,—without a chance—"

And while the words were upon his lips the cries ceased.

He turned a gray face slowly around, shivered a little, then smiled a little, then began to argue with ghastly cheerfulness:—

"It must be only for a moment, you know. We shall hear it again,—I am quite sure we shall it again, Hansom!"

Hansom, making a false stroke, I believe for the first time in his life, snapped an oar and overturned a lantern. Some drift-wood, covered with slimy weeds, washed heavily up at our feet. I remember that a little disabled ground-sparrow, chased by the tide, was fluttering and drowning just in sight, and that Myron drew it out of the water, and held it up for a moment to his cheek.

Bending over the ropes, George spoke between his teeth to me:—

"It may be a night's job on 't, findin' of the body."

"The WHAT?"

The poor little sparrow dropped from Dr. Sharpe's hand. He took a step backward, scanned our faces, sat down dizzily, and fell over upon the sand.

He is a man of good nerves and great self-possession, but he fell like a woman, and lay like the dead.

"It's no place for him," Hansom said, softly. "Get him home. Me and the neighbors can do the rest. Get him home, and put his baby into his arms, and shet the door, and go about your business."

I had left him in the dark on the office floor at last. Miss Dallas and
I sat in the cold parlor and looked at each other.

The fire was low and the lamp dull. The rain beat in an uncanny way upon the windows. I never like to hear the rain upon the windows. I liked it less than usual that night, and was just trying to brighten the fire a little, when the front door blew open.

"Shut it, please," said I, between the jerks of my poker.

But Miss Dallas looked over her shoulder and shivered.

"Just look at that latch!" I looked at that latch.

It rose and fell in a feeble fluttering way,—was still for a minute,—rose and fell again.

When the door swung in and Harrie—or the ghost of her—staggered into the chilly room and fell down in a scarlet heap at my feet, Pauline bounded against the wall with a scream which pierced into the dark office where the Doctor lay with his face upon the floor.

It was long before we knew how it happened. Indeed, I suppose we have never known it all. How she glided down, a little red wraith, through the dusk and damp to her boat; how she tossed about, with some dim, delirious idea of finding Myron on the ebbing waves; that she found herself stranded and tangled at last in the long, matted grass of that muddy cove, started to wade home, and sunk in the ugly ooze, held, chilled, and scratched by the sharp grass, blinded and frightened by the fog, and calling, as she thought of it, for help; that in the first shallow wash of the flowing tide she must have struggled free, and found her way home across the fields,—she can tell us, but she can tell no more.

This very morning on which I write, an unknown man, imprisoned in the same spot in the same way overnight, was found by George Hansom dead there from exposure in the salt grass.

It was the walk home, and only that, which could have saved her.

Yet for many weeks we fought, her husband and I, hand to hand with death, seeming to *see* the life slip out of her, and watching for wandering minutes when she might look upon us with sane eyes.

We kept her—just. A mere little wreck, with drawn lips, and great eyes, and shattered nerves,—but we kept her.

I remember one night, when she had fallen into her first healthful nap, that the Doctor came down to rest a few minutes in the parlor where I sat alone. Pauline was washing the tea-things.

He began to pace the room with a weary abstracted look,—he was much worn by watching,—and, seeing that he was in no mood for words, I took up a book which lay upon the table. It chanced to be one of Alger's, which somebody had lent to the Doctor before Harrie's illness; it was a marked book, and I ran my eye over the pencilled passages. I recollect having been struck with this one: "A man's best friend is a wife of good sense and good heart, whom he loves and who loves him."

"You believe that?" said Myron, suddenly, behind my shoulder.

"I believe that a man's wife ought to be his best friend,—in every sense of the word, his *best friend,*—or she ought never to be his wife."

"And if—there will be differences of temperament, and—other things. If you were a man now, for instance, Miss Hannah—"

I interrupted him with hot cheeks and sudden courage.

"If I were a man, and my wife were *not* the best friend I had or could have in the world, *nobody should ever know it,—she, least of all,—Myron Sharpe!*"

Young people will bear a great deal of impertinence from an old lady, but we had both gone further than we meant to. I closed Mr. Alger with a snap, and went up to Harrie.

The day that Mrs. Sharpe sat up in the easy-chair for two hours, Miss Dallas, who had felt called upon to stay and nurse her dear Harrie to recovery, and had really been of service, detailed on duty among the babies, went home.

Dr. Sharpe drove her to the station. I accompanied them at his request. Miss Dallas intended, I think, to look a little pensive, but had her lunch to cram into a very full travelling-bag, and forgot it. The Doctor, with clear, courteous eyes, shook hands, and wished her a pleasant journey.

He drove home in silence, and went directly to his wife's room. A bright blaze flickered on the old-fashioned fireplace, and the walls bowed with pretty dancing shadows. Harrie, all alone, turned her face weakly and smiled.

Well, they made no fuss about it, after all. Her husband came and stood beside her; a cricket on which one of the baby's dresses had been thrown, lay between them; it seemed, for the moment, as if he dared not cross the tiny barrier. Something of that old fancy about the lights upon the altar may have crossed his thought.

"So Miss Dallas has fairly gone, Harrie," said he, pleasantly, after a pause.

"Yes. She has been very kind to the children while I have been sick."

"Very."

"You must miss her," said poor Harrie, trembling; she was very weak yet.

The Doctor knocked away the cricket, folded his wife's two shadowy hands into his own, and said:—

"Harrie we have no strength to waste, either of us, upon a scene; but I am sorry, and I love you."

She broke all down at that, and, dear me! they almost had a scene in spite of themselves. For O, she had always known what a little goose she was; and Pauline never meant any harm, and how handsome she was, you know! only *she* didn't have three babies to look after, nor a snubbed nose either, and the sachet powder was only American, and the very servants knew, and, O Myron! she *had* wanted to be dead so long, and then—

"Harrie!" said the Doctor, at his wit's end, "this will never do in the world. I believe—I declare!—Miss Hannah!—I believe I must send you to bed."

"And then I'm SUCH a little skeleton!" finished Harrie, royally, with a great gulp.

Dr. Sharpe gathered the little skeleton all into a heap in his arms,—it was a very funny heap, by the way, but that doesn't matter,—and to the best of my knowledge and belief he cried just about as hard as she did.

The Tenth of January.

The city of Lawrence is unique in its way.

For simooms that scorch you and tempests that freeze; for sand-heaps and sand-hillocks and sand-roads; for men digging sand, for women shaking off sand, for minute boys crawling in sand; for sand in the church-slips and the gingerbread-windows, for sand in your eyes, your nose, your mouth, down your neck? up your sleeves, under your *chignon*, down your throat; for unexpected corners where tornadoes lie in wait; for "bleak, uncomforted" sidewalks, where they chase you, dog you, confront you, strangle you, twist you, blind you, turn your umbrella wrong side out; for "dimmykhrats" and bad ice-cream; for unutterable circus-bills and religious tea-parties; for uncleared ruins, and mills that spring up in a night; for jaded faces and busy feet; for an air of youth and incompleteness at which you laugh, and a consciousness of growth and greatness which you respect,—it—

I believe, when I commenced that sentence, I intended to say that it would be difficult to find Lawrence's equal.

Of the twenty-five thousand souls who inhabit that city, ten thousand are operatives in the factories. Of these ten thousand two thirds are girls.

These pages are written as one sets a bit of marble to mark a mound. I linger over them as we linger beside the grave of one who sleeps well; half sadly, half gladly,—more gladly than sadly,—but hushed.

The time to see Lawrence is when the mills open or close. So languidly the dull-colored, inexpectant crowd wind in! So briskly they come bounding out! Factory faces have a look of their own,—not only their common dinginess, and a general air of being in a hurry to find the wash-bowl, but an appearance of restlessness,—often of envious restlessness, not habitual in most departments of "healthy labor." Watch them closely: you can read their histories at a venture. A widow this, in the dusty black, with she can scarcely remember how many mouths to feed at home. Worse than widowed that one: she has put her baby out to board,—and humane people know what that means,—to keep the little thing beyond its besotted father's reach. There is a group who have "just come over." A child's face here, old before its time. That girl—she climbs five flights of stairs twice a day—will climb no more stairs for herself or another by the time the clover-leaves are green. "The best thing about one's grave is that it will be level," she was heard once to say. Somebody muses a little here,—she is to be married this winter. There is a face just behind her whose fixed eyes repel and attract you; there may be more love than guilt in them, more despair than either.

Had you stood in some unobserved corner of Essex Street, at four o'clock one Saturday afternoon towards the last of November, 1859, watching the impatient stream pour out of the Pemberton Mill, eager with a saddening eagerness for its few holiday hours, you would have observed one girl who did not bound.

She was slightly built, and undersized; her neck and shoulders were closely muffled, though the day was mild; she wore a faded scarlet hood which heightened the pallor of what must at best have been a pallid face. It was a sickly face, shaded off with purple shadows, but with a certain wiry nervous strength about the muscles of the mouth and chin: it would have been a womanly, pleasant mouth, had it not been crossed by a white scar, which attracted more of one's attention than either the womanliness or pleasantness. Her eyes had light long lashes, and shone through them steadily.

You would have noticed as well, had you been used to analyzing crowds, another face,—the two were side by side,—dimpled with pink and white flushes, and framed with bright black hair. One would laugh at this girl and love her, scold her and pity her, caress her and pray for her,—then forget her perhaps.

The girls from behind called after her: "Del! Del Ivory! look over there!"

Pretty Del turned her head. She had just flung a smile at a young clerk who was petting his mustache

in a shop-window, and the smile lingered.

One of the factory boys was walking alone across the Common in his factory clothes.

"Why, there's Dick! Sene, do you see?"

Sene's scarred mouth moved slightly, but she made no reply. She had seen him five minutes ago.

One never knows exactly whether to laugh or cry over them, catching their chatter as they file past the show-windows of the long, showy street.

"Look a' that pink silk with the figures on it!"

"I've seen them as is betther nor that in the ould counthree.—Patsy
Malorrn, let alon' hangin' onto the shawl of me!"

"That's Mary Foster getting out of that carriage with the two white horses,—she that lives in the brown house with the cupilo."

"Look at her dress trailin' after her. I'd like my dresses trailin' after me."

"Well, may they be good,—these rich folks!"

"That's so. I'd be good if I was rich; wouldn't you, Moll?"

"You'd keep growing wilder than ever, if you went to hell, Meg Match: yes you would, because my teacher said so."

"So, then, he wouldn't marry her, after all; and she—"

"Going to the circus to-night, Bess?"

"I can't help crying, Jenny. You don't *know* how my head aches! It aches, and it aches, and it seems as if it would never stop aching. I wish—I wish I was dead, Jenny!"

They separated at last, going each her own way,—pretty Del Ivory to her boarding-place by the canal, her companion walking home alone.

This girl, Asenath Martyn, when left to herself, fell into a contented dream not common to girls who have reached her age,—especially girls who have seen the phases of life which she had seen. Yet few of the faces in the streets that led her home were more gravely lined. She puzzled one at the first glance, and at the second. An artist, meeting her musing on a canal-bridge one day, went home and painted a May-flower budding in February.

It was a damp, unwholesome place, the street in which she lived, cut short by a broken fence, a sudden steep, and the water; filled with children,—they ran from the gutters after her, as she passed,—and filled to the brim; it tipped now and then, like an over-full soup-plate, and spilled out two or three through the break in the fence.

Down in the corner, sharp upon the water, the east-winds broke about a little yellow house, where no children played; an old man's face watched at a window, and a nasturtium-vine crawled in the garden. The broken panes of glass about the place were well mended, and a clever little gate, extemporized from a wild grape-vine, swung at the entrance. It was not an old man's work.

Asenath went in with expectant eyes; they took in the room at a glance, and fell.

"Dick hasn't come, father?"

"Come and gone child; didn't want any supper, he said. Your 're an hour before time, Senath."

"Yes. Didn't want any supper, you say? I don't see why not."

"No more do I, but it's none of our concern as I knows on; very like the pickles hurt him for dinner; Dick never had an o'er-strong stomach, as you might say. But you don't tell me how it m' happen you're let out at four o'clock, Senath," half complaining.

"O, something broke in the machinery, father; you know you wouldn't understand if I told you what."

He looked up from his bench,—he cobbled shoes there in the corner on his strongest days,—and after her as she turned quickly away and up stairs to change her dress. She was never exactly cross with her father; but her words rang impatiently sometimes.

She came down presently, transformed, as only factory-girls are transformed, by the simple little toilet she had been making; her thin, soft hair knotted smoothly, the tips of her fingers rosy from the water, her pale neck well toned by her gray stuff dress and cape;—Asenath always wore a cape: there was one of crimson flannel, with a hood, that she had meant to wear to-night; she had thought about it coming home from the mill; she was apt to wear it on Saturdays and Sundays; Dick had more time at home. Going up stairs to-night, she had thrown it away into a drawer, and shut the drawer with a snap; then opened it softly, and cried a little; but she had not taken it out.

As she moved silently about the room, setting the supper-table for two, crossing and recrossing the broad belt of sunlight that fell upon the floor, it was easy to read the sad story of the little hooded capes.

They might have been graceful shoulders. The hand which had scarred her face had rounded and bent them,—her own mother's hand.

Of a bottle always on the shelf; of brutal scowls where smiles should be; of days when she wandered dinnerless and supperless in the streets through loathing of her home; of nights when she sat out in the snow-drifts through terror of her home; of a broken jug one day, a blow, a fall, then numbness, and the silence of the grave,—she had her distant memories; of waking on a sunny afternoon, in bed, with a little cracked glass upon the opposite wall; of creeping out and up to it in her night-dress; of the ghastly twisted thing that looked back at her. Through the open window she heard the children laughing and leaping in the sweet summer air. She crawled into bed and shut her eyes. She remembered stealing out at last, after many days, to the grocery round the corner for a pound of coffee. "Humpback! humpback!" cried the children,—the very children who could leap and laugh.

One day she and little Del Ivory made mud-houses after school.

"I'm going to have a house of my own, when I'm grown up," said pretty Del; "I shall have a red carpet and some curtains; my husband will buy me a piano."

"So will mine, I guess," said Sene, simply.

"*Yours!*" Del shook back her curls; "who do you suppose would ever marry *you*?"

One night there was a knocking at the door, and a hideous, sodden thing borne in upon a plank. The crowded street, tired of tipping out little children, had tipped her mother staggering through the broken fence. At the funeral she heard some one say, "How glad Sene must be!"

Since that, life had meant three things,—her father, the mills, and
Richard Cross.

"You're a bit put out that the young fellow didn't stay to supper,—eh,
Senath?" the old man said, laying down his boot.

"Put out! Why should I be? His time is his own. It's likely to be the Union that took him out,—such a fine day for the Union! I'm sure I never expected him to go to walk with me *every* Saturday afternoon. I'm not a fool to tie him up to the notions of a crippled girl. Supper is ready, father."

But her voice rasped bitterly. Life's pleasures were so new and late and important to her, poor thing! It went hard to miss the least of them. Very happy people will not understand exactly how hard.

Old Martyn took off his leather apron with a troubled face, and, as he passed his daughter, gently laid his tremulous, stained hand upon her head. He felt her least uneasiness, it would seem, as a chameleon feels a cloud upon the sun.

She turned her face softly and kissed him. But she did not smile.

She had planned a little for this holiday supper; saving three mellow-cheeked Louise Bonnes—expensive pears just then—to add to their bread and molasses. She brought them out from the closet, and watched her father eat them.

"Going out again Senath?" he asked, seeing that she went for her hat and shawl, u and not a mouthful have you eaten! Find your old father dull company hey? Well, well!"

She said something about needing the air; the mill was hot; she should soon be back; she spoke tenderly and she spoke truly, but she went out into the windy sunset with her little trouble, and forgot him. The old man, left alone, sat for a while with his head sunk upon his breast. She was all he had in the world,—this one little crippled girl that the world had dealt hardly with. She loved him; but he was not, probably would never be, to her exactly what she was to him. Usually he forgot this. Sometimes he

quite understood it, as to-night.

Asenath, with the purpose only of avoiding Dick, and of finding a still spot where she might think her thoughts undisturbed, wandered away over the eastern bridge, and down to the river's brink. It was a moody place; such a one as only apathetic or healthy natures (I wonder if that is tautology!) can healthfully yield to. The bank sloped steeply; a fringe of stunted aspens and willows sprang from the frozen sand: it was a sickening, airless place in summer,—it was damp and desolate now. There was a sluggish wash of water under foot, and a stretch of dreary flats behind. Belated locomotives shrieked to each other across the river, and the wind bore down the current the roar and rage of the dam. Shadows were beginning to skulk under the huge brown bridge. The silent mills stared up and down and over the streams with a blank, unvarying stare. An oriflamme of scarlet burned in the west, flickered dully in the dirty, curdling water, flared against the windows of the Pemberton, which quivered and dripped, Asenath thought, as if with blood.

She sat down on a gray stone, wrapped in her gray shawl, curtained about by the aspens from the eye of passers on the bridge. She had a fancy for this place when things went ill with her. She had always borne her troubles alone, but she must be alone to bear them.

She knew very well that she was tired and nervous that afternoon, and that, if she could reason quietly about this little neglect of Dick's, it would cease to annoy her. Indeed, why should she be annoyed? Had he not done everything for her, been everything to her, for two long, sweet years? She dropped her head with a shy smile. She was never tired of living over these two years. She took positive pleasure in recalling the wretchedness in which they found her, for the sake of their dear relief. Many a time, sitting with her happy face hidden in his arms, she had laughed softly, to remember the day on which he came to her. It was at twilight, and she was tired. Her reels had troubled her all the afternoon; the overseer was cross; the day was hot and long. Somebody on the way home had said in passing her: "Look at that girl! I'd kill myself if I looked like that": it was in a whisper, but she heard it. All life looked hot and long; the reels would always be out of order; the overseer would never be kind. Her temples would always throb, and her back would ache. People would always say, "Look at that girl!"

"Can you direct me to—". She looked up; she had been sitting on the doorstep with her face in her hands. Dick stood there with his cap off. He forgot that he was to inquire the way to Newbury Street, when he saw the tears on her shrunken cheeks. Dick could never bear to see a woman suffer.

"I wouldn't cry," he said simply, sitting down beside her. Telling a girl not to cry is an infallible recipe for keeping her at it. What could the child do, but sob as if her heart would break? Of course he had the whole story in ten minutes, she his in another ten. It was common and short enough:—a "Down-East" boy, fresh from his father's farm, hunting for work and board,—a bit homesick here in the strange, unhomelike city, it might be, and glad of some one to say so to.

What more natural than that, when her father came out and was pleased with the lad, there should be no more talk of Newbury Street; that the little yellow house should become his home; that he should swing the fantastic gate, and plant the nasturtiums; that his life should grow to be one with hers and the old man's, his future and theirs unite unconsciously?

She remembered—it was not exactly pleasant, somehow, to remember it to-night—just the look of his face when they came into the house that summer evening, and he for the first time saw what she was, her cape having fallen off, in the full lamplight. His kindly blue eyes widened with shocked surprise, and fell; when he raised them, a pity like a mother's had crept into them; it broadened and brightened as time slid by, but it never left them.

So you see, after that, life unfolded in a burst of little surprises for Asenath. If she came home very tired, some one said, "I am sorry." If she wore a pink ribbon, she heard a whisper, "It suits you." If she sang a little song, she knew that somebody listened.

"I did not know the world was like this!" cried the girl.

After a time there came a night that he chanced to be out late,—they had planned an arithmetic lesson together, which he had forgotten,—and she sat grieving by the kitchen fire.

"You missed me so much then?" he said regretfully, standing with his hand upon her chair. She was trying to shell some corn; she dropped the pan, and the yellow kernels rolled away on the floor.

"What should I have if I didn't have you?" she said, and caught her breath.

The young man paced to the window and back again. The firelight touched her shoulders, and the sad, white scar.

"You shall have me always, Asenath," he made answer. He took her face within his hands and kissed it; and so they shelled the corn together, and nothing more was said about it.

He had spoken this last spring of their marriage; but the girl, like all girls, was shyly silent, and he had not urged it.

Asenath started from her pleasant dreaming just as the oriflamme was furling into gray, suddenly conscious that she was not alone. Below her, quite on the brink of the water, a girl was sitting,—a girl with a bright plaid shawl, and a nodding red feather in her hat. Her head was bent, and her hair fell against a profile cut in pink-and-white.

"Del is too pretty to be here alone so late," thought Asenath, smiling tenderly. Good-natured Del was kind to her in a certain way, and she rather loved the girl. She rose to speak to her, but concluded, on a second glance through the aspens, that Miss Ivory was quite able to take care of herself.

Del was sitting on an old log that jutted into the stream, dabbling in the water with the tips of her feet. (Had she lived on The Avenue she could not have been more particular about her shoemaker.) Some one—it was too dark to see distinctly—stood beside her, his eyes upon her face. Asenath could hear nothing, but she needed to hear nothing to know how the young fellow's eyes drank in the coquettish picture. Besides, it was an old story. Del counted her rejected lovers by the score.

"It's no wonder," she thought in her honest way, standing still to watch them with a sense of puzzled pleasure much like that with which she watched the print-windows,—"it's no wonder they love her. I'd love her if I was a man: so pretty! so pretty! She's just good for nothing, Del is;—would let the kitchen fire go out, and wouldn't mend the baby's aprons; but I'd love her all the same; marry her, probably, and be sorry all my life."

Pretty Del! Poor Del! Asenath wondered whether she wished that she were like her; she could not quite make out; it would be pleasant to sit on a log and look like that; it would be more pleasant to be watched as Del was watched just now; it struck her suddenly that Dick had never looked like this at her.

The hum of their voices ceased while she stood there with her eyes upon them; Del turned her head away with a sudden movement, and the young man left her, apparently without bow or farewell, sprang up the bank at a bound, and crushed the undergrowth with quick, uneasy strides.

Asenath, with some vague idea that it would not be honorable to see his face,—poor fellow!—shrank back into the aspens and the shadow.

He towered tall in the twilight as he passed her, and a dull, umber gleam, the last of the sunset, struck him from the west.

Struck it out into her sight,—the haggard struggling face,—Richard Cross's face.

Of course you knew it from the beginning, but remember that the girl did not. She might have known it, perhaps, but she had not.

Asenath stood up, sat down again.

She had a distinct consciousness, for the moment, of seeing herself crouched down there under the aspens and the shadow, a humpbacked white creature, with distorted face and wide eyes. She remembered a picture she had somewhere seen of a little chattering goblin in a graveyard, and was struck with the resemblance. Distinctly, too, she heard herself saying, with a laugh, she thought, "I might have known it; I might have known."

Then the blood came through her heart with a hot rush, and she saw Del on the log, smoothing the red feather of her hat. She heard a man's step, too, that rang over the bridge, passed the toll-house, grew faint, grew fainter, died in the sand by the Everett Mill.

Richard's face! Richard's face, looking—God help her!—as it had never looked at her; struggling—God pity him!—as it had never struggled for her.

She shut her hands, into each other, and sat still a little while. A faint hope came to her then perhaps, after all; her face lightened grayly, and she crept down the bank to Del.

"I won't be a fool," she said, "I'll make sure,—I'll make as sure as death."

"Well, where did *you* drop down from, Sene?" said Del, with a guilty start.

"From over the bridge, to be sure. Did you think I swam, or flew, or blew?"

"You came on me so sudden!" said Del, petulantly; "you nearly frightened the wits out of me. You didn't meet anybody on the bridge?" with a quick look.

"Let me see." Asenath considered gravely. "There was one small boy making faces, and two—no, three—dogs, I believe; that was all."

"Oh!"

Del looked relieved, but fell silent.

"You're sober, Del. Been sending off a lover, as usual?"

"I don't know anything about its being usual," answered Del, in an aggrieved, coquettish way, "but there's been somebody here that liked me well enough."

"You like him, maybe? It's time you liked somebody, Del."

Del curled the red feather about her fingers, and put her hat on over her eyes, then a little cry broke from her, half sob, half anger.

"I might, perhaps,—I don't know. He's good. I think he'd let me have a parlor and a door-bell. But he's going to marry somebody else, you see. I sha'n't tell you his name, so you needn't ask."

Asenath looked out straight upon the water. A dead leaf that had been caught in an eddy attracted her attention; it tossed about for a minute, then a tiny whirlpool sucked it down.

"I wasn't going to ask; it's nothing to me, of course. He doesn't care for her then,—this other girl?"

"Not so much as he does for me. He didn't mean to tell me, but he said that I—that I looked so—pretty, it came right out. But there! I mustn't tell you any more."

Del began to be frightened; she looked up sideways at Asenath's quiet face. "I won't say another word," and so chattered on, growing a little cross; Asenath need not look so still, and sure of herself,—a mere humpbacked fright!

"He'll never break his engagement, not even for me; he's sorry for her, and all that. I think it's too bad. He's handsome. He makes me feel like saying my prayers, too, he's so good! Besides, I want to be married. I hate the mill. I hate to work. I'd rather be taken care of,—a sight rather. I feel bad enough about it to cry."

Two tears rolled over her cheeks, and fell on the soft plaid shawl. Del wiped them away carefully with her rounded fingers.

Asenath turned and looked at this Del Ivory long and steadily through the dusk. The pretty, shallow thing! The worthless, bewildering thing!

A fierce contempt for her pink-and-white, and tears and eyelashes and attitudes, came upon her; then a sudden sickening jealousy that turned her faint where she sat.

What did God mean,—Asenath believed in God, having so little else to believe in,—what did he mean, when he had blessed the girl all her happy life with such wealth of beauty, by filling her careless hands with this one best, last gift? Why, the child could not hold such golden love! She would throw it away by and by. What a waste it was!

Not that she had these words for her thought, but she had the thought distinctly through her dizzy pain.

"So there's nothing to do about it," said Del, pinning her shawl. "We can't have anything to say to each other,—unless anybody should die, or anything; and of course I'm not wicked enough to think of *that.*—Sene! Sene! what are you doing?"

Sene had risen slowly, stood upon the log, caught at an aspen-top, and swung out with it its whole length above the water. The slight tree writhed and quivered about the roots. Sene looked down and moved her marred lips without sound.

Del screamed and wrung her hands. It was an ugly sight!

"O don't, Sene, *don't!* You'll drown yourself! you will be drowned! you will be—O, what a start you gave me! What *were* you doing, Senath Martyn?"

Sene swung slowly back, and sat down.

"Amusing myself a little;—well, unless somebody died, you said? But I believe I won't talk any more to-night. My head aches. Go home, Del."

Del muttered a weak protest at leaving her there alone; but, with her bright face clouded and uncomfortable, went.

Asenath turned her head to listen for the last rustle of her dress, then folded her arms, and, with her eyes upon the sluggish current, sat still.

An hour and a half later, an Andover farmer, driving home across the bridge, observed on the river's edge—a shadow cut within a shadow—the outline of a woman's figure, sitting perfectly still with folded arms. He reined up and looked down; but it sat quite still.

"Hallo there!" he called; "you'll fall in if you don't look out!" for the wind was strong, and it blew against the figure; but it did not move nor make reply. The Andover farmer looked over his shoulder with the sudden recollection of a ghost-story which he had charged his grandchildren not to believe last week, cracked his whip, and rumbled on.

Asenath began to understand by and by that she was cold, so climbed the bank, made her way over the windy flats, the railroad, and the western bridge confusedly with an idea of going home. She turned aside by the toll-gate. The keeper came out to see what she was doing, but she kept out of his sight behind the great willow and his little blue house,—the blue house with the green blinds and red moulding. The dam thundered that night, the wind and the water being high. She made her way up above it, and looked in. She had never seen it so black and smooth there. As she listened to the roar, she remembered something that she had read—was it in the Bible or the Ledger?—about seven thunders uttering their voices.

"He's sorry for her, and all that," they said.

A dead bough shot down the current while she stood there, went over and down, and out of sight, throwing up its little branches like helpless hands.

It fell in with a thought of Asenath's, perhaps; at any rate she did not like the looks of it, and went home.

Over the bridge, and the canal, and the lighted streets, the falls called after her: "He's sorry for her, and all that." The curtain was drawn aside when she came home, and she saw her father through the window, sitting alone, with his gray head bent.

It occurred to her that she had often left him alone,—poor old father! It occurred to her, also, that she understood now what it was to be alone. Had she forgotten him in these two comforted, companioned years?

She came in weakly, and looked about.

"Dick's in, and gone to bed," said the old man, answering her look.
"You're tired, Senath."

"I am tired, father."

She sunk upon the floor,—the heat of the room made her a little faint,—and laid her head upon his knee; oddly enough, she noticed that the patch on it had given way,—wondered how many days it had been so,—whether he had felt ragged and neglected while she was busy about that blue neck-tie for Dick. She put her hand up and smoothed the corners of the rent.

"You shall be mended up to-morrow, poor father!"

He smiled, pleased like a child to be remembered. She looked up at him,—at his gray hair and shrivelled face, at his blackened hands and bent shoulders, and dusty, ill-kept coat. What would it be like, if the days brought her nothing but him?

"Something's the matter with my little gal? Tell father, can't ye?"

Her face flushed hot, as if she had done him wrong. She crept up into his arms, and put her hands behind his rough old neck.

"Would you kiss me, father? You don't think I'm too ugly to kiss, maybe,—you?"

She felt better after that. She had not gone to sleep now for many a night unkissed; it had seemed hard at first.

When she had gone half-way up stairs, Dick came to the door of his room on the first floor, and called her. He held the little kerosene lamp over his head; his face was grave and pale.

"I haven't said good night, Sene."

She made no reply.

"Asenath, good night."

She stayed her steps upon the stairs without turning her head. Her father had kissed her to-night. Was not that enough?

"Why, Sene, what's the matter with you?"

Dick mounted the stairs, and touched his lips to her forehead with a gently compassionate smile.

She fled from him with a cry like the cry of a suffocated creature, shut her door, and locked it with a ringing clang.

"She's walked too far, and got a little nervous," said Dick, screwing up his lamp; "poor thing!"

Then he went into his room to look at Del's photograph awhile before he burned it up; for he meant to burn it up.

Asenath, when she had locked her door, put her lamp before the looking-glass and tore off her gray cape; tore it off so savagely that the button snapped and rolled away,—two little crystal semicircles like tears upon the floor.

There was no collar about the neck of her dress, and this heightened the plainness and the pallor of her face. She shrank instinctively at the first sight of herself, and opened the drawer where the crimson cape was folded, but shut it resolutely.

"I'll see the worst of it," she said with pinched lips. She turned herself about and about before the glass, letting the cruel light gloat, over her shoulders, letting the sickly shadows grow purple on her face. Then she put her elbows on the table and her chin into her hands, and so, for a motionless half-hour, studied the unrounded, uncolored, unlightened face that stared back at her; her eyes darkening at its eyes, her hair touching its hair, her breath dimming the outline of its repulsive mouth.

By and by she dropped her head into her hands. The poor, mistaken face! She felt as if she would like to blot it out of the world, as her tears used to blot out the wrong sums upon her slate. It had been so happy! But he was sorry for it, and all that. Why did a good God make such faces?

She slipped upon her knees, bewildered.

"He *can't* mean any harm nohow," she said, speaking fast, and knelt there and said it over till she felt sure of it.

Then she thought of Del once more,—of her colors and sinuous springs, and little cries and chatter.

After a time she found that she was growing faint, and so stole down into the kitchen for some food. She stayed a minute to warm her feet. The fire was red and the clock was ticking. It seemed to her home-like and comfortable, and she seemed to herself very homeless and lonely; so she sat down on the floor, with her head in a chair, and cried as hard as she ought to have done four hours ago.

She climbed into bed about one o'clock, having decided, in a dull way, to give Dick up to-morrow.

But when to-morrow came he was up with a bright face, and built the kitchen fire for her, and brought in all the water, and helped her fry the potatoes, and whistled a little about the house, and worried at her paleness, and so she said nothing about it.

"I'll wait till night," she planned, making ready for the mill.

"O, I can't!" she cried at night. So other mornings came, and other nights.

I am quite aware that, according to all romantic precedents, this conduct was preposterous in Asenath, Floracita, in the novel, never so far forgets the whole duty of a heroine as to struggle, waver, doubt, delay. It is proud and proper to free the young fellow; proudly and properly she frees him; "suffers in silence"—till she marries another man; and (having had a convenient opportunity to refuse

the original lover) overwhelms the reflective reader with a sense of poetic justice and the eternal fitness of things.

But I am not writing a novel, and, as the biographer of this simple factory girl, am offered few advantages.

Asenath was no heroine, you see. Such heroic elements as were in her—none could tell exactly what they were, or whether there were any: she was one of those people in whom it is easy to be quite mistaken;—her life had not been one to develop. She might have a certain pride of her own, under given circumstances; but plants grown in a cellar will turn to the sun at any cost; how could she go back into her dark?

As for the other man to marry, he was out of the question. Then, none love with the tenacity of the unhappy; no life is so lavish of itself as the denied life: to him that hath not shall be given,—and Asenath loved this Richard Cross.

It might be altogether the grand and suitable thing to say to him, "I will not be your wife." It might be that she would thus regain a strong shade of lost self-respect. It might be that she would make him happy, and give pleasure to Del. It might be that the two young people would be her "friends," and love her in a way.

But all this meant that Dick must go out of her life. Practically, she must make up her mind to build the fires, and pump the water, and mend the windows alone. In dreary fact, he would not listen when she sung; would not say, "You are tired, Sene"; would never kiss away an undried tear. There would be nobody to notice the crimson cape, nobody to make blue neck-ties for; none for whom to save the Bonnes de Jersey, or to take sweet, tired steps, or make dear, dreamy plans. To be sure, there was her father; but fathers do not count for much in a time like this on which Sene had fallen.

That Del Ivy was—Del Ivory, added intricacies to the question. It was a very unpoetic but undoubted fact that Asenath could in no way so insure Dick's unhappiness as to pave the way to his marriage with the woman whom he loved. There would be a few merry months, then slow worry and disappointment; pretty Del accepted at last, not as the crown of his young life, but as its silent burden and misery. Poor Dick! good Dick! Who deserved more wealth of wifely sacrifice? Asenath, thinking this, crimsoned with pain and shame. A streak of good common sense in the girl told her—though she half scorned herself for the conviction—that even a crippled woman who should bear all things and hope all things for his sake might blot out the memory of this rounded Del; that, no matter what the motive with which he married her, he would end by loving his wife like other people.

She watched him sometimes in the evenings, as he turned his kind eyes after her over the library book which he was reading.

"I know I could make him happy! I *know* I could!" she muttered fiercely to herself.

November blew into December, December congealed into January, while she kept her silence. Dick, in his honorable heart, seeing that she suffered, wearied himself with plans to make her eyes shine; brought her two pails of water instead of one, never forgot the fire, helped her home from the mill. She saw him meet Del Ivory once upon Essex Street with a grave and silent bow; he never spoke with her now. He meant to pay the debt he owed her down to the uttermost farthing; that grew plain. Did she try to speak her wretched secret, he suffocated her with kindness, struck her dumb with tender words.

She used to analyze her life in those days, considering what it would be without him. To be up by half past five o'clock in the chill of all the winter mornings, to build the fire and cook the breakfast and sweep the floor, to hurry away, faint and weak, over the raw, slippery streets, to climb at half past six the endless stairs and stand at the endless loom, and hear the endless wheels go buzzing round, to sicken in the oily smells, and deafen at the remorseless noise, and weary of the rough girl swearing at the other end of the pass; to eat her cold dinner from a little cold tin pail out on the stairs in the three-quarters-of-an-hour recess; to come exhausted home at half past six at night, and get the supper, and brush up about the shoemaker's bench, and be too weak to eat; to sit with aching shoulders and make the button-holes of her best dress, or darn her father's stockings, till nine o'clock; to hear no bounding step or cheery whistle about the house; to creep into bed and lie there trying not to think, and wishing that so she might creep into her grave,—this not for one winter, but for all the winters,—how should *you* like it, you young girls, with whom time runs like a story?

The very fact that her employers dealt honorably by her; that she was fairly paid, and promptly, for her wearing toil; that the limit of endurance was consulted in the temperature of the room, and her need of rest in an occasional holiday,—perhaps, after all, in the mood she was in, did not make this factory life more easy. She would have found it rather a relief to have somebody to complain of,—

wherein she was like the rest of us, I fancy.

But at last there came a day—it chanced to be the ninth of January—when Asenath went away alone at noon, and sat where Merrimack sung his songs to her. She hid her face upon her knees, and listened and thought her own thoughts, till they and the slow torment of the winter seemed greater than she could bear. So, passing her hands confusedly over her forehead, she said at last aloud, "That's what God means, Asenath Martyn!" and went back to work with a purpose in her eyes.

She "asked out" a little earlier than usual, and went slowly home. Dick was there before her; he had been taking a half-holiday. He had made the tea and toasted the bread for a little surprise. He came up and said, "Why, Sene, your hands are cold!" and warmed them for her in his own.

After tea she asked him, would he walk out with her for a little while? and he in wonder went.

The streets were brightly lighted, and the moon was up. The ice cracked crisp under their feet. Sleighs, with two riders in each, shot merrily by. People were laughing in groups before the shop-windows. In the glare of a jeweller's counter somebody was buying a wedding-ring, and a girl with red cheeks was looking hard the other way.

"Let's get away," said Asenath,—"get away from here!"

They chose by tacit consent that favorite road of hers over the eastern bridge. Their steps had a hollow, lonely ring on the frosted wood; she was glad when the softness of the snow in the road received them. She looked back once at the water, wrinkled into thin ice on the edge for a foot or two, then open and black and still.

"What are you doing?" asked Dick. She said that she was wondering how cold it was, and Dick laughed at her.

They strolled on in silence for perhaps a mile of the desolate road.

"Well, this is social!" said Dick at length; "how much farther do you want to go? I believe you'd walk to Reading if nobody stopped you!"

She was taking slow, regular steps like an automaton, and looking straight before her.

"How much farther? Oh!" She stopped and looked about her.

A wide young forest spread away at their feet, to the right and to the left. There was ice on the tiny oaks and miniature pines; it glittered sharply under the moon; the light upon the snow was blue; cold roads wound away through it, deserted; little piles of dead leaves shivered; a fine keen spray ran along the tops of the drifts; inky shadows lurked and dodged about the undergrowth; in the broad spaces the snow glared; the lighted mills, a zone of fire, blazed from east to west; the skies were bare, and the wind was up, and Merrimack in the distance chanted solemnly.

"Dick," said Asenath, "this is a dreadful place! Take me home."

But when he would have turned, she held him back with a sudden cry, and stood still.

"I meant to tell you—I meant to say—Dick! I was going to say—"

But she did not say it. She opened her lips to speak once and again, but no sound came from them.

"Sene! why, Sene, what ails you?"

He turned, and took her in his arms.

"Poor Sene!"

He kissed her, feeling sorry for her unknown trouble. He wondered why she sobbed. He kissed her again. She broke from him, and away with a great bound upon the snow.

"You make it so hard! You've no right to make it so hard! It ain't as if you loved me, Dick! I know I'm not like other girls! Go home and let me be!"

But Dick drew her arm through his, and led her gravely away. "I like you well enough, Asenath," he said, with that motherly pity in his eyes; "I've always liked you. So don't let us have any more of this."

So Asenath said nothing more.

The sleek black river beckoned to her across the snow as they went home. A thought came to her as

she passed the bridge,—it is a curious study what wicked thoughts will come to good people!—she found herself considering the advisability of leaping the low brown parapet; and if it would not be like Dick to go over after her; if there would be a chance for them, even should he swim from the banks; how soon the icy current would paralyze him; how sweet it would be to chill to death there in his arms; how all this wavering and pain would be over; how Del would look when they dragged them out down below the machine-shop!

"Sene, are you cold?" asked puzzled Dick. She was warmly wrapped in her little squirrel furs; but he felt her quivering upon his arm, like one in an ague, all the way home.

About eleven o'clock that night her father waked from an exciting dream concerning the best method of blacking patent-leather; Sene stood beside his bed with her gray shawl thrown over her night-dress.

"Father, suppose some time there should be only you and me—"

"Well, well, Sene," said the old man sleepily,—"very well."

"I'd try to be a good girl! Could you love me enough to make up?"

He told her indistinctly that she always was a good girl; she never had a whipping from the day her mother died. She turned away impatiently; then cried out and fell upon her knees.

"Father, father! I'm in a great trouble. I haven't got any mother, any friend, anybody. Nobody helps me! Nobody knows. I've been thinking such things—O, such wicked things—up in my room! Then I got afraid of myself. You're good. You love me. I want you to put your hand on my head and say, 'God bless you, child, and show you how.'"

Bewildered, he put his hand upon her unbound hair, and said: "God bless you, child, and show you how!"

Asenath looked at the old withered hand a moment, as it lay beside her on the bed, kissed it, and went away.

There was a scarlet sunrise the next morning. A pale pink flush stole through a hole in the curtain, and fell across Asenath's sleeping face, and lay there like a crown. It woke her, and she threw on her dress, and sat down for a while on the window-sill, to watch the coming-on of the day.

The silent city steeped and bathed itself in rose-tints; the river ran red, and the snow crimsoned on the distant New Hampshire hills; Pemberton, mute and cold, frowned across the disk of the climbing sun, and dripped, as she had seen it drip before, with blood.

The day broke softly, the snow melted, the wind blew warm from the river. The factory-bell chimed cheerily, and a few sleepers, in safe, luxurious beds, were wakened by hearing the girls sing on their way to work.

Asenath came down with a quiet face. In her communing with the sunrise helpful things had been spoken to her. Somehow, she knew not how, the peace of the day was creeping into her heart. For some reason, she knew not why, the torment and unrest of the night were gone. There was a future to be settled, but she would not trouble herself about that just now. There was breakfast to get; and the sun shone, and a snow-bird was chirping outside of the door. She noticed how the tea-kettle hummed, and how well the new curtain, with the castle and waterfall on it, fitted the window. She thought that she would scour the closet at night, and surprise her father by finishing those list slippers; She kissed him when she had tied on the red hood, and said good-by to Dick, and told them just where to find the squash-pie for dinner.

When she had closed the twisted gate, and taken a step or two upon the snow, she came thoughtfully back. Her father was on his bench, mending one of Meg Match's shoes. She pushed it gently out of his hands, sat down upon his lap, and stroked the shaggy hair away from his forehead.

"Father!"

"Well, what now, Sene?—what now?"

"Sometimes I believe I've forgotten you a bit, you know. I think we're going to be happier after this. That's all."

She went out singing, and he heard the gate shut again with a click.

Sene was a little dizzy that morning,—the constant palpitation of the floors always made her dizzy after a wakeful night,—and so her colored cotton threads danced out of place, and troubled her.

Del Ivory, working beside her, said, "How the mill shakes! What's going on?"

"It's the new machinery they're h'isting in," observed the overseer, carelessly. "Great improvement, but heavy, very heavy; they calc'late on getting it all into place to-day; you'd better be tending to your frame, Miss Ivory."

As the day wore on, the quiet of Asenath's morning deepened. Round and round with the pulleys over her head she wound her thoughts of Dick. In and out with her black and dun-colored threads she spun her future. Pretty Del, just behind her, was twisting a pattern like a rainbow. She noticed this, and smiled.

"Never mind!" she thought, "I guess God knows."

Was He ready "to bless her, and show her how"? She wondered. If, indeed, it were best that she should never be Dick's wife, it seemed to her that He would help her about it. She had been a coward last night; her blood leaped in her veins with shame at the memory of it. Did He understand? Did He not know how she loved Dick, and how hard it was to lose him?

However that might be, she began to feel at rest about herself. A curious apathy about means and ways and decisions took possession of her. A bounding sense that a way of escape was provided from all her troubles, such as she had when her mother died, came upon her.

Years before, an unknown workman in South Boston, casting an iron pillar upon its core, had suffered it to "float" a little, a very little more, till the thin, unequal side cooled to the measure of an eighth of an inch. That man had provided Asenath's way of escape.

She went out at noon with her luncheon, and found a place upon the stairs, away from the rest, and sat there awhile, with her eyes upon the river, thinking. She could not help wondering a little, after all, why God need to have made her so unlike the rest of his fair handiwork. Del came bounding by, and nodded at her carelessly. Two young Irish girls, sisters,—the beauties of the mill,—magnificently colored creatures,—were singing a little love-song together, while they tied on their hats to go home.

"There *are* such pretty things in the world!" thought poor Sene.

Did anybody speak to her after the girls were gone? Into her heart these words fell suddenly, "*He* hath no form nor comeliness. *His* visage was so marred more than any man."

They clung to her fancy all the afternoon. She liked the sound of them.
She wove them in with her black and dun colored threads.

The wind began at last to blow chilly up the stair-cases, and in at the cracks; the melted drifts out under the walls to harden; the sun dipped above the dam; the mill dimmed slowly; shadows crept down between the frames.

"It's time for lights," said Meg Match, and swore a little at her spools.

Sene, in the pauses of her thinking, heard snatches of the girls' talk.

"Going to ask out to-morrow, Meg?"

"Guess so, yes; me and Bob Smith we thought we'd go to Boston, and come up in the theatre train."

"Del Ivory, I want the pattern of your zouave."

"Did I go to church? No, you don't catch me! If I slave all the week,
I'll do what I please on Sunday."

"Hush-sh! There's the boss looking over here!"

"Kathleen Donnavon, be still with your ghost-stories. There's one thing in the world I never will hear about, and that's dead people."

"Del," said Sene, "I think to-morrow—"

She stopped. Something strange had happened to her frame; it jarred, buzzed, snapped; the threads untwisted and flew out of place.

"Curious!" she said, and looked up.

Looked up to see her overseer turn wildly, clap his hands to his head, and fall; to hear a shriek from

Del that froze her blood; to see the solid ceiling gape above her; to see the walls and windows stagger; to see iron pillars reel, and vast machinery throw up its helpless, giant arms, and a tangle of human faces blanch and writhe!

She sprang as the floor sunk. As pillar after pillar gave way, she bounded up an inclined plane, with the gulf yawning after her. It gained upon her, leaped at her, caught her; beyond were the stairs and an open door; she threw out her arms, and struggled on with hands and knees, tripped in the gearing, and saw, as she fell, a square, oaken beam above her yield and crash; it was of a fresh red color; she dimly wondered why,—as she felt her hands-slip, her knees slide, support, time, place, and reason, go utterly out.

"*At ten minutes before five, on Tuesday, the tenth of January, the Pemberton Mill, all hands being at the time on duty, fell to the ground*."

So the record flashed over the telegraph wires, sprang into large type in the newspapers, passed from lip to lip, a nine days' wonder, gave place to the successful candidate, and the muttering South, and was forgotten.

Who shall say what it was to the seven hundred and fifty souls who were buried in the ruins? What to the eighty-eight who died that death of exquisite agony? What to the wrecks of men and women who endure unto this day a life that is worse than death? What to that architect and engineer who, when the fatal pillars were first delivered to them for inspection, had found one broken under their eyes, yet accepted the contract, and built with them a mill whose thin walls and wide, unsupported stretches might have tottered over massive columns and on flawless ore?

One that we love may go upon battle-ground, and we are ready for the worst: we have said our good-bys; our hearts wait and pray: it is his life, not his death, which is the surprise. But that he should go out to his safe, daily, commonplace occupations, unnoticed and uncaressed,—scolded a little, perhaps, because he leaves the door open, and tells us how cross we are this morning; and they bring him up the steps by and by, a mangled mass of death and horror,—that is hard.

Old Martyn, working at Meg Match's shoes,—she was never to wear those shoes, poor Meg!—heard, at ten minutes before five, what he thought to be the rumble of an earthquake under his very feet, and stood with bated breath, waiting for the crash. As nothing further appeared to happen, he took his stick and limped out into the street.

A vast crowd surged through it from end to end. Women with white lips were counting the mills,—Pacific, Atlantic, Washington,—Pemberton? Where was Pemberton?

Where Pemberton had winked its many eyes last night, and hummed with its iron lips this noon, a cloud of dust, black, silent, horrible, puffed a hundred feet into the air.

Asenath opened her eyes after a time. Beautiful green and purple lights had been dancing about her, but she had had no thoughts. It occurred to her now that she must have been struck upon the head. The church-clocks were striking eight. A bonfire which had been built at, a distance, to light the citizens in the work of rescue, cast a little gleam in through the *débris* across her two hands, which lay clasped together at her side. One of her fingers, she saw, was gone; it was the finger which held Dick's little engagement ring. The red beam lay across her forehead, and drops dripped from it upon her eyes. Her feet, still tangled in the gearing which had tripped her, were buried beneath a pile of bricks.

A broad piece of flooring, that had fallen slantwise, roofed her in, and saved her from the mass of iron-work overhead, which would have crushed the breath out of Titans. Fragments of looms, shafts, and pillars were in heaps about. Some one whom she could not see was dying just behind her. A little girl who worked in her room—a mere child—was crying, between her groans, for her mother. Del Ivory sat in a little open space, cushioned about with reels of cotton; she had a shallow gash upon her cheek; she was wringing her hands. They were at work from the outside, sawing entrances through the labyrinth of planks. A dead woman lay close by, and Sene saw them draw her out. It was Meg Match. One of the pretty Irish girls was crushed quite out of sight; only one hand was free; she moved it feebly. They could hear her calling for Jimmy Mahoney, Jimmy Mahoney! and would they be sure and give him back the handkerchief? Poor Jimmy Mahoney! By and by she called no more; and in a little while the hand was still. On the other side of the slanted flooring some one prayed aloud. She had a little baby at home. She was asking God to take care of it for her. "For Christ's sake," she said. Sene listened long for the Amen, but it was never spoken. Beyond, they dug a man out from under a dead body, unhurt. He crawled to his feet, and broke into furious blasphemies.

As consciousness came fully, agony grew. Sene shut her lips and folded her bleeding hands together, and uttered no cry. Del did screaming enough for two, she thought. She pondered things, calmly as the

night deepened, and the words that the workers outside were saying came brokenly to her. Her hurt, she knew, was not unto death; but it must be cared for before very long; how far could she support this slow bleeding away? And what were the chances that they could hew their way to her without crushing her?

She thought of her father, of Dick; of the bright little kitchen and supper-table set for three; of the song that she had sung in the flush of the morning. Life—even her life—grew sweet, now that it was slipping from her.

Del cried presently, that they were cutting them out. The glare of the bonfires struck through an opening; saws and axes flashed; voices grew distinct.

"They never can get at me," said Sene. "I must be able to crawl. If you could get some of those bricks off of my feet, Del!"

Del took off two or three in a frightened way; then, seeing the blood on them, sat down and cried.

A Scotch girl, with one arm shattered, crept up and removed the pile, then fainted.

The opening broadened, brightened; the sweet night-wind blew in; the safe night-sky shone through. Sene's heart leaped within her. Out in the wind and under the sky she should stand again, after all! Back in the little kitchen, where the sun shone, and she could sing a song, there would yet be a place for her. She worked her head from under the beam, and raised herself upon her elbow.

At that moment she heard a cry:

"Fire! *fire!* GOD ALMIGHTY HELP THEM,—THE RUINS ARE ON FIRE!"

A man working over the *débris* from the outside had taken the notion—it being rather dark just there—to carry a lantern with him.

"For God's sake," a voice cried from the crowd, "don't stay there with that light!"

But before the words had died upon the air, it was the dreadful fate of the man with the lantern to let it fall,—and it broke upon the ruined mass.

That was at nine o'clock. What there was to see from then till morning could never be told or forgotten.

A network twenty feet high, of rods and girders, of beams, pillars, stairways, gearing, roofing, ceiling, walling; wrecks of looms, shafts, twisters, pulleys, bobbins, mules, locked and interwoven; wrecks of human creatures wedged in; a face that you know turned up at you from some pit which twenty-four hours' hewing could not open; a voice that you know crying after you from God knows where; a mass of long, fair hair visible here, a foot there, three fingers of a hand over there; the snow bright-red under foot; charred limbs and headless trunks tossed about; strong men carrying covered things by you, at sight of which other strong men have fainted; the little yellow jet that flared up, and died in smoke, and flared again, leaped out, licked the cotton-bales, tasted the oiled machinery, crunched the netted wood, danced on the heaped-up stone, threw its cruel arms high into the night, roared for joy at helpless firemen, and swallowed wreck, death, and life together out of your sight,—the lurid thing stands alone in the gallery of tragedy.

"Del," said Sene, presently, "I smell the smoke." And in a little while,
"How red it is growing away over there at the left!"

To lie here and watch the hideous redness crawling after her, springing at her!—it had seemed greater than reason could bear, at first.

Now it did not trouble her. She grew a little faint, and her thoughts wandered. She put her head down upon her arm, and shut her eyes. Dreamily she heard them saying a dreadful thing outside, about one of the overseers; at the alarm of fire he had cut his throat, and before the flames touched him he was taken out. Dreamily she heard Del cry that the shaft behind the heap of reels was growing hot. Dreamily she saw a tiny puff of smoke struggle through the cracks of a broken fly-frame.

They were working to save her, with rigid, stern faces. A plank snapped, a rod yielded; they drew out the Scotch girl; her hair was singed; then a man with blood upon his face and wrists held down his arms.

"There's time for one more! God save the rest of ye,—I can't!"

Del sprang; then stopped,—even Del,—stopped ashamed, and looked back at the cripple.

Asenath at this sat up erect. The latent heroism in her awoke. All her thoughts grew clear and bright. The tangled skein of her perplexed and troubled winter unwound suddenly. This, then, was the way. It was better so. God had provided himself a lamb for the burnt-offering.

So she said, "Go, Del, and tell him I sent you with my dear love, and that it's all right."

And Del at the first word went.

Sene sat and watched them draw her out; it was a slow process; the loose sleeve of her factory sack was scorched.

Somebody at work outside turned suddenly and caught her. It was Dick. The love which he had fought so long broke free of barrier in that hour. He kissed her pink arm where the burnt sleeve fell off. He uttered a cry at the blood upon her face. She turned faint with the sense of safety; and, with a face as white as her own, he bore her away in his arms to the hospital, over the crimson snow.

Asenath looked out through the glare and smoke with parched lips. For a scratch upon the girl's smooth cheek, he had quite forgotten her. They had left her, tombed alive here in this furnace, and gone their happy way. Yet it gave her a curious sense of relief and triumph. If this were all that she could be to him, the thing which she had done was right, quite right. God must have known. She turned away, and shut her eyes again.

When she opened them, neither Dick, nor Del, nor crimsoned snow, nor sky, were there; only the smoke writhing up a pillar of blood-red flame.

The child who had called for her mother began to sob out that she was afraid to die alone.

"Come here, Molly," said Sene. "Can you crawl around?"

Molly crawled around.

"Put your head in my lap, and your arms about my waist, and I will put my hands in yours,—so. There! I guess that's better."

But they had not given them up yet. In the still unburnt rubbish at the right, some one had wrenched an opening within a foot of Sene's face. They clawed at the solid iron pintless like savage things. A fireman fainted in the glow.

"Give it up!" cried the crowd from behind. "It can't be done! Fall back!"—then hushed, awestruck.

An old man was crawling along upon his hands and knees over the heated bricks. He was a very old man. His gray hair blew about in the wind.

"I want my little gal!" he said. "Can't anybody tell me where to find my little gal?"

A rough-looking young fellow pointed in perfect silence through the smoke.

"I'll have her out yet. I'm an old man, but I can help. She's my little gal, ye see. Hand me that there dipper of water; it'll keep her from choking, may be. Now! Keep cheery, Sene! Your old father'll get ye out. Keep up good heart, child! That's it!"

"It's no use, father. Don't feel bad, father. I don't mind it very much."

He hacked at the timber; he tried to laugh; he bewildered himself with cheerful words.

"No more ye needn't, Senath, for it'll be over in a minute. Don't be downcast yet! We'll have ye safe at home before ye know it. Drink a little more water,—do now! They'll get at ye now, sure!"

But above the crackle and the roar a woman's voice rang out like a bell:—

"We're going home, to die no more."

A child's notes quavered in the chorus. From sealed and unseen graves, white young lips swelled the glad refrain,—

"We're going, going home."

The crawling smoke turned yellow, turned red. Voice after voice broke and hushed utterly. One only sang on like silver. It flung defiance down at death. It chimed into the lurid sky without a tremor. For one stood beside her in the furnace, and his form was like unto the form of the Son of God. Their eyes

met. Why should not Asenath sing?

"Senath!" cried the old man out upon the burning bricks; he was scorched now, from his gray hair to his patched boots.

The answer came triumphantly,—

"To die no more, no more, no more!"

"Sene! little Sene!"

But some one pulled him back.

Night-Watches.

Keturah wishes to state primarily that she is good-natured. She thinks it necessary to make this statement, lest, after having heard her story, you should, however polite you might be about it, in your heart of hearts suspect her capable not only of allowing her angry passions to rise, but of permitting them to boil over "in tempestuous fury wild and unrestrained." If it were an orthodox remark, she would also add, from like motives of self-defence, that she is not in the habit of swearing.

Are you accustomed, O tender-hearted reader, to spend your nights, as a habit, with your eyes open or shut? On the answer to this question depends her sole hope of appreciation and sympathy.

She begs you will understand that she does not mean you, the be-ribboned and be-spangled and be-rouged frequenter of ball and *soirée*, with your well-taught, drooping lashes, or wide girl's eyes untamed and wondering, your flushing color, and your pulse up to a hundred. You are very pretty for your pains,—O, to be sure you are very pretty! She has not the heart to scold you, though you are dancing and singing and flirting away your golden nights, your restful, young nights, that never come but once,—though you are dancing and singing and flirting yourselves merrily into your grave. She would like to put in a plea before the eloquence of which Cicero and Demosthenes, Beecher and Sumner, should pale like wax-lights before the sun, for the new fashion said to be obtaining in New York, that the *soirée* shall give place to the *matinée*, at which the guests shall assemble at four o'clock in the afternoon, and are expected to go home at seven or eight. That would be not only civilized, it would be millennial.

But Keturah is perfectly aware that you will do as you will. If the excitement of the "wee sma' hours ayont the twal" prove preferable to a quiet evening at home, and a good, Christian, healthy sleep after it, why the "sma' hours" it will be. If you will do it, it is "none of her funerals," as the small boy remarked. Only she particularly requests you not to insult her by offering her your sympathy. Wait till you know what forty-eight mortal, wide-awake, staring, whirring, unutterable hours mean.

Listen to her mournful tale; and, while you listen, let your head become fountains of water, and your eyes rivers of tears for her, and for all who are doomed to reside in her immediate vicinity.

"Tired nature's sweet restorer," as the newspapers, in a sudden and severe poetical attack, remarked of Jeff Davis, "refuses to bless" Keturah, except as her own sweet will inclines her. They have a continuous lover's quarrel, exceedingly bitter while it rages, exceedingly sweet when it is made up. Keturah attends a perfectly grave and unimpeachable lecture,—the Restorer pouts and goes off in a huff for twenty-four hours. Keturah undertakes at seven o'clock a concert,— announced as Mendelssohn Quintette, proving to be Gilmore's Brassiest,—and nothing hears she of My Lady till two o'clock, A. M. Keturah spends an hour at a prayer-meeting, on a pine bench that may have heard of cushions, but certainly has never seen one face to face; and comes home at eight o'clock to the pleasing discovery that the fair enslaver has taken some doctrinal offence, and vanished utterly.

Though lost to sight she's still to memory dear, and Keturah penitently betakes herself to the seeking of her in those ingenious ways which she has learned at the school of a melancholy experience. A table and a kerosene lamp are brought into requisition; also a book. If it isn't the Dictionary, it is Cruden's Concordance. If these prove too exciting, it is Edwards on the Will. Light reading is strictly forbidden. Congressional Reports are sometimes efficacious, as well as Martin F. Tupper, and somebody's "Sphere of Woman."

There is one single possibility out of ten that this treatment will produce drowsiness. There are nine probabilities to the contrary. The possibility is worth trying for, and trying hard for; but if it results in the sudden flight of President Edwards across the room, a severe banging of the "Sphere of Woman"

against the wall, and the total disappearance of Cruden's Concordance beneath the bed, Keturah is not in the least surprised. It is altogether too familiar a result to elicit remark. It simply occasions a fresh growth to a horrible resolution that she has been slowly forming for years.

Some day *she* will write a book. The publishers shall nap over it, and accept it with pleasure. The drowsy printers shall set up its type with their usual unerring exactness. The proof-readers shall correct it in their dreams. Customers in the bookstores shall nod at the sight of its binding. Its readers shall dose at its Preface. Sleepless old age, sharp and unrelieved pain, youth sorrowful before the time, shall seek it out, shall flock unto the counters of its fortunate publishers (she has three firms in her mind's eye; one in Boston, one in New York, and one in Philadelphia; but who the happy men are to be is not yet definitely decided), who shall waste their inheritance in distributing it throughout the length and breadth of a grateful continent. Physicians from everywhere under the sun, who have proved the fickleness of hyoscyamus, of hops, of Dover's powders, of opium, of morphine, of laudanum, of hidden virtues of herbs of the field, and minerals from the rock, and gases from the air; who know the secrets of all the pitying earth, and, behold, it is vanity of vanities, shall line their hospitals, cram their offices, stuff their bottles, with the new universal panacea and blessing to suffering humanity.

And Keturah *can* keep a resolution.

Her literary occupation disposed of, in the summary manner referred to, she runs through the roll of her reserve force, and their name is Legion. She composes herself, in an attitude of rest, with a handkerchief tied over her eyes to keep them shut, blows her lamp out instead of screwing it out, strangles awhile in the gas, and begins to repeat her alphabet, which, owing to like stern necessity, she has fortunately never forgotten. She says it forward; she says it backward; she begins at the middle and goes up; she begins at the middle and goes down; she rattles it through in French, she groans it through in German, she falters it through in Greek. She attempts the numeration-table, flounders somewhere in the quadrillions, and forgets where she left off. She watches an interminable flock of sheep jump over a wall till her head spins. There always seem to be so many more where the last one came from. She listens to oar-beats, and drum-beats, and heart-beats. She improvises sonatas and gallopades, oratorios and mazourkas. She perpetrates the title and first line of an epic poem, goes through the alphabet for a rhyme, and none appearing, she repeats the first line by way of encouragement. But all in vain.

With a silence that speaks unspeakable things, she rises solemnly, and seeks the pantry in darkness that may be felt. At the bottom of the stairs she steps with her whole weight flat upon something that squirms, and is warm, and turns over, and utters a cry that makes night hideous. O, nothing but the cat, that is all! The pantry proves to be well stocked with bread, but not another mortal thing. Now, if there is anything Keturah *particularly* dislikes, it is dry bread. Accordingly, with a remark which is intended for Love's ear alone, she gropes her way to the cellar door, which is unexpectedly open, pitches head-first into the cavity, and makes the descent of half the stairs in an easy and graceful manner, chiefly with her elbows. She reaches the ground after an interval, steps splash into a pool of water, knocks over a mop, and embraces a tall cider barrel with her groping arms. After a little wandering about among ash-bins and apple-bins, reservoirs and coal-heaps and cobwebs, she discovers the hanging-shelf which has been the *ignis fatuus* of her search. Something extremely cold crossing her shoeless feet at this crisis suggests pleasant fancies of a rat. Keturah is ashamed to confess that she has never in all the days of the years of her pilgrimage set eyes upon a rat. Depending solely upon her imagination, her conception of that animal is a cross between an alligator and a jaguar. She stands her ground manfully, however, and is happy to state that she did *not* faint.

In the agitation consequent upon this incident she butters her bread with the lard, and takes an enormous bite on the way up stairs. She seeks no more refreshment that night.

One resort alone is left. With a despairing sigh she turns the great faucet of the bath-tub and holds her head under it till she is upon the verge of a watery grave. This experiment is her forlorn hope. Perhaps about three or four o'clock she falls into a series of jerky naps, and dreams that she is editor of a popular Hebrew magazine, wandering frantically through a warehouse full of aspirant MSS. (chiefly from the junior classes of theological seminaries) of which she cannot translate a letter.

Of the tenth of Keturah's unearthly experiences,—of the number of times she has been taken for a robber, and chased by the entire roused and bewildered family, with loaded guns; of the pans of milk she has upset, the crockery whose hopes she has untimely shattered, the skulls she has cracked against open doors, the rocking-chairs she has stumbled over and apostrophized in her own meek way; of the neighbors she has frightened out of town by her perambulations; of the alarms of fire she has raised, pacing the wood-shed with a lantern for exercise stormy nights; of all the possible and impossible corners and crevices in which she has sought repose, (she has slept on every sofa in every room in the house, and once she spent a whole night on a closet shelf); of the amiable condition of her mornings,

and the terror she is fast becoming to family. Church, and State, the time would fail her to tell. Were she to "let slip the dogs of war," and relate a modicum of the agonies she undergoes,—how the stamping of a neighbor's horse on a barn floor will drive every solitary wink of sleep from her eyes and slumber from her eyelids; the nibbling of a mouse in some un-get-at-able place in the wall prove torture; the rattling of a pane of glass, ticking of a clock, or pattering of rain-drops, as effective as a cannon; a guest in the "spare room" with a musical "love of a baby," something far different from a blessing, and a tolerably windy night, one lengthened vigil long drawn out,—the liberal public would cry, "Forbear!" It becomes really an interesting science to learn how slight a thing will utterly deprive an unfortunate creature of the great necessity of life; but this article not being a scientific treatise, that must be left to the sympathizing imagination.

Keturah feels compelled, however, to relate the story of two memorable nights, of which the only wonder is that she has lived to tell the tale.

Every incident is stamped indelibly upon her brain. It is wrought in letters of fire. "While memory holds a seat in this distracted globe," it shall not, cannot be forgotten.

It was a night in June,—sultry, gasping, fearful. Keturah went to her own room, as is her custom, at the Puritanic hour of nine. Sleep, for a couple of hours, being out of the question, she threw wide her doors and windows, and betook herself to her writing-desk. A story for a magazine, which it was imperative should be finished to-morrow, appealed to her already partially stupefied brain. She forced her unwilling pen into the service, whisked the table round into the draught, and began. In about five minutes the sibyl caught the inspiration of her god, and heat and sleeplessness were alike forgotten. This sounds very poetic, but it wasn't at all. Keturah regrets to say that she had on a very unbecoming green wrapper, and several ink-spots on her fingers.

It was a very thrilling and original story, and it came, as all thrilling and original stories must come, to a crisis. Seraphina found Theodore kissing the hand of Celeste in the woods. Keturah became excited.

"'O Theodore!' whispered the unhappy maiden to the moaning trees. 'O
Theodore, my—'"

Whir! buzz! swosh! came something through the window into the lamp, and down squirming into the ink-bottle. Keturah jumped. If you have half the horror of those great June beetles that she has, you will know how she jumped. She emptied the entire contents of the ink-bottle out of the window, closed her blinds, and began again.

"'Theodore,' said Seraphina.

"'Seraphina,' said Theodore." Jump the second! There he was,—not Theodore, but the beetle,—whirring round the lamp, and buzzing down into her lap. Hadn't he been burned in the light, drowned in the ink, speared with the pen, and crushed by falling from the window? Yet there he was, or the ghost of him, fluttering his inky wings into her very eyes, and walking leisurely across the smooth, fair page that waited to be inscribed with Seraphina's woe. Nerved by despair, Keturah did a horrible thing. Never before or since has she been known to accomplish it. She put him down on the floor and stepped on him. She repented of the act in dust and ashes. Before she could get across the room to close the window ten more had come to his funeral. To describe the horrors of the ensuing hour she has no words. She put them out of the window,—they came directly back. She drowned them in the wash-bowl,—they fluttered, and sputtered, and buzzed up into the air. She killed them in corners,—they came to life under her very eyes. She caught them in her handkerchief and tied them up tight,—they crawled out before she could get them in. She shut the cover of the wash-stand down on them,—she looked in awhile after and there was not one to be seen. All ten of the great blundering creatures were knocking their brains out against the ceiling. After the endurance of terrors that came very near turning her hair gray, she had pushed the last one out on the balcony, shut the window, and was gasping away in the airless room, her first momentary sense of security, when there struck upon her agonized ear a fiendish buzzing, and three of them came whirling back through a crack about as large as a knitting-needle. No *mortal* beetle could have come through it. Keturah turned pale and let them alone.

The clock was striking eleven when quiet was at last restored, and the exhausted sufferer began to think of sleep. At this moment she heard a sound before which her heart sank like lead. You must know that Keturah has a very near neighbor, Miss Humdrum by name. Miss Humdrum is a—well, a very excellent and pious old lady, who keeps a one-eyed servant and three cats; and the sound which Keturah heard was Miss Humdrum's cats.

Keturah descended to the wood-shed, armed herself with a huge oaken log, and sallied out into the garden, with a horrible *sang-froid* that only long familiarity with her errand could have engendered. It

was Egyptian darkness; but her practised eye discerned, or thought it discerned, a white cat upon the top of the high wooden fence. Keturah smiled a ghastly smile, and fired. Now she never yet in her life threw anything anywhere, under any circumstances, that did not go exactly in the opposite direction from what she wanted to have it. This occasion proved no exception. The cat jumped, and sprang over, and disappeared. The stick went exactly into the middle of the fence. Keturah cannot suppose that the last trump will be capable of making a louder noise. She stood transfixed. One cry alone broke the hideous silence.

"*O* Lord!" in an unmistakably Irish, half-wakened howl, from the open window of the one-eyed servant's room. "Only that, and nothing more."

Keturah returned to her apartment, a sadder if not a wiser woman. Marius among the ruins of Carthage, Napoleon at St. Helena, M'Clellan in Europe, have henceforth and forever her sympathy.

She thinks it was *precisely* five minutes after her return, during which the happy stillness that seemed to rest upon nature without and nature within had whispered faint promises of coming rest, that there suddenly broke upon it a hoarse, deep, unearthly breathing. So hoarse, so deep, so unearthly, and so directly underneath her window, that for about ten seconds Keturah sat paralyzed. There was but one thing it could be. A travelling menagerie in town had lost its Polish wolf that very day. This was the Polish wolf.

The horrible panting, like the panting of a famished creature, came nearer, grew louder, grew hoarser. The animal had found a bone in the grass, and was crunching it in his ghastly way. Then she could hear him sniffing at the door.

And Amram's room was on the lower story! Perhaps wolves climbed in at windows!

The awful thought roused Keturah from the stupor of her terror. She was no coward. She would face the fearful sight. She would call and warn him at any risk. She faltered out upon the balcony. She leaned over the railing. She gazed breathlessly down into the darkness.

A cow.

Another cow.

Three cows.

Keturah sat down on the window-sill in the calm of despair.

It was succeeded by a storm. She concludes that she was about five seconds on the passage from her room to the garden. With "hair flotant, and arms disclosed," like the harpies of heraldic device, she rushed up to the invaders—and stopped. Exactly what was to be done? Three great stupid, browsing, contented cows *versus* one lone, lorn woman. For about one minute Keturah would not have wagered her fortune on the woman. But it is not her custom to "say die," and after some reflection she ventured on a manful command.

"Go away! Go! go!" The stentorian remark caused a result for which she was, to say the least, unprepared. The creatures coolly turned about and walked directly up to her. To be sure. Why not? Is it not a part of our outrageous Yankee nomenclature to teach cows to come to you when you tell them to go away? How Keturah, country born and bred, could have even momentarily forgotten so clear and simple a principle of philology, remains a mystery to this day. A little reflection convinced her of the only logical way of ridding herself of her guests. Accordingly, she walked a little way behind them and tried again.

"Come here, sir! Come, good fellow! Wh-e-e! come here!"

Three great wooden heads lifted themselves slowly, and three pairs of soft, sleepy eyes looked at her, and the beasts returned to their clover and stood stock-still.

What was to be done? You could go behind and push them. Or you could go in front and pull them by the horns.

Neither of these methods exactly striking Keturah's fancy, she took up a little chip and threw at them; also a piece of coal and a handful of pebbles. These gigantic efforts proving to be fruitless, she sat down on the grass and looked at them. The heartless creatures resisted even that appeal.

At this crisis of her woes one of Keturah's many brilliant thoughts came to her relief. She hastened upon the wings of the wind to her infallible resort, the wood-shed, and filled her arms up to the chin with pine knots. Thus equipped, she started afresh to the conflict. It is recorded that out of twenty of

those sticks, thrown with savage and direful intent, only one hit. It is, however, recorded that the enemy dispersed, after being valiantly pursued around the house, out of the front gate (where one stuck, and got through with the greatest difficulty), and for a quarter of a mile down the street. In the course of the rout Keturah tripped on her dress only six times, and fell flat but four. One pleasing little incident gave delightful variety to the scene. A particularly frisky and clover-loving white cow, whose heart yearned after the apples of Sodom, turned about in the road without any warning whatever and showed fight. Keturah adopted a sudden resolution to return home "across lots," and climbed the nearest stone-wall with considerable *empressement*. Exactly half-way over she was surprised to find herself gasping among the low-hanging boughs of a butternut-tree, where she hung like Absalom of old, between heaven and earth. She would like to state, in this connection, that she always had too much vanity to wear a waterfall; so she still retains a portion of her original hair.

However, she returned victorious over the silent dew-laden fields and down into the garden paths, where she paced for two hours back and forth among the aromatic perfumes of the great yellow June lilies. There might have been a bit of poetry in it under other circumstances, but Keturah was not poetically inclined on that occasion. The events of the night had so roused her soul within her, that exercise unto exhaustion was her sole remaining hope of sleep.

At about two o'clock she crawled faintly upstairs again, and had just fallen asleep with her head on the window-sill, when a wandering dog had to come directly under the window, and sit there and bark for half an hour at a rake-handle.

Keturah made no other effort to fight her destiny. Determined to meet it heroically, she put a chair precisely into the middle of the room, and sat up straight in it, till she heard the birds sing. Somewhere about that epoch she fell into a doze with one eye open, when a terrific peal of thunder started her to her feet. It was Patsy knocking at the door to announce that her breakfast was cold.

In the ghastly condition of the following day the story was finished and sent off. It was on this occasion that the patient and long-enduring editor ventured mildly to suggest, that when, by a thrilling and horrible mischance, Seraphina's lovely hand came between a log of wood and the full force of Theodore's hatchet, the result *might* have been more disastrous than the loss of a finger-nail. Alas! even his editorial omniscience did not know—how could it?—the story of that night. Keturah forgave him.

It is perhaps worthy of mention that Miss Humdrum appeared promptly at eight o'clock the next morning, with her handkerchief at her eyes.

"My Star-spangled Banner has met with her decease, Ketury."

"Indeed! How very sad!"

"Yes. She has met with her decease. Under *very* peculiar circumstances,
Ketury."

"Oh!" said Ketury, hunting for her own handkerchief; finding three in her pocket, she brought them all into requisition.

"And I feel it my duty to inquire," said Miss Humdrum, "whether it may happen that *you* know anything about the event, Ketury."

"I?" said Keturah, weeping, "I didn't know she was dead even! Dear Miss
Humdrum, you are indeed afflicted."

"But I feel compelled to say," pursued Miss Humdrum, eying this wretched hypocrite severely, "that my girl Jemimy *did* hear somebody fire a gun or a cannon or something out in your garden last night, and she scar't out of her wits, and my poor cat found cold under the hogshead this morning, Ketury."

"Miss Humdrum," said Keturah, "I cannot, in justice to myself, answer such insinuations, further than to say that Amram *never* allows the gun to go out of his own room. The cannon we keep in the cellar."

"Oh!" said Miss Humdrum, with horrible suspicion in her eyes. "Well, I hope you haven't it on your conscience, I'm sure. *Good* morning."

It had been the ambition of Keturah's life to see a burglar. The second of the memorable nights referred to crowned this ambition by not only one burglar, but two. She it was who discovered them, she who frightened them away, and nobody but she ever saw them. She confesses to a natural and unconquerable pride in them. It came about on this wise:—

It was one of Keturah's wide-awake nights, and she had been wandering off into the fields at the foot

of the garden, where it was safe and still. There is, by the way, a peculiar awe in the utter hush of the earliest morning hours, of which no one can know who has not familiarized himself with it in all its moods. A solitary walk in a solitary place, with the great world sleeping about you, and the great skies throbbing above you, and the long unrest of the panting summer night, fading into the cool of dews, and pure gray dawns, has in it something of what Mr. Robertson calls "God's silence."

Once, on one of these lonely rambles, Keturah found away in the fields, under the shadow of an old stone-wall, a baby's grave. It had no headstone to tell its story, and the weeds and brambles of many years had overgrown it. Keturah is not of a romantic disposition, especially on her midnight tramps, but she sat down by the little nameless thing, and looked from it to the arch of eternal stars that, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, kept steadfast watch over it, and was very still.

It is one of the standing grievances of her life that Amram, while never taking the trouble to go and look, insists upon it that was nothing but somebody's pet dog. She knows better.

On this particular night, Keturah, in coming up from the garden to return to the house, had a dim impression that something crossed the walk in front of her and disappeared among the rustling trees. The impression was sufficiently strong to keep her sitting up for half an hour at her window, under the feeling that an ounce of prevention was worth a pound of cure. She has indeed been asked why she did not reconnoitre the rustling trees upon the spot. She considers that would have been an exceedingly poor stroke of policy, and of an impolitic thing Keturah is not capable. She sees far and plans deep. Supposing she had gone and been shot through the head, where would have been the fun of her burglars? To yield a life-long aspiration at the very moment that it is within grasp, was too much to ask even of Keturah.

Words cannot describe the sensations of the moment, when that half-hour was rewarded by the sight of two stealthy, cat-like figures, creeping out from among the trees. A tall man and a little man, and both with very unbanditti-like straw-hats on.

Now, if Keturah has a horror in this world, it is that delicate play of the emotions commonly known as "woman's nonsense." And therefore did she sit still for three mortal minutes, with her burglars making tracks for the kitchen window under her very eyes, in order to prove to herself and an incredulous public, beyond all shadow of doubt or suspicion, that they were robbers and not dreams; actual flesh and blood, not nightmares; unmistakable hats and coats in a place where hats and coats ought not to be, not clothes-lines and pumps. She tried hard to make Amram and the Paterfamilias out of them. Who knew but they also, by some unheard-of revolution in all the laws of nature, were on an exploring expedition after truant sleep? She struggled manfully after the conviction that they were innocent and unimpeachable neighbors, cutting the short way home across the fields from some remarkably late prayer-meeting. She agonized after the belief that they were two of Patsy's sweethearts, come for the commendable purpose of serenading her.

In fact they were almost in the house before this remarkable female was prepared to trust the evidence of her own senses.

But when suspense gloomed into certainty, Keturah is happy to say that she was grandly equal to the occasion. She slammed open her blinds with an emphasis, and lighted her lamp with a burnt match.

The men jumped, and dodged, and ran, and hid behind the trees, in the most approved manner of burglars, who flee when no woman pursueth; and Keturah, being of far too generous a disposition to enjoy the pleasure of their capture unshared, lost no time in hammering at Amram's door.

"Amram!"

No answer.

"_Am_ram!"

Silence.

"Am-*ram!*"

"Oh! Ugh! Who—"

Silence again.

"Amram, wake up! Come out here—quick!"

"O-o-oh, yes. Who's there?"

"I."

"I?"

"Keturah."

"Kefurah?"

"Amram, be quick, or we shall all have our throats cut! There are some men in the garden."

"Hey?"

"*Men* in the garden!"

"Men?"

"In the *garden!*"

"Garden?"

Keturah can bear a great deal, but there comes a limit even to her proverbial patience. She burst open the door without ceremony, and is under the impression that Amram received a shaking such as even his tender youth was a stranger to. It effectually woke him to consciousness, as well as to the gasping and particularly senseless remark, "What on earth was she wringing his neck for?" As if he mightn't have known! She has the satisfaction of remembering that he was asked in return, "Did he expect a solitary unprotected female to keep all his murderers away from him, as well as those wolves she drove off the other night?"

However, there was no time to be wasted in tender words, and before a woman could have winked, Amram made his appearance dressed and armed and sarcastically incredulous. Keturah grasped the pistol, and followed him at a respectful distance. Stay in the house and hold the light? Catch her! She would take the light with her, and the house too, if necessary, but she would be in at the death.

She wishes Mr. Darley were on hand, to immortalize the picture they made, scouring the premises after those disobliging burglars,—especially Keturah, in the green wrapper, with her hair rolled all up in a huge knob on top of her head, to keep it out of the way, and her pistol held out at arm's-length, pointed falteringly, directly at the stars. She will inform the reader confidentially—tell it not in Gath—of a humiliating discovery she made exactly four weeks afterward, and which she has never before imparted to a human creature,—it wasn't loaded.

Well, they peered behind every door, they glared into every shadow, they squeezed into every crack, they dashed into every corner, they listened at every cranny and crevice, step and turn. But not a burglar! Of course not. A regiment might have run away while Amram was waking up.

Keturah thinks it will hardly be credited that this hopeful person dared to suggest and dares to maintain that it was *Cats*!

But she must draw the story of her afflictions to a close. And lest her "solid" reader's eyes reject the rambling recital as utterly unworthy the honor of their notice, she is tempted to whittle it down to a moral before saying farewell. For you must know that Keturah has learned several things from her mournful experience.

1. That every individual of her acquaintance, male and female, aged and youthful, orthodox and heretical, who sleeps regularly nine hours out of the twenty-four, has his or her own especial specimen recipe of a "perfectly harmless anodyne" to offer, with advice thrown in.

2. That nothing ever yet put her to sleep but a merciful Providence.

3. A great respect for Job.

4. That the notion commonly and conscientiously received by very excellent people, that wakeful nights can and should be spent in prayer, religious meditation, and general spiritual growth, is all they know about it. Hours of the extremest bodily and mental exhaustion, when every nerve is quivering as if laid bare, and the surface of the brain burning and whirling to agony, with the reins of control let loose on every rebellious and every senseless thought, are not the times most likely to be chosen for the purest communion with God. To be sure. King David "remembered Him upon his bed, and meditated upon Him in the night-watches." Keturah does not undertake to contradict Scripture, but she has come to the conclusion that David was either a *very* good man, or he didn't lie awake very often.

But, over and above all, *haec fabula docet*:

5. That people who can sleep when they want to should keep Thanksgiving every day in the year.

The Day of My Death[1]

[Footnote 1: The characters in this narrative are fictitious. The incidents the author does not profess to have witnessed. But they are given as related by eye-witnesses whose testimony would command a verdict from any honest jury. The author, however, draws no conclusions and suggests none.]

Alison was sitting on a bandbox. She had generally been sitting on a bandbox for three weeks,—or on a bushel-basket, or a cupboard shelf, or a pile of old newspapers, or the baby's bath-tub. On one occasion it was the baby himself. She mistook him for the rag-bag.

If ever we had to move again,—which all the beneficence of the Penates forbid!—my wife should be locked into the parlor, and a cargo of Irishwomen turned loose about the premises to "attend to things." What it is that women find to do with themselves in this world I have never yet discovered. They are always "attending to things." Whatever that may mean, I have long ago received it as the only solution at my command of their superfluous wear and tear, and worry and flurry, and tears and nerves and headaches. A fellow may suggest Jane, and obtrude Bridget, and hire Peggy, and run in debt for Mehetable, and offer to take the baby on 'Change with him, but has he by a feather's weight lightened Madam's mysterious burden? My dear sir, don't presume to expect it. She has just as much to do as she ever had. In fact, she has a little more. "Strange, you don't appreciate it! Follow her about one day, and see for yourself!"

What I started to say, however, was that I thought it over often,—I mean about that invoice of Irishwomen,—coming home from the office at night, while we were moving out of Artichoke Street into Nemo's Avenue. It is not pleasant to find one's wife always sitting on a bandbox. I have seen her crawl to her feet when she heard me coming, and hold on by a chair, and try her poor little best to look as if she could stand twenty-four hours longer; she so disliked that I should find a "used-up looking house" under any circumstances. But I believe that was worse than the bandbox.

On this particular night she was too tired even to crawl. I found her all in a heap in the corner, two dusters and a wash-cloth in one blue-veined hand, and a broom in the other; an old corn-colored silk handkerchief knotted over her hair,—her hair is black, and the effect was good,—and her little brown calico apron-string literally tied to the baby, who was shrieking at the end of his tether because he could just not reach the kitten and throw her into the fire. On Alison's lap, between a pile of shirts and two piles of magazines, lay a freshly opened letter. I noticed that she put it into her pocket before she dropped her dusters and stood up to lift her face for my kiss. She forgot about the apron-strings, and the baby tipped up the wrong way, and hung dangling in mid-air.

After we had taken tea,—that is to say, after we had drawn around the ironing-board put on two chairs in the front entry, made the cocoa in a tin dipper, stirred it with a fork, and cut the bread with a jack-knife,—after the baby was fairly off to bed in a champagne-basket, and Tip disposed of, his mother only knew where, we coaxed a consumptive fire into the parlor grate, and sat down before it in the carpetless, pictureless, curtainless, blank, bare, soapy room.

"Thank fortune, this is the last night of it!" I growled, putting my booted feet against the wall, (my slippers had gone over to the avenue in a water-pail that morning,) and tipping my chair back drearily, —my wife "*so* objects" to the habit!

Allis made no reply, but sat looking thoughtfully, and with a slightly perplexed and displeased air, into the sizzling wet wood that snapped and flared and smoked and hissed and blackened, and did everything but burn.

"I really don't know what to do about it," she broke silence at last.

"I'm inclined to think there's nothing better to do than to look at it."

"No; not the fire. O, I forgot—I haven't shown it to you."

She drew from her pocket the letter which I had noticed in the afternoon, and laid it upon my knee. With my hands in my pockets—the room was too cold to take them out—I read:—

Dear Cousin Alison:—

> "I have been so lonely since mother died, that my health, never of the strongest, as you

know, has suffered seriously. My physician tells me that something is wrong with the periphrastic action, if you know what that is," [I suppose Miss Fellows meant the peristaltic action,] "and prophesies something dreadful, (I've forgotten whether it was to be in the head, or the heart, or the stomach,) if I cannot have change of air and scene this winter. I should dearly love to spend some time with you in your new home, (I fancy it will be drier than the old one,) if convenient to you. If inconvenient, don't hesitate to say so, of course. I hope to hear from you soon.

"In haste, your aff. cousin,

"Gertrude Fellows.

"P.S.—I shall of course insist upon being a boarder if I come.

"G.F."

"Hum-m. Insipid sort of letter."

"Exactly. That's Gertrude. No more flavor than a frozen pear. If she had one distinguishing peculiarity, good or bad, I believe I should like her better. But I'm sorry for the woman."

"Sorry enough to stand a winter of her?"

"If we hadn't just been through this moving! A new house and all,—nobody knows how the flues are yet, or whether we can heat a spare room. She hasn't had a home, though, since Cousin Dorothy died. But I was thinking about you, you see."

"O, she can't hurt me. She won't want the library, I suppose; nor my slippers, and the small bootjack. Let her come."

My wife sighed a small sigh of relief out from the depths of her hospitable heart, and the little matter was settled and dismissed as lightly as are most little matters out of which grow the great ones.

I had just begun to dream that night that Gertrude Fellows, in the shape of a large wilted pear, had walked in and sat down on a dessert plate, when Allis gave me a little pinch and woke me.

"My dear, Gertrude has *one* peculiarity. I never thought of it till this minute."

"Confound Gertrude's peculiarities! I want to go to sleep. Well, let's have it."

"Why, you see, she took up with some Spiritualistic notions after her mother's death; thought she held communications with her, and all that, Aunt Solomon says."

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Of course. But, Fred, dear, I'm inclined to think she *must* have made her sewing-table walk into the front entry; and Aunt Solomon says the spirits rapped out the whole of Cousin Dorothy's history on the mantel-piece, behind those blue china vases,—you must have noticed them at the funeral,—and not a human hand within six feet."

"Alison Hotchkiss!" I said, waking thoroughly, and sitting up in bed to emphasize the opinion, "when I hear a spirit rap on *my* mantel-piece, and see *my* tables walk about the front entry, I'll believe that,—not before!"

"O, I know it! I'm not a Spiritualist, I'm sure, and nothing would tempt me to be. But still that sort of reasoning has a flaw in it, hasn't it, dear? The King of Siam, you know—"

I had heard of the King of Siam before, and I politely informed my wife that I did not care to hear of him again. Spiritualism was a system of refined jugglery. Just another phase of the same thing which brings the doves out of Mr. Hermann's empty hat. It might be entertaining if it had not become such an abominable imposition. There would always be nervous women and hypochondriac men enough for its dupes. I thanked Heaven that I was neither, and went to sleep.

Our new house was light and dry; the flues worked well, and the spare chamber heated admirably. The baby exchanged the champagne-basket for his dainty pink-curtained crib; Tip began to recover from the perpetual cold with which three weeks' sitting in draughts, and tumbling into water-pails, and playing in the sink, had sweetened his temper; Allis forsook her bandboxes for the crimson easy-chair (very becoming, that chair), or tripped about on her own rested feet; we returned to table-cloths, civilized life, and a fork apiece.

In short, nothing at all worth mentioning happened, till that one night,—I think it was our first Sunday,—when Allis waked me at twelve o'clock with the announcement that some one was knocking at the door. Supposing it to be Bridget with the baby,—croup, probably, or a fit,—I unlocked and unlatched it promptly. No one was there, however; and telling my wife, in no very gentle tone, if I remember correctly, that it would be a convenience, on such cold nights, if she could keep her dreams to herself, I shut the door distinctly and returned to my own.

In the morning I observed a little white circle about each of Allis's blue eyes, and after some urging she confessed to me that her sleep had been much broken by a singular disturbance in the room. I might laugh at her if I chose, and she had not meant to tell me, but somebody had rapped in that room all night long.

"On the door?"

"On the door, on the mantel, on the foot of the bed, on the head-board,—Fred, right on the head-board! I listened till I grew cold listening, but it rapped and it rapped, and by and by it was morning, and it stopped."

"Rats!" said I.

"Then rats have knuckles," said she.

"Mice!" said I, "wind! broken plaster! crickets! imagination! dreams! fancies! blind headache! nonsense! Next time wake me up, and fire pillows at me till I'm pleasant to you. Now I'll have a kiss and a cup of coffee. Any sugar in it?"

Tip fell down the cellar stairs that day, and the baby swallowed a needle and two gutta-percha buttons, which I had been waiting a week to have sewed on my vest, so that Alison had enough else to think about, and the little incident of the raps was forgotten. I believe it was not recalled by either of us till after Gertrude Fellows came.

It was on a Monday and in a drizzly storm that I brought her from the station. She was a thin, cold, phantom-like woman, shrouded in water-proofs and green *barège* veils. Why is it that homely women always wear green *barège* veils? She did not improve in appearance when her wraps were off, and she was seated by my parlor grate. Her large green eyes had no speculation in them. Her mouth—an honest mouth, that was one mercy—quivered and shrank when she was addressed suddenly, as if she felt herself to be a sort of foot-ball that the world was kicking about at pleasure,—your gentlest smile might prove a blow. She seldom spoke unless she were spoken to, and fell into long reveries, with her eyes on the window or the coals. She wore a horrible sort of ruff,—"illusion," I think Allis called it,—which, of all contrivances that she could have chosen to encircle her sallow neck, was exactly the most unbecoming. She was always knitting blue stockings,—I never discovered for what or whom; and she wore her lifeless hair in the shape of a small toy cartwheel, on the back of her head.

However, she brightened a little in the course of the first week, helped Alison about the baby, kept herself out of my way, read her Bible and the "Banner of Light" in about equal proportion, and became a mild, inoffensive, and, on the whole, not unpleasant addition to the family.

She had been in the house about ten days, I think, when Alison, with a disturbed face, confided to me that she had spent another wakeful night with those "rats" behind the head-board; I had been down with a sick-headache the day before, and she had not wakened me. I promised to set a trap and buy a cat before evening, and was closing the door upon the subject, being already rather late at the office, when the expression of Gertrude Fellows's face detained me.

"If I were you, I—wouldn't—really buy a very expensive trap, Mr. Hotchkiss. It will be a waste of money, I am afraid. I heard the noise that disturbed Cousin Alison"; and she sighed.

I shut the door with a snap, and begged her to be so good as to explain herself.

"It's of no use," she said, doggedly. "You know you won't believe me.
But that makes no difference. They come all the same."

"*They*?" asked Allis, smiling. "Do you mean some of your spirits?"

The cold little woman flushed. "These are not *my* spirits. I know nothing about them. I did not mean to obtrude a subject so disagreeable to you while I was in your family; but I have seldom been in a house in which the Influences were so strong. I don't know what they mean, nor anything about them, but just that they're here. They wake me up, twitching my elbows, nearly every night."

"Wake you up *how*?"

"Twitching my elbows," she repeated, gravely.

I broke into a laugh, from which neither my politeness nor the woman's heightened color could save me, bought the cat and ordered the rat-trap without delay.

That night, when Miss Fellows had "retired,"—she never "went to bed" in simple English like other people,—I stole softly out in my stockings and screwed a little brass button outside of her door. I had made a gimlet-hole for it in the morning when our guest was out shopping; it fitted into place without noise. Without noise I turned it, and went back to my own room.

"You suspect her, then?" said Alison.

"One is always justified in suspecting a Spiritualistic medium."

"I don't know about that," Allis said, decidedly. "It may have been mice that I heard last night, or the wind in a bottle, or any of the other proper and natural causes that explain away the ghost stories in the children's papers; but it was not Gertrude. Women know something about one another, my dear; and I tell you it was not Gertrude."

"I don't assert that it was; but with the bolt on Gertrude's door, the cat in the kitchen, and the rat-trap on the garret stairs, I am strongly inclined to anticipate a peaceful night. I will watch for a while, however, and you can go to sleep."

She went to sleep, and I watched. I lay till half past eleven with my eyes staring at the dark, wide awake and undisturbed and triumphant.

At half past eleven I must confess that I heard a singular sound.

Something whistled at the keyhole. It could not have been the wind, by the way, for there was no wind that night. Something else than the wind whistled in at the keyhole, sighed through into the room as much like a long-drawn breath as anything, and fell with a slight clink upon the floor.

I lighted my candle and got up. I searched the floor of the room, and opened the door and searched the entry. Nothing was visible or audible, and I went back to bed. For about ten minutes I heard no further disturbance, and was concluding myself to be in some undefined manner the victim of my own imagination, when there suddenly fell upon the headboard of my bed a blow so distinct and loud that I involuntarily sprang at the sound of it. It wakened Alison, and I had the satisfaction of hearing her sleepily inquire if I had caught that rat yet? By way of reply I relighted the candle, and gave the bed a shove which sent it rolling half across the room. I examined the wall; I examined the floor; I examined the headboard; I made Alison get up, so that I could shake the mattresses. Meantime the pounding had recommenced, in rapid, irregular, blows, like the blows of a man's fist. The room adjoining ours was the nursery. I went in with my light. It was empty and silent. Bridget, with Tip and the baby, slept soundly in the large chamber across the hall. While I was searching the room my wife called loudly to me, and I ran back.

"It is on the mantel now," she said. "It struck the mantel just after you left; then the ceiling, three times, very loud; then the mantel again,—don't you hear?"

I heard distinctly; moreover, the mantel shook a little with the concussion. I took out the fire-board and looked up the chimney; I took out the register and looked down the furnace-pipe; I ransacked the garret and the halls; finally, I examined Miss Fellows's door,—it was locked as I had left it, upon the outside; and that locked door was the only means of egress from the room, unless the occupant fancied that of jumping from a two-story window upon a broad flight of stone steps.

I came thoughtfully back across the hall; an invisible trip-hammer appeared to hit the floor beside me at every step; I attempted to step aside from it, over it, away from it; but it followed me, pounding into my room.

"Wind?" suggested Allis. "Plaster cracking? Fancies? Dreams? Blind headaches?—I should like to know which you have decided upon?"

Quiet fell upon the house after that for an hour, and I was dropping into my first nap, when there came a light tap upon the door. Before I could reach it, it had grown into a thundering blow.

"Whatever it is I'll have it now!" I whispered, turned the latch without noise, and flung the door wide into the hall. It was silent, dark, and cold. A little glimmer of moonlight fell in and showed me the figures upon the carpet, outlined in a frosty bar. No hand or hammer, human or superhuman, was there.

Determined to investigate matters a little more thoroughly, I asked my wife to stand upon the inside of the doorway while I kept watch upon the outside. We took our position, and I closed the door between us. Instantly a series of furious blows struck the door; the sound was such as would be made by a stick of oaken wood. The solid door quivered under it.

"It's on your side!" said I.

"No, it's on yours!" said she.

"You're pounding yourself to fool me," cried I.

"You're pounding yourself to frighten me," sobbed she.

And we nearly had a quarrel. The sound continued with more or less intermission till daybreak. Allis fell asleep, but I spent the time in appropriate reflections.

Early in the morning I removed the button from Miss Fellows's door. She never knew anything about it.

I believe, however, that I had the fairness to exculpate her in my secret heart from any trickish connection with the disturbances of that night.

"Just keep quiet about this little affair," I said to my wife; "we shall come across an explanation in time, and may never have any more of it."

We kept quiet, and for five days so did "the spirits," as Miss Fellows was pleased to pronounce the trip-hammers.

The fifth day I came home early, as it chanced, from the office. Miss Fellows was writing letters in the parlor. Allis, upstairs, was sorting and putting away the weekly wash. I came into the room and sat down by the register to watch her. I always liked to watch her sitting there on the floor with the little heaps of linen and cotton stuff piled like blocks of snow about her, and her pink hands darting in and out of the uncertain sleeves that were just ready to give way in the gathers, trying the stockings' heels briskly, and testing the buttons with a little jerk.

She laid aside some under-clothing presently from the rest. "It will not be needed again this winter," she observed, "and had better go into the cedar closet." The garments, by the way, were marked and numbered in indelible ink. I heard her run over the figures in a busy, housekeeper's undertone, before carrying them into the closet. She locked the closet door, I think, for I remember the click of the key. If I remember accurately, I stepped into the hall after that to light a cigar, and Alison flitted to and fro with her clothes, dropping the baby's little white stockings every step or two, and anathematizing them daintily—within orthodox bounds, of course. In about five minutes she called me; her voice was sharp and alarmed.

"Come quick! O Fred, look here! All those clothes that I locked into the cedar closet are out here on the bed!"

"My dear wife," I blandly observed, as I sauntered into the room, "too much of Gertrude Fellows hath made thee mad. Let *me* see the clothes!"

She pointed to the bed. Some white clothing lay upon it, folded in an ugly way, to represent a corpse, with crossed hands.

"Is it meant for a joke, Alison? You did it yourself, I suppose!"

"Fred! I have not touched it with the tip of my little finger!"

"Gertrude, then?"

"Gertrude is in the parlor writing."

So she was. I called her up. She looked surprised and troubled.

"It must have been Bridget," I proceeded, authoritatively, "or Tip."

"Bridget is out walking with Tip and the baby. Jane is in the kitchen making pies."

"At any rate these are not the clothes which you locked into the closet, however they came here."

"The very same, Fred. See, I noticed the numbers 6 upon the stockings, 2 on the night-caps, and—"

"Give me the key," I interrupted.

She gave me the key. I went to the cedar closet and tried the door. It was locked. I unlocked it, and opened the drawer in which my wife assured me that the clothes had lain. Nothing was to be seen in it but the linen towel which neatly covered the bottom. I lifted it and shook it. The drawer was empty.

"Give me those clothes, if you please."

She brought them to me. I made in my diary a careful memorandum of their naming and numbering; placed the articles myself in the drawer,—an upper drawer, so that there could be no mistake in identifying it; locked the drawer, put the key in my pocket; locked the door of the closet, put the key in my pocket; locked the door of the room in which the closet was, and put that key in my pocket.

We sat down then in the hall, all of us; Allis and Gertrude to fill the mending-basket, I to smoke and consider. I saw Tip coming home with his nurse presently, and started to go down and let him in, when a faint scream from my wife arrested me. I ran past Miss Fellows, who was sitting on the stairs, and into my room. Allis, going in to put away Tip's little plaid aprons, had stopped, rather pale, upon the threshold. Upon the bed lay some clothing, folded, as before, in rude, hideous imitation of the dead.

I took each article in turn, and compared the name and number with the names and numbers in my diary. They were identical throughout. I took the clothes, took the three keys from my pocket, unlocked the "cedar-room" door, unlocked the closet door, unlocked the upper drawer, and looked in. The drawer was empty.

To say that from this time I failed to own—to myself, if not to other people—that some mysterious influence, inexplicable by common or scientific causes, was at work in my house, would be to accuse myself of more obstinacy than even I am capable of. I propounded theory after theory, and gave it up. I arrived at conclusion upon conclusion, and threw them aside. Finally, I held my peace, ceased to talk of "rats," kept my mind in a state of passive vacancy, and narrowly and quietly watched the progress of affairs.

From the date of that escapade with the underclothes confusion reigned in our corner of Nemo's Avenue. That night neither my wife nor myself closed an eye, the house so resounded and re-echoed with the blows of unseen hammers, fists, logs, and knuckles.

Miss Fellows, too, was pale with her vigils, looked troubled, and proposed going home. This I peremptorily vetoed, determined if the woman had any connection, honest or otherwise, with the mystery, to ferret it out.

The following day, just after dinner, I was writing in the library, when a child's cry of fright and pain startled me. It seemed to come from the little yard behind the house, and I hurried thither to behold a singular sight. There was one apple-tree in the yard,—an old, stunted, crooked thing; and in that tree I found my son and heir, Tip, tied fast with a small stout rope. "Tied" does not express it; he was gagged, manacled, twisted, contorted, wound about, crossed and recrossed, held without a chance of motion, scarcely of breath.

"You never tied yourself up here, child?" I asked, as I cut the knots.

The question certainly was unnecessary. No juggler could have bound himself in such a fashion; scarcely, then, a four-years' child. To my continued, clear, and gentle inquiries, the boy replied, persistently and consistently, that nobody tied him there,—"not Cousin Gertrude, nor Bridget, nor the baby, nor mamma, nor Jane, nor papa, nor the black kitty"; he was "just tooken up all at once into the tree, and that was all there was about it." He "s'posed it must have been God, or something like that, did it."

Poor Tip had a hard time of it. Two days after that, while his mother and I sat discussing the incident, and the child was at play upon the floor, he suddenly threw himself at full length, writhing with pain, and begging to "have them pulled out quick!"

"Have *what* pulled out?" exclaimed his terrified mother. She took the child into her lap, and found that he was stuck over from head to foot with large white pins.

"We haven't so many large pins in all the house," she said as soon as he was relieved.

As she spoke the words thirty or forty *small* pins pierced the boy.
Where they came from no one could see. How they came there no one knew.
We looked, and there they were, and Tip was crying and writhing as
before.

For the remainder of that winter we had scarcely a day of quiet. The rumor that "the Hotchkisses had rented a haunted house" leaked out and spread abroad. The frightened servants gave warning, and other frightened servants took their place, to leave in turn. My wife was her own cook and nursery-maid a quarter of the time. The disturbances varied in character with every week, assuming, as time went on, an importunity which, had we not quietly settled it in our own minds "not to be beaten by a noise," would have driven us from the house.

Night after night the mysterious fingers rapped at the windows, the doors, the floors, the walls. Day after day uncomfortable tricks were sprung upon us by invisible agencies. We became used to the noises, so that we slept through them easily; but many of the phenomena were so strikingly unpleasant, and so singularly unsuited to the ordinary conditions of human happiness and housekeeping, that we scarcely became—as one of our excellent deacons had a cheerful habit of exhorting us to become —"resigned."

Upon one occasion we had invited a small and select number of friends to dine. It was to be rather a *recherché* affair for Nemo's Avenue, and my wife had spared no painstaking to suit herself with her table. We had had a comparatively quiet house the night before, so that our cook, who had been with us three days, consented to remain till our guests had been provided for. The soup was good, the pigeons better, the bread was *not* sour, and Allis looked hopeful, and inclined to trust Providence for the gravies and dessert.

It was just as I had begun to carve the beef that I observed my wife suddenly pale, and a telegram from her eyes turned mine in the direction of General Popgun, who sat at her right hand. My sensations "can better be imagined than described" when I saw General Popgun's fork, untouched by any human hand, dancing a jig on his plate. He grasped it and laid it firmly down. As soon as he released his hold it leaped from the table.

"Really—aw—very singular phenomena," began the General; "very singular! I was not prepared to credit the extraordinary accounts of spiritual manifestations in this house, but—aw—Well, I must say—"

Instantly it was Pandemonium at that dinner-table. Dr. Jump's knife, Mrs. M'Ready's plate, and Colonel Hope's tumbler sprang from their places. The pigeons flew from the platter, the caster rattled and rolled, the salt-cellars bounded to and fro, and the gravies, moved by some invisible disturber, spattered all over Mrs. Elias P. Critique's *moire antique*.

Mortified and angered beyond endurance, I for the first time addressed the spirits,—wrenched for the moment into a profound belief that they must be spirits indeed.

"Whatever you are, and wherever you are," I shouted, bringing my hand down hard upon the table, "go out of this room and let us alone!"

The only reply was a furious mazourka of all the dishes on the table. A gentleman present, who had, as he afterward told us, studied the subject of spiritualism somewhat, very sceptically and with unsatisfactory results, observed the performance keenly, and suggested that I should try a gentler method of appeal. Whatever the agent was,—and what it was he had not yet discovered,—he had noticed repeatedly that the quiet modes of meeting it were most effective.

Rather amused, I spoke more softly, addressing the caster, and intimating in my blandest manner that I and my guests would feel under obligations if we could have the room to ourselves till after we had dined. The disturbance gradually ceased, and we had no more of it that day.

A morning or two after Alison chanced to leave half a dozen teaspoons upon the sideboard in the breakfast-room; they were of solid silver, and quite thick. She was going to rub them herself, I believe, and went into the china-closet, which opens from the room, for the silver-soap. The breakfast-room was left vacant, and it was vacant when she returned to it, and she insists, with a quiet conviction which it is hardly reasonable to doubt, that no human being did or could have entered the room without her knowledge. When she came back to the sideboard every one of those spoons lay there *bent double*. She showed them to me when I came home at noon. Had they been pewter toys they could not have been more completely twisted out of shape than they were. I took them without any remarks (I began to feel as if this mystery were assuming uncomfortable proportions), put them away, just as I found them, into a small cupboard in the wall of the breakfast-room, locked the cupboard door with the only key in the house which fitted it, put the key in my inner vest pocket, and meditatively ate my dinner.

About half an hour afterward a neighbor dropped in to groan over the weather and see the baby, and Allis chanced to mention the incident of the spoons.

"Really, Mrs. Hotchkiss!" said the lady, with a slight smile, and that indefinite, quickly smothered change of eye which signifies, "I don't believe a word of it!" "Are you sure that there is not a mistake

somewhere, or a little mental hallucination? The story is very entertaining, but—I beg your pardon—I should be interested to see those spoons."

"Your curiosity shall be gratified, madam," I said, a little testily; and taking the key from my pocket, I led her to the cupboard and unlocked the door. I found those spoons as straight, smooth, and fair as ever spoons had been;—not a dent, not a wrinkle, not a bend nor untrue line could we discover anywhere upon them.

"*Oh!*" said our visitor, significantly.

That lady, be it recorded, then and thenceforward spared no pains to found and strengthen throughout Nemo's Avenue the theory that "the Hotchkisses were getting up all that spiritual nonsense to force their landlord into lower rents. And such respectable people too! It did seem a pity, didn't it?"

One night I was alone in the library. It was late; about half-past eleven, I think. The brightest gas jet was lighted, so that I could see to every portion of the small room. The door was shut. There was no furniture but the book-cases, my table, and chair; no sliding: doors or concealed corners; no nook or cranny in which any human creature could lurk unseen by me; and I say that I was alone.

I had been writing to a confidential friend a somewhat minute account of the disturbances in my house, which were now of about six weeks' duration. I had begged him to come and observe them for himself, and help me out with a solution,—I myself was at a loss for a reasonable one. There certainly seemed to be evidence of superhuman agency; but I was hardly ready yet to commit myself thoroughly to that view of the matter, and—

In the middle of that sentence I laid down my pen. A consciousness, sudden and distinct, came to me that I was not alone in that bright little silent room. Yet to mortal eyes alone I was. I pushed away my writing and looked about. The warm air was empty of outline; the curtains were undisturbed; the little recess under the library table held nothing but my own feet; there was no sound but the ordinary rap-rapping on the floor, to which I had by this time become so accustomed that often it passed unnoticed. I rose and examined the room thoroughly, until quite satisfied that I was its only visible occupant; then sat down again. The rappings had meantime become loud and impatient.

I had learned that very week from Miss Fellows the spiritual alphabet with which she was in the habit of "communicating with her dead mother." I had never asked her, nor had she proposed, to use it herself for my benefit. I had meant to try all other means of investigation before resorting to it. Now, however being alone, and being perplexed and annoyed by my sense of having invisible company, I turned and spelled out upon the table, so many raps to a letter till the question was complete:—

"*What do you want of me?*"

Instantly the answer came rapping back:—

"*Stretch down your hand.*"

I put my fingers under the table, and I felt, as indubitably as I ever felt a touch in my life, the grasp of a *warm, human hand*.

I added to the broken paragraph in the letter to my friend a brief account of the occurrence, and reiterated my entreaties that he would come at his earliest convenience to my house. He was an Episcopal clergyman, by the way, and I considered that his testimony would uphold my fast-sinking character for veracity among my townspeople. I began to have an impression that this dilemma in which I found myself was a pretty serious one for a man of peaceable disposition and honest intentions to be in.

About this time I undertook to come to a little better understanding with Miss Fellows. I took her away alone, and having tried my best not to frighten the life out of her by my grave face, asked her seriously and kindly to tell me whether she supposed herself to have any connection with the phenomena in my house. To my surprise she answered promptly that she thought she had. I repressed a whistle, and "asked for information."

"The presence of a medium renders easy what would otherwise be impossible," she replied. "I offered to go away, Mr. Hotchkiss, in the beginning."

I assured her that I had no desire to have her go away at present, and begged her to proceed.

"The Influences in the house are strong, as I have said before," she continued, looking through me and beyond me with her vacant eyes. "Something is wrong. They are never at rest. I hear them. I feel them. I see them. They go up and down the stairs with me. I find them in my room. I see them gliding

about. I see them standing now, with their hands almost upon your shoulders."

I confess to a kind of chill that crept down my backbone at these words, and to having turned my head and stared hard at the book-cases behind me.

"But they—I mean something—rapped one night before you came," I suggested.

"Yes, and they might rap after I was gone. The simple noises are not uncommon in places where there are no better means of communication. The extreme methods of expression, such as you have witnessed this winter, are, I doubt not, practicable only when the system of a medium is accessible. They write all sorts of messages for you. You would ridicule them. I do not repeat them. You and Cousin Alison do not see, hear, feel as I do. We are differently made. There are lying spirits and true, good spirits and bad. Sometimes the bad deceive and distress me, but sometimes—sometimes my mother comes."

She lowered her voice reverently, and I was fain to hush the laugh upon my lips. Whatever the thing might prove to be to me, it was daily comfort to the nervous, unstrung, lonely woman, whom to suspect of trickery I began to think was worse than stupidity.

From the time of my midnight experience in the library I allowed myself to look a little further into the subject of "communications." Miss Fellows wrote them out at my request whenever they "came" to her. Writers on Spiritualism have described the process so frequently, that it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon it at length. The influences took her unawares in the usual manner. In the usual manner her arm—to all appearance the passive instrument of some unseen, powerful agency—jerked and glided over the paper, writing in curious, scrawly characters, never in her own neat little old-fashioned hand, messages of which, on coming out from the "trance" state, she would have-no memory; of many of which at any time she could have had no comprehension. These messages assumed every variety of character from the tragic to the ridiculous, and a large portion of them had no point whatever.

One day Benjamin West desired to give me lessons in oil-painting. The next, my brother Joseph, dead now for ten years, asked forgiveness for his share in a little quarrel of ours which had embittered a portion of his last days,—of which, by the way, I am confident that Miss Fellows knew nothing. At one time I received a long discourse enlightening me on the arrangement of the "spheres" in the disembodied state of existence. At another, Alison's dead grandfather pathetically reminded her of a certain Sunday afternoon at "meetin'" long ago, when the child Allis hooked his wig off in the long prayer with a bent pin and a piece of fish-line.

One day we were saddened by the confused wail of a lost spirit, who represented his agonies as greater than soul could bear, and clamored for relief. Moved to pity, I inquired:—

"What can we do for you?"

Unseen knuckles rapped back the touching answer:—

"Give me a piece of squash pie!"

I remarked to Miss Fellows that I supposed this to be a modern and improved version of the ancient drop of water which was to cool the tongue of Dives. She replied that it was the work of a mischievous spirit who had nothing better to do; they would not infrequently take in that way the reply from the lips of another. I am not sure whether we are to have lips in the spiritual world, but I think that was her expression.

Through all the nonsense and confusion of these daily messages, however, one restless, indefinite purpose ran; a struggle for expression that we could not grasp; a sense of something unperformed which was tormenting somebody.

One week we had been so much more than usually annoyed by the dancing of tables, shaking of doors, and breaking of crockery, that I lost all patience, and at length vehemently dared our unseen tormentors to show themselves.

"Who and what are you?" I cried, "destroying the peace of my family in this unendurable fashion. If you are mortal man, I will meet you as mortal man. Whatever you are, in the name of all fairness, let me see you!"

"If you see me it will be death to you," tapped the Invisible.

"Then let it be death to me! Come on! When shall I have the pleasure of an interview?"

"To-morrow night at six o'clock."

"To-morrow at six, then, be it."

And to-morrow at six it was. Allis had a headache, and was lying down upstairs. Miss Fellows and I were with her, busy with cologne and tea, and one thing and another. I had, in fact, forgotten all about my superhuman appointment, when, just as the clock struck six, a low cry from Miss Fellows arrested my attention.

"I see it!" she said.

"See what?"

"A tall man wrapped in a sheet."

"Your eyes are the only ones so favored, it happens," I said, with a superior smile. But while I spoke Allis started from the pillows with a look of fear.

"*I* see it, Fred!" she exclaimed, under her breath.

"Women's imagination!" for I saw nothing.

I saw nothing for a moment; then I must depose and say that I *did* see a tall figure, covered from head to foot with a sheet, standing still in the middle of the room. I sprang upon it with raised arm; my wife states that I was within a foot of it when the sheet dropped. It dropped at my feet,—nothing but a sheet. I picked it up and shook it; only a sheet.

"It is one of those old linen ones of grandmother's," said Allis, examining it; "there are only six, marked in pink with the boar's-head in the corner. It came from the blue chest up garret. They have not been taken out for years."

I took the sheet back to the blue chest myself,—having first observed the number, as I had done before with the underclothes; and locked it in. I came back to my room and sat down by Allis. In about three minutes we saw the figure standing still as before, in the middle of the room. As before, I sprang at it, and as before the drapery dropped, and there was nothing there. I picked up the sheet and turned to the numbered corner. It was the same that I had locked into the blue chest.

Miss Fellows was inclined to fear that I had really endangered my life by this ghostly rendezvous. I can testify, however, that it was by no means "death to me," nor did I experience any ill effects from the event.

My friend, the clergyman, made me the desired visit in January. For a week after his arrival, as if my tormentors were bent on convincing my almost only friend that I was a fool or a juggler, we had no disturbance at all beyond the ordinary rappings. These, the reverend gentleman confessed were of a singular nature, but expressed a polite desire to see some of the extraordinary manifestations of which I had written him.

But one day he had risen with some formality to usher a formal caller to the-door, when, to his slight amazement and my secret delight, his chair—an easy-chair of good proportions—deliberately jumped up and hopped after him across the room. From this period the mystery "manifested" itself to his heart's content. Not only did the rocking-chairs, and the cane-seat chairs, and the round-backed chairs, and Tip's little chairs, and the affghans chase him about, and the heavy *tête-à-tête* in the corner evince symptoms of agitation at his approach, but the piano trundled a solemn minuet at him; the heavy walnut centre-table rose half-way to the ceiling under his eyes; the marble-topped stand, on which he sat to keep it still, lifted itself and him a foot from the ground; his coffee-cup spilled over when he tried to drink, shaken by an unseen elbow; his dressing-cases disappeared from his bureau and hid themselves, none knew how or when, in his closets and under his bed; mysterious uncanny figures, dressed in his best clothes and stuffed with straw, stood in his room when he came to it at night; his candlesticks walked, untouched by hands, from the mantel into space; keys and chains fell from the air at his feet; and raw turnips dropped from the solid ceiling into his soup-plate.

"Well, Garth," said I one day, confidentially, "how are things? Begin to have a 'realizing sense' of it, eh?"

"Let me think awhile," he answered.

I left him to his reflections, and devoted my attention for a day or two to Gertrude Fellows. She seemed to have been of late receiving less ridiculous, less indefinite, and more important messages from her spiritual acquaintances. The burden of them was directed at me. They were sometimes confused, but never contradictory, and the sum of them, as I cast it up, was this:—

A former occupant of the house, one Mr. Timothy Jabbers, had been in early life connected in the dry-goods business with my wife's father, and had, unknown to any but himself, defrauded his partner of a considerable sum for a young swindler,—some five hundred dollars, I think. This fact, kept in the knowledge only of God and the guilty man, had been his agony since his death. In the parlance of Spiritualism, he could never "purify" his soul and rise to a higher "sphere" till he had made restitution,—though to that part of the communications I paid little attention. This money my wife, as her father's sole living heir, was entitled to, and this money I was desired to claim for her from Mr. Jabbers's estate, then in the hands of some wealthy nephews.

I made some inquiries which led to the discovery that there had been a Mr. Timothy Jabbers once the occupant of our house, that he had at one period been in business with my wife's father, that he was now many years dead, and that his nephews in New York were his heirs. We never attempted to bring any claim upon them, for three reasons: in the first place, because we knew we shouldn't get the money; in the second, because such a procedure would give so palpable an "object" in people's eyes for the disturbances at the house that we should, in all probability, lose the entire confidence of the entire non-spiritualistic community; thirdly, because I thought it problematical whether any constable of ordinary size and courage could be found who would undertake to summon the witness to testify in the county court at Atkinsville.

I mention the matter only because, on the theories of Spiritualism, it appeared to give some point and occasion to the phenomena, and their infesting that particular house.

Whether poor Mr. Timothy Jabbers felt relieved by having unburdened himself of his confession, I cannot state; but after he found that I paid some attention to his messages, he gradually ceased to express himself through turnips and cold keys; the rappings grew less violent and frequent, and finally ceased altogether. Shortly after that Miss Fellows went home.

Garth and I talked matters over the day after she left. He had brought his "thinking" to a close, whittled his opinions to a point, and was quite ready to stick them into their places for my benefit, and leave them there, as George Garth left all his opinions, immovable as the everlasting hills.

"How much had she to do with it now,—the Fellows?"

"Precisely what she said she had, no more. She was a medium, but not a juggler."

"No trickery about the affair, then?"

"No trickery could have sent that turnip into my soup-plate, or that candlestick walking into the air. There *is* a great deal of trickery mixed with such phenomena. The next case you come across may be a regular cheat; but you will find it out,—you'll find it out. You've had three months to find this out, and you couldn't. Whatever may be the explanation of the mystery, the man who can witness what you and I have witnessed, and pronounce it the trick of that incapable, washed-out woman, is either a liar or a fool.

"You understand yourself and your wife, and you've tested your servants faithfully; so we're somewhat narrowed in our conclusions."

"Well, then, what's the matter?"

I was, I confess, a little startled by the vehemence with which my friend brought his clerical fist down upon the table, and exclaimed:—

"The Devil?"

"Dear me, Garth, don't swear; you in search of a pulpit just at this time, too!"

"I tell you I never spoke more solemnly. I cannot, in the face of facts, ascribe all these phenomena to human agency. Something that comes we know not whence, and goes we know not whither, is at work there in the dark. I am driven to grant to it an extra-human power. Yet when that flabby Miss Fellows, in the trance state, undertakes to bring me messages from my dead wife, and when she attempts to recall the most tender memories of our life together, I cannot,"—he paused and turned his face a little away,—"it would be pleasant to think I had a word from Mary, but I cannot think she is there. I don't believe good spirits concern themselves with this thing. It has in its fair developments too much nonsense and too much positive sin; read a few numbers of the 'Banner,' or attend a convention or two, if you want to be convinced of that. If they 're not good spirits they're bad ones, that's all. I've dipped into the subject in various ways since I have been here; consulted the mediums, talked with the prophets; I'm convinced that there is no dependence to be placed on the thing. You never learn anything from it that it is worth while to learn; above all, you never can trust its *prophecies*. It is evil,

—*evil* at the root; and except by physicians and scientific men it had better be let alone. They may yet throw light on it; you and I cannot. I propose for myself to drop it henceforth. In fact, it looks too much toward putting one's self on terms of intimacy with the Prince of the Powers of the Air to please me."

"You're rather positive, considering the difficulty of the subject," I said.

The truth is, and it may be about time to own to it, that the three months' siege against the mystery, which I had held so pertinaciously that winter, had driven me to broad terms of capitulation. I assented to most of my friend's conclusions, but where he stopped I began a race for further light. I understood then, for the first time, the peculiar charm which I had often seen work so fatally with dabblers in Spiritualism. The fascination of the thing was upon me. I ransacked the papers for advertisements of mediums. I went from city to city at their mysterious calls. I held *séances* in my parlor, and frightened my wife with messages—some of them ghastly enough—from her dead relatives, I ran the usual gauntlet of strange seers in strange places, who told me my name, the names of all my friends, dead or alive, my secret aspirations and peculiar characteristics, my past history and future prospects.

For a long time they never made a failure. Absolute strangers told me facts about myself which not even my own wife knew: whether they spoke with the tongues of devils, or whether, by some unknown laws of magnetism, they simply *read my thoughts*, I am not even now prepared to say. I think if they had made a miss I should have been spared some suffering. Their communications had sometimes a ridiculous aimlessness, and occasionally a subtle deviltry coated about with religion, like a pill with sugar, but often a significant and fearful accuracy.

Once, I remember, they foretold an indefinite calamity to be brought upon me before sunset on the following Saturday. Before sunset on that Saturday I lost a thousand dollars in mining stock which had stood in all Eastern eyes as solid as its own gold. At another time I was warned by a medium in Philadelphia that my wife, then visiting in Boston, was taken suddenly ill. I had left her in perfect health; but feeling nevertheless uneasy, I took the night train and went directly to her. I found her in the agonies of a severe attack of pleurisy, just preparing to send a telegram to me.

"Their prophecies are unreliable, notwithstanding coincidences," wrote George Garth. "Let them alone, Fred, I beg of you. You will regret it if you don't."

"Once let me be fairly taken in and cheated to my face," I made reply, "and I may compress my views to your platform. Until then I must gang my own gait."

I now come to the remarkable portion of my story,—at least it seems to me the remarkable portion under my present conditions of vision.

In August of the summer following Miss Fellows's visit, and the manifestations in my house at Atkinsville, I was startled one pleasant morning, while sitting in the office of a medium in Washington Street in Boston, by a singularly unpleasant communication.

"The second day of next May," wrote the medium,—she wrote with the forefinger of one hand upon the palm of the other,—"the second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon, you will be summoned into a spiritual state of existence."

"I suppose, in good English, that means I'm going to die," I replied, carelessly. "Would you be so good as to write it with a pen and ink, that there may be no mistake?"

She wrote it distinctly: "The second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon."

I pocketed the slip of paper for further use, and sat reflecting.

"How do you know it?"

"*I* don't know it. I am told."

"Who tells you?"

"Jerusha Babcock and George Washington."

Jerusha Babcock was the name of my maternal grandmother. What could the woman know of my maternal grandmother? It did not occur to me, I believe, to wonder what occasion George Washington could find to concern himself about my dying or my living. There stood the uncanny Jerusha as pledge that my informant knew what she was talking about. I left the office with an uneasy sinking at the heart. There was a coffin-store near by, and I remember the peculiar interest with which I studied the quilting of the satin lining, and the peculiar crawling sensation which crept to my fingers' ends.

Determined not to be unnecessarily alarmed, I spent the next three weeks in testing the communication. I visited one more medium in Boston, two in New York, one in New Haven, one in Philadelphia, and one in a little out-of-the-way Connecticut village, where I spent a night, and did not know a soul. None of these people, I am confident, had ever seen my face or heard, my name before.

It was a circumstance calculated at least to arrest attention, that these seven people, each unknown to the others, and without concert with the others, repeated the ugly message which had sought me out through the happy summer morning in Washington Street. There was no hesitation, no doubt, no contradiction. I could not trip them or cross-question them out of it. Unerring, assured, and consistent, the fiat went forth:—

"On the second of May, at one o'clock in the afternoon, you will pass out of the body."

I would not have believed them if I could have helped myself, I sighed for the calm days when I had laughed at medium and prophet, and sneered at ghost and rapping. I took lodgings in Philadelphia, locked my doors, and paced my rooms all day and half the night, tortured by my thoughts, and consulting books of medicine to discover what evidence I could by any possibility give of unsuspected disease. I was at that time absolutely well and strong; absolutely well and strong I was forced to confess myself, after having waded through Latin adjectives and anatomical illustrations enough to make a ghost of Hercules. I devoted two days to researches in genealogical pathology, and was rewarded for my pains by discovering myself to be the possessor of one great-aunt who had died of heart disease at the advanced age of two months.

Heart disease, then, I settled upon. The alternative was accident. "Which will it be?" I asked in vain. Upon this point my friends the mediums held a delicate reserve. "The Influences were confusing, and they were not prepared to state with exactness."

"Why *don't* you come home?" my wife wrote in distress and perplexity.
"You promised to come ten days ago, and they need you at the office, and
I need you more than anybody."

"I need you more than anybody!" When the little clinging needs of three weeks grew into the great want of a lifetime,—O, how could I tell *her* what was coming?

I did not tell her. When I had hurried home, when she came bounding through the hall to meet me, when she held up her face, half laughing, half crying, and flushing and paling, to mine,—the poor little face that by and by would never watch and glow at my coming,—I could not tell her.

When the children were in bed and we were alone after tea, she climbed gravely up into my lap from the little cricket on which she had been sitting, and put her hands upon my shoulders.

"You're sober, Fred, and pale. Something ails you, you know, and you are going to tell me all about it."

Her pretty, mischievous face swam suddenly before my eyes. I kissed it, put her gently down as I would a child, and went away alone till I felt more like myself.

The winter set in gloomily enough. It may have been the snow-storms, of which we had an average of one every other day, or it may have been the storm in my own heart which I was weathering alone.

Whether to believe those people, or whether to laugh at their predictions; whether to tell my wife, or whether to continue silent,—these questions tormented me through many wakeful nights and dreary days. My fears were in nowise allayed by a letter which' I received one day in January from Gertrude Fellows.

"Why don't you read it aloud? What's the news?" asked Alison. But at one glance over the opening page I folded the sheet, and did not read it till I could lock myself into the library alone. The letter ran:—

"I have been much disturbed lately on your behalf. My mother and your brother Joseph appear to me nearly every day, and charge me with some message to you which I cannot distinctly grasp. It seems to be clear, however, as far as this: that some calamity is to befall you in the spring,—in May, I should say. It seems to me to be of the nature of death. I do not learn that you can avoid it, but that they desire you to be prepared for it."

After receiving this last warning, certain uncomfortable words filed through my brain for days together:—

"Set thine house in order, for thou shalt surely die."

"Never knew you read your Bible so much in all your life," said Alison, with a pretty pout. "You'll grow so good that I can't begin to keep up with you. When I try to read my polyglot, the baby comes and bites the corners, and squeals till I put it away and take him up."

As the winter wore away I arrived at this conclusion: If I were in fact destined to death in the spring, my wife could not help herself or me by the knowledge of it. If events proved that I was deluded in the dread, and I had shared it with her, she would have had all her pain and anxiety to no purpose. In either case I would insure her happiness for these few months; they might be her last happy months. At any rate happiness was a good thing, and she could not have too much of it. To say that I myself felt no uneasiness as to the event would be affectation. The old sword of Damocles hung over me. The hair might hold, but it was a hair.

As the winter passed,—it seemed to me as if winter had never passed so rapidly before,—I found it natural to watch my health with the most careful scrutiny; to avoid improper food and undue excitement; to refrain from long and perilous journeys; to consider whether each new cook who entered the family might have occasion to poison me. It was an anomaly which I did not observe at the time, that while in my heart of hearts I expected to breathe my last upon the second of May, I yet cherished a distinct plan of fighting, cheating, persuading, or overmatching death.

I closed a large speculation on which I had been inclined, in the summer, to "fly"; Alison could never manage petroleum ventures. I wound up my business in a safe and systematic manner. "Hotchkiss must mean to retire," people said. I revised my will, and held one long and necessary conversation with my wife about her future, should "anything happen" to me. She listened and planned without tears or exclamations; but after we had finished the talk, she crept up to me with a quiet, puzzled sadness that I could not bear.

"You are growing so blue lately, Fred! Why, what can 'happen' to you? I don't believe God can mean to leave me here after you are gone; I don't believe he *can* mean to!"

All through the sweet spring days we were much together. I went late to the office. I came home early. I spent the beautiful twilights at home. I followed her about the house. I made her read to me, sing to me, sit by me, touch me with her little, soft hand. I watched her face till the sight choked me. How soon before she would know? How soon?

"I feel as if we'd just been married over again," she said one day, pinching my cheek with a low laugh. "You are so good! I'd no idea you cared so much about me. By and by, when you get over this lazy fit and go about as you used to, I shall feel so deserted,—you've no idea! I believe I will order a little widow's cap, and put it on, and wear it about,—now, what do you mean by getting up and stalking off to look out of the window? Fine prospect you must have, with the curtain down!"

It is, to say the least, an uncomfortable state of affairs when you find yourself drawing within a fortnight of the day on which seven people have assured you that, you are going to shuffle off this mortal coil. It is not agreeable to have no more idea than the dead (probably not as much) of the manner in which your demise is to be effected. It is not in all respects a cheerful mode of existence to dress yourself in the morning with the reflection that you are never to half wear out your new mottled coat, and that this striped neck-tie will be laid away by and by in a little box, and cried over by your wife; to hear your immediate acquaintances all wondering why you *don't* get yourself some new boots; to know that your partner has been heard to say that you are growing dull at trade; to find the children complaining that you have engaged no rooms yet at the beach; to look into their upturned eyes and wonder how long it is going to take for them to forget you; to go out after breakfast and wonder how many more times you will shut that front door; to come home in the perfumed dusk and see the faces pressed against the window to watch for you, and feel warm arms about your neck, and wonder how soon they will shrink from the chill of you; to feel the glow of the budding world, and think how blossom and fruit will crimson and drop without you, and wonder how the blossom and fruit of life can slip from you in the time of violet smells and orioles.

April, spattered with showers and dripped upon a little with ineffectual suns, slid restlessly away from me, and I locked my office door one night, reflecting that it was the night of the first of May, and that to-morrow was the second.

I spent the evening alone with my wife. I have spent more agreeable evenings. She came and nestled at my feet, and the firelight painted her cheeks and hair, and her eyes followed me, and her hand was in mine; but I have spent more agreeable evenings.

The morning of the second broke without a cloud. Blue jays flashed past my window; a bed of royal pansies opened to the sun, and the smell of the fresh, moist earth came up where Tip was digging in his little garden.

"Not feeling exactly like work to-day," as I told my wife, I did not go to the office. I asked her to come into the library and sit with me. I remember that she had a pudding to bake, and refused at first; then yielded, laughing, and said that I must go without my dessert. I thought it highly probable that I *should* go without my dessert.

I remember precisely how pretty she was that morning. She wore a bright dress,—blue, I think,—and a white crocus in her hair; she had a dainty white apron tied on, "to cook in," she said, and her pink nails were powdered with flour. Her eyes laughed and twinkled at me. I remember thinking how young she looked, and how unready for suffering. I remember that she brought the baby in after a while, and that Tip came all muddy from the garden, dragging his tiny hoe over the carpet; that the window was open, and that, while we all sat there together, a little brown bird brought some twine and built a nest on an apple-bough just in sight.

I find it difficult to explain the anxiety which I felt, as the, morning wore on, that dinner should be punctually upon the table at half past twelve. But I now understand perfectly, as I did not once, the old philosophy: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

It was ironing-day, and our dinners were apt to be late upon ironing-days. I concluded that, if the soup were punctual, and not too hot, I could leave myself ten or perhaps fifteen unoccupied minutes before one o'clock. It strikes me as curious now, the gravity with which this thought underran the fever and pain and dread of the morning.

I fell to reading my hymn-book about twelve o'clock, and when Alison called me to dinner I did not remember to consult my watch.

The soup was good, though hot. A grim Epicurean stolidity crept over me as I sat down before it. A man had better make the most of his last chance at mock-turtle. Fifteen minutes were enough to die in.

I am confident that I ate more rapidly than is consistent with consummate elegance. I remember that Tip imitated me, and that Allis opened her eyes at me. I recall distinctly the fact that I had passed my plate a second time.

I had passed my plate a second time, I say, and had just raised the spoon to my lips, when it fell from my palsied hand; for the little bronze clock upon the mantel struck one.

I sat with drawn breath and glared at it; at the relentless silver hands; at the fierce, and, as it seemed to me, *living* face of the Time on its top, who stooped and swung his scythe at me.

"I would like a very *big* white potato," said Tip, breaking the solemn silence.

You may or may not believe me, but it is a fact that that is all which happened.

* * * * *

I slowly turned my head. I resumed my spoon.

"The kitchen clock is nearly half an hour too slow," observed Alison. "I told Jane that you would have it fixed this week."

I finished my soup in silence.

It may interest the reader to learn that up to the date of this article
"I still live."

"Little Tommy Tucker."

There were but three persons in the car; a merchant, deep in the income list of the "Traveller," an old lady with two bandboxes, a man in the corner with his hat pulled over his eyes.

Tommy opened the door, peeped in, hesitated, looked into another car, came back, gave his little fiddle a shove on his shoulder, and walked in.

"Hi! Little Tommy Tucker
Plays for his supper,"

shouted the young exquisite lounging on the platform in tan-colored coat and lavender kid gloves.

"O Kids, you're there, are you? Well, I'd rather play for it than loaf for it, *I* had," said Tommy, stoutly.

The merchant shot a careless glance over the top of his paper, at the sound of this *petit dialogue*, and the old lady smiled benignly; the man in the corner neither looked nor smiled.

Nobody would have thought, to look at that man in the corner, that he was at that very moment deserting a wife and five children. Yet that is precisely what he was doing.

A villain? O no, that is not the word. A brute? Not by any means. A man, weak, unfortunate, discouraged, and selfish, as weak, unfortunate, and discouraged people are apt to be; that was the amount of it. His panoramas never paid him for the use of his halls. His travelling tin-type saloon had trundled him into a sheriff's hands. His petroleum speculations had crashed like a bubble. His black and gold sign, *J. Harmon, Photographer*, had swung now for nearly a year over the dentist's rooms, and he had had the patronage of precisely six old women and three babies. He had drifted to the theatre in the evenings, he did not care now to remember how many times,—the fellows asked him, and it made him forget his troubles; the next morning his empty purse would gape at him, and Annie's mouth would quiver. A man must have his glass too, on Sundays, and—well, perhaps a little oftener. He had not always been fit to go to work after it; and Annie's mouth would quiver. It will be seen at once that it was exceedingly hard on a man that his wife's mouth should quiver. "Confound it! Why couldn't she scold or cry? These still women aggravated a fellow beyond reason."

Well, then the children had been sick; measles, whooping-cough, scarlatina, mumps, he was sure he did not know what not; every one of them from the baby up. There was medicine, and there were doctor's bills, and there was sitting up with them at night,—their mother usually did that. Then she must needs pale down herself, like a poorly finished photograph; all her color and roundness and sparkle gone; and if ever a man liked to have a pretty wife about, it was he. Moreover she had a cough, and her shoulders had grown round, stooping so much over the heavy baby, and her breath came short, and she had a way of being tired. Then she never stirred out of the house,—he found out about that one day; she had no bonnet, and her shawl had been cut up into blankets for the crib. The children had stopped going to school. "They could not buy the new arithmetic," their mother said, half under her breath. Yesterday there was nothing for dinner but Johnny-cake, nor a large one at that. To-morrow the saloon rents were due. Annie talked about pawning one of the bureaus. Annie had had great purple rings under her eyes for six weeks.

He would not bear the purple rings and quivering mouth any longer. He hated the sight of her, for the sight stung him. He hated the corn-cake and the untaught children. He hated the whole dreary, dragging, needy home. The ruin of it dogged him like a ghost, and he should be the ruin of it as long as he stayed in it. Once fairly rid of him, his scolding and drinking, his wasting and failing, Annie would send the children to work, and find ways to live. She had energy and invention, a plenty of it in her young, fresh days, before he came across her life to drag her down. Perhaps he should make a golden fortune and come back to her some summer day with a silk dress and servants, and make it all up; in theory this was about what he expected to do. But if his ill luck went westward with him, and the silk dress never turned up, why, she would forget him, and be better off, and that would be the end of it.

So here he was, ticketed and started, fairly bound for Colorado, sitting with his hat over his eyes, and thinking about it.

"Hm-m. Asleep," pronounced Tommy, with his keen glance into the corner.
"Guess I'll wake him up."

He laid his cheek down on his little fiddle,—you don't know how Tommy loved that little fiddle,—and struck up a gay, rollicking tune,—

"I care for nobody and nobody cares for me."

The man in the corner sat quite still. When it was over he shrugged his shoulders.

"When folks are asleep they don't hist their shoulders, not as a general thing," observed Tommy. "We'll try another."

Tommy tried another. Nobody knows what possessed the little fellow, the little fellow himself least of all; but he tried this:—

"We've lived and loved together,
Through many changing years."

It was a new tune, and he wanted practice, perhaps.

The train jarred and started slowly; the gloved exquisite, waiting hackmen, baggage-masters, coffee-counter, and station-walls slid back; engine-house and prison towers, and labyrinths of tracks slipped by; lumber and shipping took their place, with clear spaces between, where sea and sky shone through. The speed of the train increased with a sickening sway; old wharves shot past, with the green water sucking at their piers; the city shifted by and out of sight.

"We've lived and loved together,"

played Tommy in a little plaintive wail,

"We've lived and loved—"

"Confound the boy!" Harmon pushed up his hat with a jerk, and looked out of the window. The night was coming on. A dull sunset lay low on the water, burning like a bale-fire through the snaky trail of smoke that went writhing past the car windows. Against lonely signal-houses and little deserted beaches the water was plashing drearily, and playing monotonous bases to Tommy's wail:—

"Through many changing years,
Many changing years."

It was a nuisance, this music in the cars. Why didn't somebody stop it? What did the child mean by playing that? They had left the city far behind now. He wondered how far. He pushed up the window fiercely, venting the passion of the music on the first thing that came in his way, and thrust his head out to look back. Through the undulating smoke, out in the pale glimmer from the sky, he could see a low, red tongue of land, covered with the twinkle of lighted homes. Somewhere there, in among the quivering warmth, was one—

What was that boy about now? Not "Home, sweet Home?" But that was what Tommy was about.

They were lighting the lamps now in the car. Harmon looked at the conductor's face, as the sickly yellow flare struck on it, with a curious sensation. He wondered if he had a wife and five children; if he ever thought of running away from them; what he would think of a man who did; what most people would think; what she would think. She!—ah, she had it all to find out yet.

"There's no place like home,"

said Tommy's little fiddle,

"O, no place like home."

Now this fiddle of Tommy's may have had a crack or so in it, and I cannot assert that Tommy never struck a false note; but the man in the corner was not fastidious as a musical critic; the sickly light was flickering through the car, the quiver on the red flats was quite out of sight, the train was shrieking away into the west,—the baleful, lonely west,—which was dying fast now out there upon the sea, and it is a fact that his hat went slowly down over his face again, and that his face went slowly down upon his arm.

There, in the lighted home out upon the flats, that had drifted by forever, she sat waiting now. It was about time for him to be in to supper; she was beginning to wonder a little where he was; she was keeping the coffee hot, and telling the children not to touch their father's pickles; she had set the table and drawn the chairs; his pipe lay filled for him upon the shelf over the stove. Her face in the light was worn and white,—the dark rings very dark; she was trying to hush the boys, teasing for their supper; begging them to wait a few minutes, only a few minutes, he would surely be here then. She would put the baby down presently, and stand at the window with her hands—Annie's hands once were not so thin—raised to shut out the light,—watching, watching.

The children would eat their supper; the table would stand untouched, with his chair in its place; still she would go to the window, and stand watching, watching. O, the long night that she must stand watching, and the days, and the years!

"Sweet, sweet home,"

played Tommy.

By and by there was no more of "Sweet Home."

"How about that cove with his head lopped down on his arms?" speculated Tommy, with a businesslike air.

He had only stirred once, then put his face down again. But he was awake, awake in every nerve; and listening, to the very curve of his fingers. Tommy knew that; it being part of his trade to learn how to use his eyes.

The sweet, loyal passion of the music—it would take worse playing than Tommy's to drive the sweet, loyal passion out of Annie Laurie—grew above the din of the train:—

"'T was there that Annie Laurie
Gave me her promise true."

She used to sing that, the man was thinking,—this other Annie of his own. Why, she had been his own, and he had loved her once. How he had loved her! Yes, she used to sing that when he went to see her on Sunday nights, before they were married,—in her pink, plump, pretty days. Annie used to be very pretty.

"Gave me her promise true,"

hummed the little fiddle.

"That's a fact," said poor Annie's husband, jerking the words out under his hat, "and kept it too, she did."

Ah, how Annie had kept it! The whole dark picture of her married years,—the days of work and pain, the nights of watching, the patient voice, the quivering mouth, the tact and the planning and the trust for to-morrow, the love that had borne all things, believed all things, hoped all things, uncomplaining,—rose into outline to tell him how she had kept it.

"Her face is as the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on,"

suggested the little fiddle.

That it should be darkened forever, the sweet face! and that he should do it,—he, sitting here, with his ticket bought, bound for Colorado.

"And ne'er forget will I,"

murmured the little fiddle.

He would have knocked the man down who had told him twenty years ago that he ever should forget; that he should be here to-night, with his ticket bought, bound for Colorado.

But it was better for her to be free from him. He and his cursed ill-luck were a drag on her and the children, and would always be. What was that she had said once?

"Never mind, Jack, I can bear anything as long as I have you."

And here he was, with his ticket bought, bound for Colorado.

He wondered if it were ever too late in the day for a fellow to make a man of himself. He wondered—

"And she's a' the world to me,
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me down and dee,"

sang the little fiddle, triumphantly.

Harmon shook himself, and stood up. The train was slackening; the lights of a way-station bright ahead. It was about time for supper and his mother, so Tommy put down his fiddle and handed around his faded cap.

The merchant threw him a penny, and returned to his tax list. The old lady was fast asleep with her mouth open.

"Come here," growled Harmon, with his eyes very bright. Tommy shrank back, almost afraid of him.

"Come here," softening, "I won't hurt you. I tell you, boy, you don't know what you've done to-night."

"Done, sir?" Tommy couldn't help laughing, though there was a twinge of pain at his stout little heart, as he fingered the solitary penny in the faded cap. "Done? Well, I guess I've waked you up, sir, which was about what I meant to do."

"Yes, that is it," said Harmon, very distinctly, pushing up his hat, "you've waked me up. Here, hold your cap."

They had puffed into the station now, and stopped. He emptied his purse into the little cap, shook it clean of paper and copper alike, was out of the car and off the train before Tommy could have said Jack Robinson.

"My eyes!" gasped Tommy, "that chap had a ticket for New York, sure! Methuselah! Look a here! One, two, three,—must have been crazy; that's it, crazy."

"He'll never find out," muttered Harmon, turning away from the station lights, and striking back through the night for the red flats and home. "He'll never find out what he has done, nor, please God, shall she."

It was late when he came in sight of the house; it had been a long tramp across the tracks, and hard; he being stung by a bitter wind from the east all the way, tired with the monotonous treading of the sleepers, and with crouching in perilous niches to let the trains go by.

She stood watching at the window, as he had known that she would stand, her hands raised to her face, her figure cut out against the warm light of the room.

He stood still a moment and looked at her, hidden in the shadow of the street, thinking his own thoughts. The publican, in the old story, hardly entered the beautiful temple with more humble step than he his home that night.

She sprang to meet him, pale with her watching and fear.

"Worried, Annie, were you? I haven't been drinking; don't be frightened,—no, not the theatre, either, this time. Some business, dear; business that delayed me. I'm sorry you were worried, I am, Annie. I've had a long walk. It is pleasant here. I believe I'm tired, Annie."

He faltered, and turned away his face.

"Dear me," said Annie, "why, you poor fellow, you are all tired out. Sit right up here by the fire, and I will bring the coffee. I've tried so hard not to let it boil away, you don't know, Jack, and I was so afraid something had happened to you."

Her face, her voice, her touch, seemed more than he could bear for a minute, perhaps. He gulped down his coffee, choking.

"Annie, look here." He put down his cup, trying to smile and make a jest of the words. "Suppose a fellow had it in him to be a rascal, and nobody ever knew it, eh?"

"I should rather not know it, if I were his wife," said Annie, simply.

"But you couldn't care anything more for him, you know, Annie?"

"I don't know," said Annie, shaking her head with a little perplexed smile, "you would be just Jack, *any how*."

Jack coughed, took up his coffee-cup, set it down hard, strode once or twice across the room, kissed the baby in the crib, kissed his wife, and sat down again, winking at the fire.

"I wonder if He had anything to do with sending him," he said, presently, under his breath.

"Sending whom?" asked puzzled Annie.

"Business, dear, just business. I was thinking of a boy who did a little job for me to-night, that's all."

And that is all that she knows to this day about the man sitting in the corner, with his hat over his eyes, bound for Colorado.

One of the Elect.

"Down, Muff! down!"

Muff obeyed; he took his paws off from his master's shoulders with an injured look in his great mute

eyes, and consoled himself by growling at the cow. Mr. Ryck put a sudden stop to a series of gymnastic exercises commenced between them, by throwing the creature's hay down upon her horns; then he watered his horse, fed the sheep, took a look at the hens, and closed all the doors tightly; for the night was cold, so cold that he shivered, even under that great bottle-green coat of his: he was not a young man.

"Pretty cold night, Muff!" Muff was not blest with a forgiving disposition; he maintained a dignified silence. But his master did not feel the slight. Something, perhaps the cold, made him careless of the dog to-night.

The house was warm, at least; the light streamed far out of the kitchen window, down almost to the orchard. He passed across it, showing his figure a little stooping, and the flutter of gray hair from under his hat; then into the house. His wife was busied about the room, a pleasant room for a kitchen, with the cleanest of polished floors and whitened tables; the cheeriest of fires, the home-like faces of blue and white china peeping through the closet door; a few books upon a little shelf, with an old Bible among them; the cosey rocking-chair that always stood by the fire, and a plant or two in the south window. He came in, stamping off the snow; Muff crawled behind the stove, and gave himself up to a fit of metaphysics.

"Cold, Amos?"

"Of course. What else should I be, woman?"

His wife made no reply. His unusual impatience only saddened her eyes a little. She was one of those women who would have borne a life-long oppression with dumb lips. Amos Ryck was not an unkind husband, but it was not his way to be tender; the years which had whitened his hair had brought him stern experiences: life was to him a battle, his horizon always that about a combatant. But he loved her.

"Most ready to sit down, Martha?" he said at last, more gently.

"In a minute, Amos."

She finished some bit of evening work, her step soft about the room. Then she drew up the low rocking-chair with its covering of faded crimson chintz, and sat down by her husband.

She did this without noise; she did not sit too near to him; she took pains not to annoy him by any feminine bustle over her work; she chose her knitting, as being always most to his fancy; then she looked up timidly into his face. But there was a frown, slight to be sure, but still a frown, upon it, neither did he speak. Some gloomy, perhaps some bitter thought held the man. A reflection of it might have struck across her, as she turned her head, fixing her eyes upon the coals.

The light on her face showed it pale; the lines on her mouth were deeper than any time had worn for her husband; her hair as gray as his, though he was already a man of grave, middle age, when the little wife—hardly past her sixteenth birthday—came to the farm with him.

Perhaps it is these silent women—spiritless, timid souls, like this one,—who have, after all, the greatest capacity for suffering. You might have thought so, if you had watched her. Some infinite mourning looked out of her mute brown eyes. In the very folding of her hands there was a sort of stifled cry, as one whose abiding place is in the Valley of the Shadow.

A monotonous sob of the wind broke at the corners of the house; in the silence between the two, it was distinctly heard. Martha Ryck's face paled a little.

"I wish—" She tried to laugh. "Amos, it cries just like a baby."

"Nonsense!"

Her husband rose impatiently, and walked to the window. He was not given to fancies; all his life was ruled and squared up to a creed. Yet I doubt if he liked the sound of that wind much better than the woman. He thrummed upon the window-sill, then turned sharply away.

"There's a storm up, a cold one too."

"It stormed when—"

But Mrs. Ryck did not finish her sentence. Her husband, coming back to his seat, tripped over a stool, —a little thing it was, fit only for a child; a bit of dingy carpet covered it: once it had been bright.

"Martha, what *do* you keep this about for? It's always in the way!" setting it up angrily against the wall.

"I won't, if you'd rather not, Amos."

The farmer took up an almanac, and counted out the time when the minister's salary and the butcher's bill were due; it gave occasion for making no reply.

"Amos!" she said at last. He put down his book.

"Amos, do you remember what day it is?"

"I'm not likely to forget." His face darkened.

"Amos," again, more timidly, "do you suppose we shall ever find out?"

"How can I tell?"

"Ever know anything,—just a little?"

"We know enough, Martha."

"Amos! Amos!" her voice rising to a bitter cry, "we don't know enough! God's the only one that knows enough. He knows whether she's alive, and if she's dead he knows, and where she is; if there was ever any hope, and if her mother—"

"Hope, Martha, for *her*!"

She had been looking into the fire, her attitude unchanged, her hands wrung one into the other. She roused at that, something in her face as if one flared a sudden light upon the dead.

"What ails you, Amos? You're her father; you loved her when she was a little, innocent child."

When she was a child, and innocent,—yes. *That* was long ago. He stopped his walk across the room, and sat down, his face twitching nervously. But he had nothing to say,—not one word to the patient woman watching him there in the firelight, not one for love of the child who had climbed upon his knee and kissed him in that very room, who had played upon that little faded cricket, and wound her arms about the mother's neck, sitting just so, as she sat now. Yet he *had* loved her, the pure baby. That stung him. He could not forget it, though he might own no fathership to the wanderer.

Amos Ryck was a respectable man; he had the reputation of an honest, pious farmer to maintain. Moreover, he was a deacon in the church. His own life, stern in its purity, could brook no tenderness toward offenders. His own child was as shut out from his forgiveness as he deemed her to be from the forgiveness of his God. Yet you would have seen, in one look at the man, that this blow with which he was smitten had cleft his heart to its core.

This was her birthday,—hers whose name had not passed his lips for years. Do you think he had once forgotten it since its morning? Did not the memories it brought crowd into every moment? Did they not fill the very prayers in which he besought a sin-hating God to avenge him of all his enemies?

So many times the child had sat there at his feet on this day, playing with some birthday toy,—he always managed to find her something, a doll or a picture-book; she used to come up to thank him, pushing back her curls, her little red lips put up for a kiss. He was very proud of her,—he and the mother. She was all they had,—the only one. He used to call her "God's dear blessing," softly, while his eyes grew dim; she hardly heard him for his breaking voice.

She might have stood there and brought back all those dead birthday nights, so did he live them over. But none could know it; for he did not speak, and the frown knotted darkly on his forehead. Martha Ryck looked up at last into her husband's face.

"Amos, if she *should* ever come back!" He started, his eyes freezing.

"She won't! She—"

Would he have said "she *shall* not?" God only knew.

"Martha, you talk nonsense! It's just like a woman. We've said enough about this. I suppose He who's cursed us has got his own reasons for it. We must bear it, and so must she."

He stood up, stroking his beard nervously, his eyes wandering about the room; he did not, or he could not, look at his wife. Muff, rousing from his slumbers, came up sleepily to be taken some notice of. She used to love the dog,—the child; she gave him his name in a frolic one day; he was always her playfellow; many a time they had come in and found her asleep with Muff's black, shaggy sides for a

pillow, and her little pink arms around his neck, her face warm and bright with some happy dream.

Mr. Ryck had often thought he would sell the creature; but he never had. If he had been a woman, he would have said he could not. Being a man, he argued that Muff was a good watch-dog, and worth keeping.

"Always in the way, Muff!" he muttered, looking at the patient black head rubbed against his knee. He was angry with the dog at that moment; the next he had repented; the brute had done no wrong. He stooped and patted him. Muff returned to his dreams content.

"Well, Martha," he said, coming up to her uneasily, "you look tired."

"Tired? No, I was only thinking, Amos."

The pallor of her face, its timid eyes and patient mouth, the whole crushed look of the woman, struck him freshly. He stooped and kissed her forehead, the sharp lines of his face relaxing a little.

"I didn't mean to be hard on you, Martha; we both have enough to bear without that, but it's best not to talk of what can't be helped,—you see."

"Yes."

"Don't think anything more about the day; it's not—it's not really good for you; you must cheer up, little woman."

"Yes, Amos."

Perhaps his unusual tenderness gave her courage; she stood up, putting both arms around his neck.

"If you'd only try to love her a little, after all, my husband! He would know it; He might save her for it."

Amos Ryck choked, coughed, and said it was time for prayers. He took down the old Bible in which his child's baby-fingers used to trace their first lessons after his own, and read, not of her who loved much and was forgiven, but one of the imprecatory Psalms.

When Mrs. Ryck was sure that her husband was asleep that night, she rose softly from her bed, unlocked, with noiseless key, one of her bureau drawers, took something from it, and then felt her way down the dark stairs into the kitchen.

She drew a chair up to the fire, wrapped her shawl closely about her, and untied, with trembling fingers, the knots of a soft silken handkerchief in which her treasures were folded.

Some baby dresses of purest white; a child's little pink apron; a pair of tiny shoes, worn through by pattering feet; and a toy or two all broken, as some impatient little fingers had left them; she was such a careless baby! Yet they never could scold her, she always affected such pretty surprises, and wide blue-eyed penitence: a bit of a queen she was at the farm.

Was it not most kindly ordered by the Infinite Tenderness which pitieth its sorrowing ones, that into her still hours her child should come so often only as a child, speaking pure things only, touching her mother so like a restful hand, and stealing into a prayer?

For where was ever grief like this one? Beside this sorrow, death was but a joy. If she might have closed her child's baby-eyes, and seen the lips which had not uttered their first "Mother!" stilled, and laid her away under the daisies, she would have sat there alone that night, and thanked Him who had given and taken away.

But *this*,—a wanderer upon the face of the earth,—a mark, deeper seared than the mark of Cain, upon the face which she had fondled and kissed within her arms; the soul to which she had given life, accursed of God and man,—to measure this, there is no speech nor language.

Martha Ryck rose at last, took off the covers of the stove, and made a fresh blaze which brightened all the room, and shot its glow far into the street. She went to the window to push the curtain carefully aside, stood a moment looking out into the night, stole softly to the door, unlocked it, then went upstairs to bed.

The wind, rising suddenly that night, struck sharply through the city. It had been cold enough before, but the threatened storm foreboded that it would be worse yet before morning. The people crowded in a warm and brilliant church cast wandering glances from the preacher to the painted windows, beyond which the night lay darkly, thought of the ride home in close, cushioned carriages, and shivered.

So did a woman outside, stopping just by the door, and looking in at the hushed and sacred shelter. Such a temperature was not the best medicine for that cough of hers. She had just crawled out of the garret, where she had lain sick, very sick, for weeks.

Passing the door of the Temple which reared its massive front and glittering windows out of the darkness of the street, her ear was caught by the faint, muffled sound of some anthem the choir were singing. She drew the hood of her cloak over her face, turned into the shadow of the steps, and, standing so, listened. Why, she hardly knew. Perhaps it was the mere entreaty of the music, for her dulled ear had never grown deaf to it; or perhaps a memory, flitting as a shadow, of other places and other times, in which the hymns of God's church had not been strange to her. She caught the words at last, brokenly. They were of some one who was wounded. Wounded! she held her breath, listening curiously. The wind shrieking past drowned the rest; only the swelling of the organ murmured above it. She stole up the granite steps just within the entrance. No one was there to see her, and she went on tiptoe to the muffled door, putting her ear to it, her hair falling over her face. It was some plaintive minor air they were hymning, as sad as a dying wail, and as sweet as a mother's lullaby.

"But He was wounded; He was wounded for our transgression; He was bruised for our iniquities."

Then, growing slower and more faint, a single voice took up the strain, mournfully but clearly, with a hush in it as if one sang on Calvary.

"Yet we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Well; He only knows what it spoke to the woman, who listened with her guilty face hidden in her hair; how it drew her like a call to join the throng that worshipped him.

"I'd like to hear the rest," she muttered to herself. "I wonder what it is about."

A child came down from the gallery just then, a ragged boy, who, like herself, had wandered in from the street.

"Hilloa, Meg!" he said, laughing, "*you* going to meeting? That's a good joke!" If she had heard him, she would have turned away. But her hand was on the latch; the door had swung upon its noiseless hinges; the pealing organ drowned his voice. She went in and sat down in an empty slip close by the door, looking about her for the moment in a sort of childish wonder. The church was a blaze of light and color. One perceived a mist of gayly dressed people, a soft flutter of fans, and faint, sweet perfumes below; the velvet-cushioned pulpit, and pale, scholarly outlines of the preacher's face above; the warmth of rainbow-tinted glass; the wreathed and massive carving of oaken cornice; the glitter of gas-light from a thousand prisms, and the silence of the dome beyond.

The brightness struck sharply against the woman sitting there alone. Her face seemed to grow grayer and harder in it. The very hush of that princely sanctuary seemed broken by her polluted presence. True, she kept afar off; she did not so much as lift up her eyes to heaven; she had but stolen in to hear the chanted words that were meant for the acceptance and the comfort of the pure, bright worshippers, —sinners, to be sure, in their way; but then, Christ died for *them*. This tabernacle, to which they had brought their purple and gold and scarlet, for his praise, was not meant for such as Meg, you know.

But she had come into it, nevertheless. If He had called her there, she did not know it. She only sat and listened to the chanting, forgetting what she was; forgetting to wonder if there were one of all that reverent throng who would be willing to sit and worship beside her.

The singing ended at last, and the pale preacher began his sermon. But Meg did not care for that; she could not understand it. She crouched down in the corner of the pew, her hood drawn far over her face, repeating to herself now and then, mechanically as it seemed, the words of the chant.

"Wounded—for our transgressions; and bruised,"—muttering, after a while,—"Yet we hid our faces." Bruised and wounded! The sound of the words attracted her; she said them over and over. She knew who He was. Many years ago she had heard of him; it was a great while since then; she had almost forgotten it. Was it true? And was he perhaps,—was there a little chance it meant, he was bruised for her,—for *her*? She began to wonder dimly, still muttering the sorrowful words down in her corner, where no one could hear her.

I wonder if He heard them. Do you think he did? For when the sermon was ended, and the choir sang again,—still of him, and how he called the heavy-laden, and how he kept his own rest for them, she said,—for was she not very weary and heavy-laden with her sins?—still crouching down in her corner, "That's me. I guess it is. I'll find out."

She fixed her eyes upon the preacher, thinking, in her stunted, childish way, that he knew so much,

so many things she did not understand, that surely he could tell her,—she should like to have it to think about; she would ask him. She rose instinctively with the audience to receive his blessing, then waited in her hooded cloak, like some dark and evil thing, among the brilliant crowd. The door opening, as they began to pass out by her, swept in such a chill of air as brought back a spasm of coughing. She stood quivering under it, her face livid with the pain. The crowd began to look at her curiously, to nod and whisper among themselves.

The sexton stepped up nervously; he knew who she was. "Meg, you'd better go. What are you standing here for?"

She flung him a look out of her hard, defiant eyes; she made no answer. A child, clinging to her mother's hand, looked up as she went by, pity and fear in her great wondering eyes. "Mother, see that poor woman; she's hungry or cold!"

The little one put her hand over the slip, pulling at Meg's cloak,
"What's the matter with you? Why don't you go home?"

"Bertha, child, are you crazy?" Her mother caught her quickly away.
"Don't touch that woman!"

Meg heard it.

Standing, a moment after, just at the edge of the aisle, a lady, clad in velvet, brushed against her, then gathered her costly garments with a hand ringed and dazzling with diamonds, shrinking as if she had touched some accursed thing, and sweeping by.

Meg's eyes froze at that. This was the sanctuary, these the worshippers of Him who was bruised. His message could not be for her. It would be of no use to find out about him; of no use to tell him how she loathed herself and her life; that she wanted to know about that Rest, and about that heavy-laden one. His followers would not brook the very flutter of her dress against their pure garments. They were like him; he could have nothing to say to such as she.

She turned to go out. Through the open door she saw the night and the storm. Within was the silent dome, and the organ-hymn still swelling up to it.

It was still of the wounded that they sang. Meg listened, lingered, touched the preacher on the arm as he came by.

"I want to ask you a question."

He started at the sight of her, or more perhaps at the sharpness in her voice.

"Why, why, who are you?"

"I'm Meg. You don't know me. I ain't fit for your fine Christian people to touch; they won't let their little children speak to me."

"Well?" he said, nervously, for she paused.

"Well? You're a preacher. I want to know about Him they've been singing of, I came in to hear the singing. I like it."

"I—I don't quite understand you," began the minister. "You surely have heard of Jesus Christ."

"Yes," her eyes softened, "somebody used to tell me; it was mother; we lived in the country. I wasn't what I am now. I want to know if he can put me back again. What if I should tell him I was going to be different? Would he hear me, do you suppose?"

Somehow the preacher's scholarly self-possession failed him. He felt ill at ease, standing there with the woman's fixed black eyes upon him.

"Why, yes; he always forgives a repentant sinner."

"Repentant sinner." She repeated the words musingly. "I don't understand all these things. I've forgotten most all about it. I want to know. Couldn't I come in some way with the children and be learnt 'em? I wouldn't make any trouble."

There was something almost like a child in her voice just then, almost as earnest and as pure. The preacher took out his handkerchief and wiped his face; then he changed his hat awkwardly from hand to hand.

"Why, why, really, we have no provision in our Sabbath school for cases like this: we have been meaning to establish an institution of a missionary character, but the funds cannot be raised just yet. I am sorry; I don't know but—"

"It's no matter!"

Meg turned sharply away, her hands dropping lifelessly; she moved toward the door. They were alone now in the church, they two.

The minister's pale cheek flushed; he stepped after her.

"Young woman!"

She stopped, her face turned from him.

"I will send you to some of the city missionaries, or I will go with you to the Penitents' Retreat. I should like to help you. I—"

He would have exhorted her to reform as kindly as he knew how; he felt uncomfortable at letting her go so; he remembered just then who washed the feet of his Master with her tears. But she would not listen. She turned from him, and out into the storm, some cry on her lips,—it might have been:—

"There ain't nobody to help me. I *was* going to be better!"

She sank down on the snow outside, exhausted by the racking cough which the air had again brought on.

The sexton found her there in the shadow, when he locked the church doors.

"Meg! you here? What ails you?"

"*Dying*, I suppose!"

The sight of her touched the man, she lying there alone in the snow; he lingered, hesitated, thought of his own warm home, looked at her again. If a friendly hand should save the creature,—he had heard of such things. Well? But how could he take her into his respectable home? What would people say?—the sexton of the Temple! He had a little wife there too, pure as the snow upon the ground to-night. Could he bring them under the same roof?

"Meg!" he said, speaking in his nervous way, though kindly, "you *will* die here. I'll call the police and let them take you where it's warmer."

But she crawled to her feet again.

"No you won't!"

She walked away as fast as she was able, till she found a still place down by the water, where no one could see her. There she stood a moment irresolute, looked up through the storm as if searching for the sky, then sank upon her knees down in the silent shade of some timber.

Perhaps she was half-frightened at the act, for she knelt so a moment without speaking. There she began to mutter: "Maybe He won't drive me off; if they did, maybe he won't. I should just like to tell him, anyway!"

So she folded her hands, as she had folded them once at her mother's knee.

"O Lord! I'm tired of being *Meg*. I should like to be something else!"

Then she rose, crossed the bridge, and on past the thinning houses, walking feebly through the snow that drifted against her feet.

She did not know why she was there, or where she was going. She repeated softly to herself now and then the words uttered down in the shade of the timber, her brain dulled by the cold, faint, floating dreams stealing into them.

Meg! tired of being Meg! She wasn't always that. It was another name, a pretty name she thought, with a childish smile,—Maggie. They always call her that. She used to play about among the clover-blossoms and buttercups then; the pure little children used to kiss her; nobody hooted after her in the street, or drove her out of church, or left her all alone out in the snow,—*Maggie*!

Perhaps, too, some vague thought came to her of the mournful, unconscious prophecy of the name, as

the touch of the sacred water upon her baby-brow had sealed it,—Magdalene.

She stopped a moment, weakened by her toiling against the wind, threw off her hood, the better to catch her laboring breath, and standing so, looked back at the city, its lights glimmering white and pale, through the falling snow.

Her face was a piteous sight just then. Do you think the haughtiest of the pure, fair women in yonder treasured homes could have loathed her as she loathed herself at that moment?

Yet it might have been a face as fair and pure as theirs; kisses of mother and husband might have warmed those drawn and hueless lips; they might have prayed their happy prayers, every night and morning, to God. It *might have been*. You would almost have thought he had meant it should be so, if you had looked into her eyes sometimes,—perhaps when she was on her knees by the timber; or when she listened to the chant, crouching out of sight in the church.

Well, it was only that it might have been. Life could hold no possible blessed change for her, you know. Society had no place for it, though she sought it carefully with tears. Who of all God's happy children that he had kept from sin would have gone to her and said, "My sister, his love holds room for you and me"; have touched her with her woman's hand, held out to her her woman's help, and blessed her with her woman's prayers and tears?

Do you not think Meg knew the answer? Had she not learned it well, in seven wandering years? Had she not read it in every blast of this bitter night, out into which she had come to find a helper, when all the happy world passed by her, on the other side?

She stood there, looking at the glittering of the city, then off into the gloom where the path lay through the snow. Some struggle was in her face.

"Home! home and mother! She don't want me,—nobody wants me. I'd better go back."

The storm was beating upon her. But, looking from the city to the drifted path, and back from the lonely path to the lighted city, she did not stir.

"I should like to see it, just to look in the window, a little,—it wouldn't hurt 'em any. Nobody'd know."

She turned, walking slowly where the snow lay pure and untrodden. On, out of sight of the town, where the fields were still; thinking only as she went, that nobody would know,—nobody would know.

She would see the old home out in the dark; she could even say good-by to it quite aloud, and they wouldn't hear her, or come and drive her away. And then—

She looked around where the great shadows lay upon the fields, felt the weakening of her limbs, her failing breath, and smiled. Not Meg's smile; a very quiet smile, with a little quiver in it. She would find a still place under the trees somewhere; the snow would cover her quite out of sight before morning,—the pure, white snow. She would be only Maggie then.

The road, like some familiar dream, wound at last into the village. Down the street where her childish feet had pattered in their playing, by the old town pump, where, coming home from school, she used to drink the cool, clear water on summer noons, she passed,—a silent shadow. She might have been the ghost of some dead life, so moveless was her face. She stopped at last, looking about her.

"Where? I most forget."

Turning out from the road, she found a brook half hidden under the branches of a dripping tree,—frozen now; only a black glare of ice, where she pushed away the snow with her foot. It might have been a still, green place in summer, with banks of moss, and birds singing overhead. Some faint color flushed all her face; she did not hear the icicles dropping from the lonely tree.

"Yes,"—she began to talk softly to herself,—"this is it. The first time I ever saw him, he stood over there under the tree. Let me see; wasn't I crossing the brook? Yes, I was crossing the brook; on the stones. I had a pink dress. I looked in the glass when I went home," brushing her soft hair out of her eyes. "Did I look pretty? I can't remember. It's a great while ago."

She came back into the street after that, languidly, for the snow lay deeper. The wind, too, had chilled her more than she knew. The sleet was frozen upon her mute, white face. She tried to draw her cloak more closely about her, but her hands refused to hold it. She looked at them curiously.

"Numb? How much farther, I wonder?"

It was not long before she came to it. The house stood up silently in the night. A single light

glimmered far out upon the garden. Her eye caught it eagerly. She followed it down, across the orchard, and the little plats where the flowers used to be so bright all summer long. She had not forgotten them. She used to go out in the morning and pick them for her mother,—a whole apronful, purple, and pink, and white, with dewdrops on them. She was fit to touch them then. Her mother used to smile when she brought them in. Her mother! Nobody ever smiled so since. Did she know it? Did she ever wonder what had become of her,—the little girl who used to kiss her? Did she ever want to see her? Sometimes, when she prayed up in the old bedroom, did she remember her daughter who had sinned, or guess that she was tired of it all, and how no one in all the wide world would help her?

She was sleeping there now. And the father. She was afraid to see him; he would send her away, if he knew she had come out in the snow to look at the old home. She wondered if her mother would.

She opened the gate, and went in. The house was very still. So was the yard, and the gleam of light that lay golden on the snow. The numbness of her body began to steal over her brain. She thought at moments, as she crawled up the path upon her hands and knees,—for she could no longer walk,—that she was dreaming some pleasant dream; that the door would open, and her mother come out to meet her. Attracted like a child by the broad belt of light, she followed it over and through a piling drift. It led her to the window where the curtain was pushed aside. She managed to reach the blind, and so stand up a moment, clinging to it, looking in, the glow from the fire sharp on her face. Then she sank down upon the snow by the door.

Lying so, her face turned up against it, her stiffened lips kissing the very dumb, unanswering wood, a thought came to her. She remembered the day. For seven long years she had not thought of it.

A spasm crossed her face, her hands falling clinched. Who was it of whom it was written, that better were it for that man if he had never been born? Of Magdalene, more vile than Judas, what should be said?

Yet it was hard, I think, to fall so upon the very threshold,—so near the quiet, peaceful room, with the warmth, and light, and rest; to stay all night in the storm, with eyes turned to that dead, pitiless sky, without one look into her mother's face, without one kiss, or gentle touch, or blessing, and die so, looking up! No one to hold her hand and look into her eyes, and hear her say she was sorry,—sorry for it all! That they should find her there in the morning, when her poor, dead face could not see if she were forgiven!

"I should like to go in," sobbing, with the first tears of many years upon her cheek,—weak, pitiful tears, like a child's,—"just in out of the cold!"

Some sudden strength fell on her after that. She reached up, fumbling for the latch. It opened at her first touch; the door swung wide into the silent house.

She crawled in then, into the kitchen where the fire was, and the rocking-chair; the plants in the window, and the faded cricket upon the hearth; the dog, too, roused from his nap behind the stove. He began to growl at her, his eyes on fire.

"Muff!" she smiled weakly, stretching out her hand. He did not know her,—he was fierce with strangers. "Muff! don't you know me? I'm Maggie; there, there, Muff, good fellow!"

She crept up to him fearlessly, putting both her arms about his neck, in a way she had of soothing him when she was his playfellow. The creature's low growl died away. He submitted to her touch, doubtfully at first, then he crouched on the floor beside her, wagging his tail, wetting her face with his huge tongue.

"Muff, *you* know me, you old fellow! I'm sorry, Muff, I am,—I wish we could go out and play together again. I'm very tired, Muff."

She laid her head upon the dog, just as she used to long ago, creeping up near the fire. A smile broke all over her face, at Muff's short, happy bark.

"*He* don't turn me off; he don't know; he thinks I'm nobody but Maggie."

How long she lay so, she did not know. It might have been minutes, it might have been hours; her eyes wandering all about the room, growing brighter too, and clearer. They would know now that she had come back; that she wanted to see them; that she had crawled into the old room to die; that Muff had not forgotten her. Perhaps, *perhaps* they would look at her not unkindly, and cry over her just a little, for the sake of the child they used to love.

Martha Ryck, coming in at last, found her with her long hair falling over her face, her arms still about

the dog, lying there in the firelight.

The woman's eyelids fluttered for an instant, her lips moving dryly; but she made no sound. She came up, knelt upon the floor, pushed Muff gently away, and took her child's head upon her lap.

"Maggie!"

She opened her eyes and looked up.

"Mother's glad to see you, Maggie."

The girl tried to smile, her face all quivering.

"Mother, I—I wanted you. I thought I wasn't fit."

Her mother stooped and kissed her lips,—the polluted, purple lips, that trembled so.

"I thought you would come back to me, my daughter. I've watched for you a great while."

She smiled at that, pushing away her falling hair.

"Mother, I'm so sorry."

"Yes, Maggie."

"And oh!" she threw out her arms; "O, I'm so tired, I'm so tired!"

Her mother raised her, laying her head upon her shoulder.

"Mother'll rest you, Maggie," soothing her, as if she sang again her first lullaby, when she came to her, the little pure baby,—her only one.

"Mother," once more, "the door was unlocked."

"It has been unlocked every night for seven years, my child."

She closed her eyes after that, some stupor creeping over her, her features in the firelight softening and melting, with the old child-look coming into them. Looking up at last, she saw another face bending over her, a face in which grief had worn stern lines; there were tears in the eyes, and some recent struggle quivering out of it.

"Father, I didn't mean to come in,—I didn't really; but I was so cold. Don't send me off, father! I couldn't walk so far,—I shall be out of your way in a little while,—the cough—"

"*I* send you away, Maggie? I—I might have done it once; God forgive me! He sent you back, my daughter,—I thank him."

A darkness swept over both faces then; she did not even hear Muff's whining cry at her ear.

"Mother," at last, the light of the room coming back, "there's Somebody who was wounded. I guess I'm going to find him. Will he forget it all?"

"All, Maggie."

For what did He tell the sin-laden woman who came to him once, and dared not look into his face? Was ever soul so foul and crimson-stained that he could not make it pure and white? Does he not linger till his locks are wet with the dews of night, to listen for the first, faint call of any wanderer crying to him in the dark?

So He came to Maggie. So he called her by her name,—Magdalene, most precious to him; whom he had bought with a great price; for whom, with groanings that cannot be uttered, he had pleaded with his Father: Magdalene, chosen from all eternity, to be graven in the hollow of his hand, to stand near to him before the throne, to look with fearless eyes into his face, to touch him with her happy tears among his sinless ones forever.

And think you that *then*, any should scorn the woman whom the high and lofty One, beholding, did thus love? Who could lay anything to the charge of his elect?

Perhaps he told her all this, in the pauses of the storm, for something in her face transfigured it.

"Mother, it's all over now. I think I shall be your little girl again."

And so, with a smile, she went to Him. The light flashed broader and brighter about the room, and on the dead face there,—never Meg's again. A strong man, bowed over it, was weeping. Muff moaned out his brute sorrow where the still hand touched him.

But Martha Ryck, kneeling down beside her only child, gave thanks to God.

What Was the Matter?

I could not have been more than seven or eight years old, when it happened; but it might have been yesterday. Among all other childish memories, it stands alone. To this very day it brings with it the old, utter sinking of the heart, and the old, dull sense of mystery.

To read what I have to say, you should have known my mother. To understand it, you should understand her. But that is quite impossible now, for there is a quiet spot over the hill, and past the church, and beside the little brook where the crimsoned mosses grow thick and wet and cool, from which I cannot call her. It is all I have left of her now. But after all, it is not of her that you will chiefly care to hear. My object is simply to acquaint you with a few facts, which, though interwoven with the events of her life, are quite independent of it as objects of interest. It is, I know, only my own heart that makes these pages a memorial,—but, you see, I cannot help it.

Yet, I confess, no glamour of any earthly love has ever entirely dazzled me,—not even hers. Of imperfections, of mistakes, of sins, I knew she was guilty. I know it now; even with the sanctity of those crimsoned mosses, and the hush of the rest beneath, so close to my heart, I cannot forget them. Yet somehow—I do not know how—the imperfections, the mistakes, the very sins, bring her nearer to me as the years slip by, and make her dearer.

My mother was what we call an aristocrat. I do not like the term, as the term is used. I am sure she does not now; but I have no other word. She was a royal-looking woman, and she had the blood of princes in her veins. Generations back,—how we children used to reckon the thing over!—she was cradled in a throne. A miserable race, to be sure, they were,—the Stuarts; and the most devout genealogist might deem it dubious honor to own them for great-grand-fathers by innumerable degrees removed. So she used to tell us, over and over, as a damper on our childish vanity, looking such a very queen as she spoke, in every play of feature, and every motion of her hand, that it was the old story of preachers who did not practise. The very baby was proud of her. The beauty of a face, and the elegant repose of a manner, are influences by no means more unfelt at three years than at thirty.

As insanity will hide itself away, and lie sleeping, and die out,—while old men are gathered to their fathers scathless, and young men follow in their footsteps safe and free,—and start into life, and claim its own when children's children have forgotten it; as a single trait of a single scholar in a race of clods will bury itself in day-laborers and criminals, unto the third and fourth generation, and spring then, like a creation from a chaos, into statesmen and poets and sculptors;—so, I have sometimes fancied, the better and truer nature of voluptuaries and tyrants was sifted down through the years, and purified in our little New England home, and the essential autocracy of monarchical blood refined and ennobled, in my mother, into royalty.

A broad and liberal culture had moulded her; she knew its worth, in every fibre of her heart; scholarly parents had blessed her with their legacies of scholarly mind and name. With the soul of an artist, she quivered under every grace and every defect; and the blessing of a beauty as rare as rich had been given to her. With every instinct of her nature recoiling from the very shadow of crimes the world winks at, the family record had been stainless for a generation. God had indeed blessed her; but the very blessing was a temptation.

I knew, before she left me, what she might have been, but for the merciful and tender watch of Him who was despised and rejected of men. I know, for she told me, one still night when we were alone together, how she sometimes shuddered at herself, and what those daily and hourly struggles between her nature and her Christianity *meant*.

I think we were as near to one another as mother and daughter can be, but yet as different. Since I have been talking in such lordly style of those miserable Jameses and Charleses, I will take the opportunity to confess that I have inherited my father's thorough-going democracy,—double measure, pressed down and running over. She not only pardoned it, but I think she loved it in me, for his sake.

It was about a year and a half, I think, after he died, that she sent for Aunt Alice to come to Creston.

"Your aunt loves me," she said, when she told us in her quiet way, "and I am so lonely now."

They had been the only children, and they loved each other,—how much, I afterwards knew. And how much they love each other *now*, I like to think,—quite freely and fully, and without shadow or doubt between them, I dare to hope.

A picture of Aunt Alice always hung in mother's room. It was taken down years ago. I never asked her where she put it. I remember it, though, quite well; for mother's sake I am glad I do. For it was a pleasant face to look upon, and a young, pure, happy face,—beautiful too, though with none of the regal beauty crowned by my mother's massive hair, and pencilled brows. It was a timid, girlish face, with reverent eyes, and ripe, tremulous lips,—weak lips, as I remember them. From babyhood, I felt a want in the face. I had, of course, no capacity to define it; it was represented to me only by the fact that it differed from my mother's.

She was teaching school out West when mother sent for her. I saw the letter. It was just like my mother: "Alice, I need you. You and I ought to have but one home now. Will you come?"

I saw, too, a bit of postscript to the answer: "I'm not fit that you should love me so, Marie."

And how mother laughed at it!

When it was all settled, and the waiting weeks became at last a single day, I hardly knew my mother. She was so full of fitful moods, and little fantastic jokes! such a flush on her cheeks too, as she ran to the window every five minutes, like a child! I remember how we went all over the house together, she and I, to see that everything looked neat, and bright, and welcome. And how we lingered in the guest-room, to put the little finishing touches to its stillness, and coolness, and coseyness. The best spread was on the bed, and the white folds smoothed as only mother's fingers could smooth them; the curtain freshly washed, and looped with its crimson cord; the blinds drawn, cool and green; the late afternoon sunlight slanting through, in flecks upon the floor. There were flowers, too, upon the table. I remember they were all white,—lilies of the valley, I think; and the vase of Parian marble, itself a solitary lily, unfolding stainless leaves. Over the mantle she had hung the finest picture in the house,—an "Ecce Homo," and an exquisite engraving. It used to hang in grandmother's room in the old house. We children wondered a little that she took it upstairs.

"I want your aunt to feel at home, and see some things," she said. "I wish I could think of something more to make it pleasant in here."

Just as we left the room she turned and looked into it. "Pleasant, isn't it? I am so glad, Sarah," her eyes dimming a little. "She's a very dear sister to me."

She stepped in again to raise a stem of the lilies that had fallen from the vase and lay like wax upon the table, then she shut the door and came away.

That door was shut just so for years; the lonely bars of sunlight flecked the solitude of the room, and the lilies faded on the table. We children passed it with hushed footfall, and shrank from it at twilight, as from a room that held the dead. But into it we never went.

Mother was tired out that afternoon; for she had been on her feet all day, busied in her loving cares to make our simple home as pleasant and as welcome as home could be. But yet she stopped to dress us in our Sunday clothes,—and it was no sinecure to dress three persistently undressable children; Winthrop was a host in himself. "Auntie must see us look our prettiest," she said.

She was a sight for an artist when she came down. She had taken off her widow's cap and coiled her heavy hair low in her neck, and she always looked like a queen in that lustreless black silk. I do not know why these little things should have made such an impression on me then. They are priceless to me now. I remember how she looked, framed there in the doorway, while we were watching for the coach,—the late light ebbing in golden tides over the grass at her feet, and touching her face now and then through the branches of trees, her head bent a little, with eager, parted lips, and the girlish color on her cheeks, her hand shading her eyes as they strained for a sight of the lumbering coach. She must have been a magnificent woman when she was young,—not unlike, I have heard it said, to that far-off ancestress whose name she bore, and whose sorrowful story has made her sorrowful beauty immortal. Somewhere abroad there is a reclining statue of Queen Mary, to which, when my mother stood beside it, her resemblance was so strong that the by-standers clustered about her, whispering curiously. "Ah, mon Dieu!" said a little Frenchman aloud, "c'est une résurrection."

We must have tried her that afternoon, Clara and Winthrop and I; for the spirit of her own excitement had made us completely wild. Winthrop's scream of delight, when, stationed on the gate-post, he caught the first sight of the old yellow coach, might have been heard a quarter of a mile.

"Coming?" said mother, nervously, and stepped out to the gate, full in the sunlight that crowned her like royal gold.

The coach lumbered on, and rattled up, and passed.

"Why, she hasn't come!" All the eager color died out of her face. "I am so disappointed!"—speaking like a troubled child, and turning slowly into the house.

Then, after a while, she drew me aside from the others,—I was the oldest, and she was used to make a sort of confidence between us, instinctively, as it seemed, and often quite forgetting how very few my years were. "Sarah, I don't understand. You think she might have lost the train? But Alice is so punctual. Alice never lost a train. And she said she would come." And then, a while after, "I *don't* understand."

It was not like my mother to worry. The next day the coach lumbered up and rattled past, and did not stop,—and the next, and the next.

"We shall have a letter," mother said, her eyes saddening every afternoon. But we had no letter. And another day went by, and another.

"She is sick," we said; and mother wrote to her, and watched for the lumbering coach, and grew silent day by day. But to the letter there was no answer.

Ten days passed. Mother came to me one afternoon to ask for her pen, which I had borrowed. Something in her face troubled me vaguely.

"What are you going to do, mother?"

"Write to your aunt's boarding-place. I can't bear this any longer." She spoke sharply. She had already grown unlike herself.

She wrote, and asked for an answer by return of mail.

It was on a Wednesday, I remember, that we looked for it. I came home early from school. Mother was sewing at the parlor window, her eyes wandering from her work, up the road. It was an ugly day. It had rained drearily from eight o'clock till two, and closed in suffocating mist, creeping and dense and chill. It gave me a childish fancy of long-closed tombs and low-land graveyards, as I walked home in it.

I tried to keep the younger children quiet when we went in, mother was so nervous. As the early, uncanny twilight fell, we grouped around her timidly. A dull sense of awe and mystery clung to the night, and clung to her watching face, and clung even then to that closed room upstairs where the lilies were fading.

Mother sat leaning her head upon her hand, the outline of her face dim in the dusk against the falling curtain. She was sitting so when we heard the first rumble of the distant coach-wheels. At the sound, she folded her hands in her lap and stirred a little, rose slowly from her chair, and sat down again.

"Sarah."

I crept up to her. At the near sight of her face, I was so frightened I could have cried.

"Sarah, you may go out and get the letter. I—I can't."

I went slowly out at the door and down the walk. At the gate I looked back. The outline of her face was there against the window-pane, white in the gathering gloom.

It seems to me that my older and less sensitive years have never known such a night. The world was stifling in a deluge of gray, cold mists, unstirred by a breath of air. A robin with feathers all ruffled, and head hidden, sat on the gate-post, and chirped a little mournful chirp, like a creature dying in a vacuum. The very daisy that nodded and drooped in the grass at my feet seemed to be gasping for breath. The neighbor's house, not forty paces across the street, was invisible. I remember the sensation it gave me, as I struggled to find its outlines, of a world washed out, like the figures I washed out on my slate. As I trudged, half frightened, into the road, and the fog closed about me, it seemed to my childish superstition like a horde of long-imprisoned ghosts let loose, and angry. The distant sound of the coach, which I could not see, added to the fancy.

The coach turned the corner presently. On a clear day I could see the brass buttons on the driver's coat at that distance. There was nothing visible now of the whole dark structure but the two lamps in front, like the eyes of some evil thing, glaring and defiant, borne with swift motion down upon me by a power utterly unseen,—it had a curious effect. Even at this time, I confess I do not like to see a lighted

carriage driven through a fog.

I summoned all my little courage, and piped out the driver's name, standing there in the road.

He reined up his horses with a shout,—he had nearly driven over me. After some searching, he discovered the small object cowering down in the mist, handed me a letter, with a muttered oath at being intercepted on such a night, and lumbered on and out of sight in three rods.

I went slowly into the house. Mother had lighted a lamp, and stood at the parlor door. She did not come into the hall to meet me.

She took the letter and went to the light, holding it with the seal unbroken. She might have stood so two minutes.

"Why don't you read, mamma?" spoke up Winthrop. I hushed him.

She opened it then, read it, laid it down upon the table, and went out of the room without a word. I had not seen her face. We heard her go upstairs and shut the door.

She had left the letter open there before us. After a little awed silence, Clara broke out into sobs. I went up and read the few and simple lines.

Aunt Alice had left for Creston on the appointed day.

Mother spent that night in the closed room where the lilies had drooped and died. Clara and I heard her pacing the floor till we cried ourselves to sleep. When we woke in the morning, she was pacing it still.

Weeks wore into months, and the months became many years. More than that we never knew. Some inquiry revealed the fact, after a while, that a slight accident had occurred, upon the Erie Railroad, to the train which she should have taken. There was some disabling, but no deaths, the conductor had supposed. The car had fallen into the water. She might not have been missed when the half-drowned passengers were all drawn out.

So mother added a little crape to her widow's weeds, the key of the closed room lay henceforth in her drawer, and all things went on as before. To her children my mother was never gloomy,—it was not her way. No shadow of household affliction was placed like a skeleton confronting our uncomprehending joy. Of what those weeks and months and years were to her—a widow, and quite uncomforted in their dark places by any human love—she gave no sign. We thought her a shade paler, perhaps. We found her often alone with her little Bible. Sometimes, on the Sabbath, we missed her, and knew that she had gone into that closed room. But she was just as tender with us in our little faults and sorrows, as merry with us in our plays, as eager in our gayest plans, as she had always been. As she had always been,—our mother.

And so the years slipped from her and from us. Winthrop went into business in Boston; he never took to his books, and mother was too wise to *push* him through college; but I think she was disappointed. He was her only boy, and she would have chosen for him the profession of his father and grandfather. Clara and I graduated in our white dresses and blue ribbons, like other girls, and came home to mother, crochet-work, and Tennyson. Just about here is the proper place to begin my story.

I mean that about here our old and long-tried cook, Bathsheba, who had been an heirloom in the family, suddenly fell in love with the older sexton, who had rung the passing-bell for every soul who died in the village for forty years, and took it into her head to marry him, and desert our kitchen for his little brown house under the hill.

So it came about that we hunted the township for a handmaiden; and it also came about that our inquiring steps led us to the poor-house. A stout, not over-brilliant-looking girl, about twelve years of age, was to be had for her board and clothes, and such schooling as we could give her,—in country fashion to be "bound out" till she should be eighteen. The economy of the arrangement decided in her favor; for, in spite of our grand descent and grander notions, we were poor enough, after father died, and the education of three children had made no small gap in our little principal, and she came.

Her name was a singular one,—Selphar. It always savored too nearly of brimstone to please me. I used to call her Sel, "for short." She was a good, sensible, uninteresting-looking girl, with broad face, large features, and limp, tow-colored curls. They used to hang straight down about her eyes, and were never otherwise than perfectly smooth. She proved to be of good temper, which is worth quite as much as brains in a servant, as honest as the daylight, dull enough at her books, but a good, plodding worker, if you marked out every step of the way for her beforehand. I do not think she would ever have

discovered the laws of gravitation; but she might have jumped off a precipice to prove them, if she had been bidden.

Until she was seventeen, she was precisely like any other rather stupid girl; never given to novel-reading or fancies; never, frightened by the dark or ghost-stories; proving herself warmly attached to us, after a while, and rousing in us, in return, the kindly interest naturally felt for a faithful servant; but she was not in any respect _un_common, —quite far from it,—except in the circumstance that she never told a false-hood.

At seventeen she had a violent attack of diphtheria, and her life hung by a thread. Mother was as tender and unwearying in her care of her as the girl's own mother might have been.

From that time, I believe, Sel was immovable in her faith in her mistress's divinity. Under such nursing as she had, she slowly recovered, but her old, stolid strength never came back to her. Severe headaches became of frequent occurrence. Her stout, muscular arms grew weak. As weeks went on, it became evident in many ways that, though the diphtheria itself was quite out of her system, it had left her thoroughly diseased. Strange fits of silence came over her; her volubility had been the greatest objection we had to her hitherto. Her face began to wear a troubled look. She was often found in places where she had stolen away to be alone.

One morning she slept late in her little garret-chamber, and we did not call her. The girl had gone upstairs the night before crying with the pain in her temples, and mother, who was always thoughtful of her servants, said it was a pity to wake her, and, as there were only three of us, we might get our own breakfast for once. While we were at work together in the kitchen, Clara heard her kitten mewing out in the snow, and went to the door to let her in. The creature, possessed by some sudden frolic, darted away behind the well-curb. Clara was always a bit of a romp, and, with never a thought of her daintily slippered feet, she flung her trailing dress over one arm and was off over the three-inch snow. The cat led her a brisk chase, and she came in flushed and panting, and pretty, her little feet drenched, and the tip of a Maltese tail just visible above a great bundle she had made of her apron.

"Why!" said mother, "you have lost your ear-ring."

Clara dropped the kitten with unceremonious haste on the floor, felt of her little pink ear, shook her apron, and the corners of her mouth went down into her dimpled chin.

"They're the ones Winthrop sent, of all things in the world!"

"You'd better put on your rubbers, and have a hunt out-doors," said mother.

We hunted out-doors,—on the steps, on the well-boards, in the wood-shed, in the snow; Clara looked down the well till her nose and fingers were blue, but the ear-ring was not to be found. We hunted in-doors, under the stove and the chairs and the table, in every possible and impossible nook, cranny, and crevice, but gave up the search in despair. It was a pretty trinket,—a leaf of delicately wrought gold, with a pearl dew-drop on it,—very becoming to Clara, and the first present Winthrop had sent her from his earnings. If she had been a little younger she would have cried. She came very near it as it was, I suspect, for when she went after the plates she stayed in the cupboard long enough to set two tables.

When we were half through breakfast, Selphar came down, blushing, and frightened half out of her wits, her apologies tumbling over each other with such skill as to render each one unintelligible, and evidently undecided in her own mind whether she was to be hung or burnt at the stake.

"It's no matter at all," said mother, kindly; "I knew you felt sick last night. I should have called you if I had needed you."

Having set the girl at her ease, as only she could do, she went on with her breakfast, and we forgot all about her. She stayed, however, in the room to wait on the table. It was afterwards remembered that she had not been out of our sight since she came down the garret-stairs. Also, that her room looked out upon the opposite side of the house from that on which the well-curb stood.

"Why, look at Sel!" said Clara, suddenly, "she has her eyes shut."

The girl was just passing the toast. Mother spoke to her. "Selphar, what is the matter?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you open your eyes?"

"I can't."

"Hand the salt to Miss Sarah."

She took it up and brought it round the table to me, with perfect precision.

"Sel, how you act!" said Clara, petulantly. "Of course you saw."

"Yes'm, I saw," said the girl in a puzzled way, "but my eyes are shut, Miss Clara."

"Tight?"

"Tight."

Whatever this freak meant, we thought best to take no notice of it. My mother told her, somewhat gravely, that she might sit down until she was wanted, and we returned to our conversation about the ear-ring.

"Why!" said Sel, with a little jump, "I see your ear-ring. Miss Clara,—the one with a white drop on the leaf. It's out by the well."

The girl was sitting with her back to the window, her eyes, to all appearance, tightly closed.

"It's on the right-hand side, under the snow, between the well and the wood-pile. Why, don't you see?"

Clara began to look frightened, mother displeased.

"Selphar," she said, "this is nonsense. It is impossible for you to see through the walls of two rooms and a wood-shed."

"May I go and get it?" said the girl, quietly.

"Sel," said Clara, "on your word and honor, are your eyes shut *perfectly* tight?"

"If they ain't, Miss Clara, then they never was."

Sel never told a lie. We looked at each other, and let her go. I followed her out and kept my eyes on her closed lids. She did not once raise them; nor did they tremble, as lids will tremble, if only partially closed.

She walked without the slightest hesitation directly to the well-curb, to the spot which she had mentioned, stooped down, and brushed away the three-inch fall of snow. The ear-ring lay there, where it had sunk in falling. She picked it up, carried it in, and gave it to Clara.

That Clara had the thing on when she started after her kitten, there could be no doubt. She and I both remembered it. That Sel, asleep on the opposite side of the house, could not have seen it drop, was also settled. That she, with her eyes closed and her back to the window, had seen through three walls and through three inches of snow, at a distance of fifty feet, was an inference.

"I don't believe it!" said my mother, "it's some nonsensical mistake."
Clara looked a little pale, and I laughed.

We watched her carefully through the day. Her eyes remained tightly closed. She understood all that was said to her, answered correctly, but did, not seem inclined to talk. She went about her work as usual, and performed it without a mistake. It could not be seen that she groped at all with her hands to feel her way, as is the case with the blind. On the contrary, she touched everything with her usual decision. It was impossible to believe, without seeing them, that her eyes were closed.

We tied a handkerchief tightly over them; see through it or below it she could not, if she had tried. We then sent her into the parlor, with orders to bring from the book-case two Bibles which had been given as prizes to Clara and me at school, when we were children. The books were of precisely the same size, color, and texture. Our names in gilt letters were printed upon the binding. We followed her in, and watched her narrowly. She went directly to the book-case, laid her hands upon the books at once, and brought them to my mother. Mother changed them from hand to hand several times, and turned them with the gilt lettering downwards upon her lap.

"Now, Selphar, which is Miss Sarah's?"

The girl quietly took mine up. The experiment was repeated and varied again and again. In every case the result was the same. She made no mistake. It was no guess-work. All this was done with the

bandage tightly drawn about her eyes. *She did not see those letters with them*.

That evening we were sitting quietly in the dining-room. Selphar sat a little apart with her sewing, her eyes still closed. We kept her with us, and kept her in sight. The parlor, which was a long room, was between us and the front of the house. The distance was so great that we had often thought, if prowlers were to come around at night, how impossible it would be to hear them. The curtains and shutters were closely drawn. Sel was sitting by the fire. Suddenly she turned pale, dropped her sewing, and sprang from her chair.

"Robbers, robbers!" she cried. "Don't you see? they're getting in the east parlor window! There's three of 'em, and a lantern. They've just opened the window,—hurry, hurry!"

"I believe the girl is insane," said mother, decidedly. Nevertheless, she put out the light, opened the parlor door noiselessly, and went in.

The east window was open. There was a quick vision of three men and a dark lantern. Then Clara screamed, and it disappeared. We went to the window, and saw the men running down the street. The snow the next morning was found trodden down under the window, and their footprints were traced out to the road.

When we went back to the other room, Selphar was standing in the middle of it, a puzzled, frightened look on her face, her eyes wide open.

"Selphar," said my mother, a little suspiciously, "how did you know the robbers were there?"

"Robbers!" said the girl, aghast.

She knew nothing of the robbers. She knew nothing of the ear-ring. She remembered nothing that had happened since she went up the garret-stairs to bed, the night before. And, as I said, the girl was as honest as the sunlight. When we told her what had happened, she burst into terrified tears.

For some time after this there was no return of the "tantrums," as Selphar had called the condition, whatever it was. I began to get up vague theories of a trance state. But mother said, "Nonsense!" and Clara was too much frightened to reason at all about the matter.

One Sunday morning Sel complained of a headache. There was service that evening, and we all went to church. Mother let Sel take the empty seat in the carryall beside her.

It was very dark when we started to come home. But Creston was a safe old Orthodox town, the roads were filled with returning church-goers like ourselves, and mother drove like a man. A darker night I think I have never seen. Literally, we could not see a hand before our eyes. We met a carriage on a narrow road and the horses' heads touched, before either driver had seen the other.

Selphar had been quite silent during the drive. I leaned forward, looked closely into her face, and could dimly see through the darkness that her eyes were closed.

"Why!" she said at last, "see those gloves!"

"Where?"

"Down in the ditch; we passed them before I spoke. I see them on a blackberry-bush; they've got little brass buttons on the wrist."

Three rods past now, and we could not see our horse's head.

"Selphar," said my mother, quickly, "what *is* the matter with you?"

"If you please, ma'am, I don't know," replied the girl, hanging her head. "May I get out and bring 'em to you?"

Prince was reined up, and Sel got out. She went so far back, that, though we strained our eyes to do it, we could not see her. In about two minutes she came up, a pair of gentleman's gloves in her hand. They were rolled together, were of cloth so black that on a bright night it would never have been seen, and had small brass buttons at the wrist.

Mother took them without a word.

The story leaked out somehow, and spread all over town. It raised a great hue and cry. Four or five antediluvian ladies declared at once that we were nothing more nor less than a family of "them spirituous mediums," and seriously proposed to expel mother from the prayer-meeting. Masculine

Creston did worse. It smiled a pitying smile, and pronounced the whole thing the fancy of "scared women-folks." I could endure with calmness any slander upon earth but that. I bore it a number of weeks, till at last, driven by despair, I sent for Winthrop, and stated the case to him in a condition of suppressed fury. He very politely bit back an incredulous smile, and said he should be *very* happy to see her perform. The answer was somewhat dubious. I accepted it in silent suspicion.

He came on a Saturday noon. That afternoon we attended *en masse* one of those refined inquisitions commonly known as picnics, and Winthrop lost his pocket-knife. Selphar, of course, kept house at home.

When we returned, Winthrop made some careless reference to his loss in her presence, and thought no more of it. About half an hour after, we observed that she was washing the dishes with her eyes shut. The condition had not been upon her five minutes before she dropped the spoon suddenly into the water, and asked permission to go out to walk. She "saw Mr. Winthrop's knife somewhere under a stone, and wanted to get it." It was fully two miles to the picnic grounds, and nearly dark. Winthrop followed the girl, unknown to her, and kept her in sight. She went rapidly, and without the slightest hesitation or search, to an out-of-the-way gully down by the pond, where Winthrop afterwards remembered having gone to cut some willow-twigs for the girls, parted a thick cluster of bushes, lifted a large, loose stone under which the knife had rolled, and picked it up. She returned it to Winthrop, quietly, and hurried away about her work to avoid being thanked.

I observed that, after this incident, masculine Creston became more respectful.

Of several peculiarities in this development of the girl I made at the time careful memoranda, and the exactness of these can be relied upon.

1. She herself, so far from attempting to bring on these trance states, or taking any pride therein, was intensely troubled and mortified by them,—would run out of the room, if she felt them coming on in the presence of visitors.

2. They were apt to be preceded by severe headaches, but came often without any warning.

3. She never, in any instance, recalled anything that happened during the trance, after it was passed.

4. She was powerfully and unpleasantly affected by electricity from a battery, or acting in milder forms. She was also unable at any time to put her hands and arms into hot water; the effect was to paralyze them at once.

5. Space proved to be no impediment to her vision. She has been known to follow the acts, words, and expressions of countenance of members of the family hundreds of miles away, with accuracy as was afterwards proved by comparing notes as to time.

6. The girl's eyes, after her trances became habitual, assumed, and always retained, the most singular expression I ever saw on any face. They were oblong and narrow, and set back in her head like the eyes of a snake. They were not—smile if you will, O practical and incredulous reader! but they were not—eyes. The eyes of Elsie Venner are the only eyes I can think of as at all like them. The most horrible circumstance about them—a circumstance that always made me shudder, familiar as I was with it—was, that, though turned fully on you, *they never looked at you*. Something behind them or out of them did the seeing, not they.

7. She not only saw substance, but soul. She has repeatedly told me my thoughts when they were upon subjects to which she could not by any possibility have had the slightest clew.

8. We were never able to detect a shadow of deceit about her.

9. The clairvoyance never failed in any instance to be correct, so far as we were able to trace it.

As will be readily imagined, the girl became a useful member of the family. The lost valuables restored and the warnings against mischances given by her quite balanced her incapacity for peculiar kinds of work. This incapacity, however, rather increased than diminished; and, together with her fickle health, which also grew more unsettled, caused us a great deal of care. The Creston physician—who was a keen man in his way, for a country doctor—pronounced the case altogether undreamt of before in Horatio's philosophy, and kept constant notes of it. Some of these have, I believe, found their way into the medical journals.

After a while there came, like a thief in the night, that which I suppose was poor Selphar's one unconscious, golden mission in this world. It came on a quiet summer night, that ended a long trance of a week's continuance. Mother had gone out into the kitchen to give an order for breakfast. I heard a

few eager words in Selphar's voice, and then the door shut quickly, and it was an hour before it was opened.

Then my mother came to me without a particle of color in lips or cheek, and drew me away alone, and told the secret to me.

Selphar had seen Aunt Alice.

We sat down and looked at one another. There was a singular, pinched look about my mother's mouth.

"Sarah."

"Yes."

"She says"—and then she told me what she said. She had seen Alice Stuart in a Western town, seven hundred miles away. Among the living, she desired to be counted of the dead. And that was all.

My mother paced the room three times back and forth, her hands locked.

"Sarah." There was a chill in her voice—it had been such a gentle voice!—that froze me. "Sarah, the girl is an impostor."

"Mother!"

She paced the room once more, three times, back and forth. "At any rate, she is a poor, self-deluded creature. How *can* she see, seven hundred miles away, a dead woman who has been an angel all these years? Think! an *angel*, Sarah! So much better than I, and I—I loved—"

Before or since, I never heard my mother speak like that. She broke off sharply, and froze back into her chilling voice.

"We will say nothing about this, if you please. I do not believe a word of it."

We said nothing about it but Selphar did. The delusion, if delusion it were, clung to her, haunted her, pursued her, week after week. To rid her of it, or to silence her, was impossible. She added no new facts to her first statement, but insisted that the long-lost dead was yet alive, with a quiet pertinacity that it was simply impossible to ridicule, frighten, threaten, or cross-question out of her. Clara was so thoroughly alarmed that she would not have slept alone for any mortal—perhaps not for any immortal—considerations. Winthrop and I talked the matter over often and gravely when we were alone and in quiet places. Mother's lips were sealed. From the day when Sel made the first disclosure, she was never heard once to refer to the matter. A perceptible haughtiness crept into her manner towards the girl. She even talked of dismissing her, but repented it, and melted into momentary gentleness. I could have cried over her that night. I was beginning to understand what a pitiful struggle her life had become, and how alone she must be in it. She *would* not believe—she knew not what. She could not doubt the girl. And with the conflict even her children could not intermeddle.

To understand the crisis into which she was brought, the reader must bear in mind our long habit of belief, not only in Selphar's personal honesty, but in the infallibility of her mysterious power. Indeed, it had almost ceased to be mysterious to us, from daily familiarity. We had come to regard it as the curious working of physical disease, had taken its results as a matter of course, and had ceased, in common with converted Creston, to doubt the girl's capacity for seeing anything that she chose to, at any place.

Thus a year worried on. My mother grew sleepless and pallid. She laughed often, in a nervous, shallow way, as unlike her as a butterfly is unlike a sunset; and her face settled into an habitual sharpness and hardness unutterably painful to me.

Once only I ventured to break into the silence of the haunting thought that, she knew and we knew, was never escaped by either. "Mother, it would do no harm for Winthrop to go out West, and—"

She interrupted me sternly: "Sarah, I had not thought you capable of such childish superstition, I wish that girl and her nonsense had never come into this house!"—turning sharply away, and out of the room.

But year and struggle ended. They ended at last, as I had prayed every night and morning of it that they should end. Mother came into my room one night, locked the door behind her, and walking over to the window, stood with her face turned from me, and softly spoke my name.

But that was all, for a little while. Then,—"Sick and in suffering, Sarah! The girl,—she may be right;

God Almighty knows! *Sick and in suffering*, you see! I am going—I think." Then her voice broke.

Creston put on its spectacles and looked wise on learning, the next day, that Mrs. Dugald had taken the earliest morning train for the West, on sudden and important business. It was precisely what Creston expected, and just like the Dugalds for all the world—gone to hunt up material for that genealogical book, or map, or tree, or something, that they thought nobody knew they were going to publish. O yes, Creston understood it perfectly.

Space forbids me to relate in detail the clews which Selphar had given as to the whereabouts of the wanderer. Her trances, just at this time, were somewhat scarce and fragmentary, and the information she had professed to give had come in snatches and very imperfectly,—the trance being apt to end suddenly at the moment when some important question was pending, and then, of course, all memory of what she had said, or was about to say, was gone. The names and appearance of persons and places necessary to the search had, however, been given with sufficient distinctness to serve as a guide in my mother's rather chimerical undertaking. I suppose ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have thought her a candidate for the State Lunatic Asylum. Exactly what she herself expected, hoped, or feared, I think it doubtful if she knew. I confess to a condition of simple bewilderment, when she was fairly gone, and Clara and I were left alone with Selphar's ghostly eyes forever on us. One night I had to lock the poor thing into her garret-room before I could sleep.

Just three weeks from the day on which mother started for the West, the coach rattled up to the door, and two women, arm in arm, came slowly up the walk. The one, erect, royal, with her great steadfast eyes alight; the other, bent and worn, gray-haired and shallow and dumb, crawling feebly through the golden afternoon sunshine, as the ghost of a glorious life might crawl back to its grave.

Mother threw open the door, and stood there like a queen. "Children, your aunt has come home. She is too tired to talk just now. By and by she will be glad to see you."

We took her gently upstairs, into the room where the lilies were mouldering to dust, and laid her down upon the bed. She closed her eyes wearily, turned her face over to the wall, and said no word.

What was the story of those tired eyes I never asked and I never knew. Once, as I passed the room, I saw,—and have always been glad that I saw,—through the open door, the two women lying with their arms about each other's neck, as they used to do when they were children together, and above them, still and watchful, the wounded Face that had waited there so many years for this.

She lingered weakly there, within the restful room, for seven days, and then one morning we found her with her eyes upon the thorn-crowned Face, her own quite still and smiling.

A little funeral train wound away one night behind the church, and left her down among those red-cup mosses that opened in so few months again to cradle the sister who had loved her. Her name only, by mother's orders, marked the headstone.

* * * * *

I have given you facts. Explain them as you will. I do not attempt it, for the simple reason that I cannot.

A word must be said as to the fate of poor Sel, which was mournful enough. Her trances grew gradually more frequent and erratic, till she became so thoroughly diseased in mind and body as to be entirely unfitted for household work, and, in short, nothing but an encumbrance. We kept her, however, for the sake of charity, and should have done so till her poor, tormented life wore itself out; but after the advent of a new servant, and my mother's death, she conceived the idea that she was a burden, cried over it a few weeks, and at last, one bitter winter's night, she disappeared. We did not give up all search for her for years, but nothing was ever heard from her. He, I hope, who permitted life to be such a terrible mystery to her, has cared for her somehow, and kindly and well.

In the Gray Goth.

If the wick of the big oil lamp had been cut straight I don't believe it would ever have happened.

Where is the poker, Johnny? Can't you push back that for'ard log a little? Dear, dear! Well, it doesn't make much difference, does it? Something always seems to all your Massachusetts fires; your hickory is green, and your maple is gnarly, and the worms eat out your oak like a sponge. I haven't seen anything like what I call a fire,—not since Mary Ann was married, and I came here to stay. "As long as

you live, father," she said; and in that very letter she told me I should always have an open fire, and how she wouldn't let Jacob put in the air-tight in the sitting-room, but had the fireplace kept on purpose. Mary Ann was a good girl always, if I remember straight, and I'm sure I don't complain. Isn't that a pine-knot at the bottom of the basket? There! that's better.

Let me see; I began to tell you something, didn't I? O yes; about that winter of '41. I remember now. I declare, I can't get over it, to think you never heard about it, and you twenty-four year old come Christmas. You don't know much more, either, about Maine folks and Maine fashions than you do about China,—though it's small wonder, for the matter of that, you were such a little shaver when Uncle Jed took you. There were a great many of us, it seems to me, that year, I 'most forget how many;—we buried the twins next summer, didn't we?—then there was Mary Ann, and little Nancy, and—well, coffee was dearer than ever I'd seen it, I know, about that time, and butter selling for nothing; we just threw our milk away, and there wasn't any market for eggs; besides doctor's bills and Isaac to be sent to school; so it seemed to be the best thing, though your mother took on pretty badly about it at first. Jedediah has been good to you, I'm sure, and brought you up religious,—though you've cost him a sight, spending three hundred and fifty dollars a year at Amherst College.

But, as I was going to say, when I started to talk about '41,—to tell the truth, Johnny, I'm always a long while coming to it, I believe. I'm getting to be an old man,—a little of a coward, maybe, and sometimes, when I sit alone here nights, and think it over, it's just like the toothache, Johnny. As I was saying, if she had cut that wick straight, I do believe it wouldn't have happened,—though it isn't that I mean to lay the blame on her *now*.

I'd been out at work all day about the place, slicking things up for to-morrow; there was a gap in the barn-yard fence to mend,—I left that till the last thing, I remember,—I remember everything, some way or other, that happened that day,—and there was a new roof to put on the pig-pen, and the grape-vine needed an extra layer of straw, and the latch was loose on the south barn-door; then I had to go round and take a last look at the sheep, and toss down an extra forkful for the cows, and go into the stall to have a talk with Ben, and unbutton the coop-door to see if the hens looked warm,—just to tuck 'em up, as you might say. I always felt sort of homesick—though I wouldn't have owned up to it, not even to Nancy—saying good-by to the creeturs the night before I went in. There, now! it beats all, to think, you don't know what I'm talking about, and you a lumberman's son. "Going in" is going up into the woods, you know, to cut and haul for the winter,—up, sometimes, a hundred miles deep,—in in the fall and out in the spring; whole gangs of us shut up there sometimes for six months, then down with the freshets on the logs, and all summer to work the farm,—a merry sort of life when you get used to it, Johnny; but it was a great while ago, and it seems to me as if it must have been very cold.—Isn't there a little draft coming in at the pantry door?

So when I'd said good-by to the creeturs,—I remember just as plain how Ben put his great neck on my shoulder and whinnied like a baby,—that horse know when the season came round and I was going in, just as well as I did,—I tinkered up the barn-yard fence, and locked the doors, and went in to supper.

I gave my finger a knock with the hammer, which may have had something to do with it, for a man doesn't feel very good-natured when he's been green enough to do a thing like that, and he doesn't like to say it aches either. But if there is anything I can't bear it is lamp-smoke; it always did put me out, and I expect it always will. Nancy knew what a fuss I made about it, and she was always very careful not to hector me with it. I ought to have remembered that, but I didn't. She had lighted the company lamp on purpose, too, because it was my last night. I liked it better than the tallow candle.

So I came in, stamping off the snow, and they were all in there about the fire,—the twins, and Mary Ann, and the rest; baby was sick, and Nancy was walking back and forth with him, with little Nancy pulling at her gown. You were the baby then, I believe, Johnny; but there always was a baby, and I don't rightly remember. The room was so black with smoke, that they all looked as if they were swimming round and round in it. I guess coming in from the cold, and the pain in my finger and all, it made me a bit sick. At any rate, I threw open the window and blew out the light, as mad as a hornet.

"Nancy," said I, "this room would strangle a dog, and you might have known it, if you'd had two eyes to see what you were about. There, now! I've tipped the lamp over, and you just get a cloth and wipe up the oil."

"Dear me!" said she, lighting a candle, and she spoke up very soft, too. "Please, Aaron, don't let the cold in on baby. I'm sorry it was smoking, but I never knew a thing about it; he's been fretting and taking on so the last hour, I didn't notice anyway."

"That's just what you ought to have done," says I, madder than ever. "You know how I hate the stuff, and you ought to have cared more about me than to choke me up with it this way the last night before going in."

Nancy was a patient, gentle-spoken sort of woman, and would bear a good deal from a fellow; but she used to fire up sometimes, and that was more than she could stand. "You don't deserve to be cared about, for speaking like that!" says she, with her cheeks as red as peat-coals.

That was right before the children. Mary Ann's eyes were as big as saucers, and little Nancy was crying at the top of her lungs, with the baby tuning in, so we knew it was time to stop. But stopping wasn't ending; and folks can look things that they don't say.

We sat down to supper as glum as pump-handles, there were some fritters—I never knew anybody beat your mother at fritters—smoking hot off the stove, and some maple molasses in one of the best chiny tea-cups; I knew well enough it was just on purpose for my last night, but I never had a word to say, and Nancy crumbed up the children's bread with a jerk. Her cheeks didn't grow any whiter; it seemed as if they would blaze right up,—I couldn't help looking at them, for all I pretended not to, for she looked just like a picture. Some women always are pretty when they are put out,—and then again, some ain't; it appears to me there's a great difference in women, very much as there is in hens; now, there was your aunt Deborah,—but there, I won't get on that track now, only so far as to say that when she was flustered up she used to go red all over, something like a piny, which didn't seem to have just the same effect.

That supper was a very dreary sort of supper, with the baby crying, and Nancy getting up between the mouthfuls to walk up and down the room with him; he was a heavy little chap for a ten-month-old, and I think she must have been tuckered out with him all day. I didn't think about it then; a man doesn't notice such things when he's angry,—it isn't in him. I can't say but *she* would if I'd been in her place. I just eat up the fritters and the maple molasses,—seems to me I told her she ought not to use the best chiny cup, but I'm not just sure,—and then I took my pipe, and sat down in the corner.

I watched her putting the children to bed; they made her a great deal of bother, squirming off of her lap and running round barefoot. Sometimes I used to hold them and talk to them and help her a bit, when I felt good-natured, but I just sat and smoked, and let them alone. I was all worked up about that lamp-wick, and I thought, you see, if she hadn't had any feelings for me there was no need of my having any for her—if she had cut the wick, I'd have taken the babies; she hadn't cut the wick, and I wouldn't take the babies; she might see it if she wanted to, and think what she pleased. I had been badly treated, and I meant to show it.

It is strange, Johnny, it really does seem to me very strange, how easy it is in this world to be always taking care of our *rights*. I've thought a great deal about it since I've been growing old, and there seems to me a good many things we'd better look after fust.

But you see I hadn't found that out in '41, and so I sat in the corner, and felt very much abused. I can't say but what Nancy had pretty much the same idea; for when the young ones were all in bed at last, she took her knitting and sat down the other side of the fire, sort of turning her head round and looking up at the ceiling, as if she were trying her best to forget I was there. That was a way she had when I was courting, and we went along to huskings together, with the moon shining round.

Well, I kept on smoking, and she kept on looking at the ceiling, and nobody said a word for a while, till by and by the fire burnt down, and she got up and put on a fresh log.

"You're dreadful wasteful with the wood, Nancy," says I, bound to say something cross? and that was all I could think of.

"Take care of your own fire, then," says she, throwing the log down and standing up as straight as she could stand. "I think it's a pity if you haven't anything better to do, the last night before going in, than to pick everything I do to pieces this way, and I tired enough to drop, carrying that great crying child in my arms all day. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Aaron Hollis!"

Now if she had cried a little, very like I should have given up, and that would have been the end of it, for I never could bear to see a woman cry; it goes against the grain. But your mother wasn't one of the crying sort, and she didn't feel like it that night.

She just stood up there by the fireplace, as proud as Queen Victory,—I don't blame her, Johnny,—O no, I don't blame her; she had the right of it there, I *ought* to have been ashamed of myself; but a man never likes to hear that from other folks, and I put my pipe down on the chimney-shelf so hard I heard it snap like ice, and I stood up too, and said—but no matter what I said, I guess. A man's quarrels with his wife always make me think of what the Scripture says about other folks not intermeddling. They're things, in my opinion, that don't concern anybody else as a general thing, and I couldn't tell what I said without telling what she said, and I'd rather not do that. Your mother was as good and patient-tempered a woman as ever lived, Johnny, and she didn't mean it, and it was I that set her on. Besides,

my words were worst of the two.

Well, well, I'll hurry along just here, for it's not a time I like to think about; but we had it back and forth there for half an hour, till we had angered each other up so I couldn't stand it, and I lifted up my hand,—I would have struck her if she hadn't been a woman.

"Well," says I, "Nancy Hollis, I'm sorry for the day I married you, and that's the truth, if ever I spoke a true word in my life!"

I wouldn't have told you that now if you could understand the rest without. I'd give the world, Johnny,—I'd give the world and all those coupon bonds Jedediah invested for me if I could anyway forget it; but I said it, and I can't.

Well, I've seen your mother look 'most all sorts of ways in the course of her life, but I never saw her before, and I never saw her since, look as she looked that minute. All the blaze went out in her cheeks, as if somebody had thrown cold water on it, and she stood there stock still, so white I thought she would drop.

"Aaron—" she began, and stopped to catch her breath,—"Aaron—" but she couldn't get any further; she just caught hold of a little shawl she had on with both her hands, as if she thought she could hold herself up by it, and walked right out of the room. I knew she had gone to bed, for I heard her go up and shut the door. I stood there a few minutes with my hands in my pockets, whistling Yankee Doodle. Your mother used to say men were queer folks, Johnny; they always whistled up the gayest when they felt the wust. Then I went to the closet and got another pipe, and I didn't go upstairs till it was smoked out.

When I was a young man, Johnny, I used to be that sort of fellow that couldn't bear to give up beat. I'd acted like a brute, and I knew it, but I was too spunky to say so. So I says to myself, "If she won't make up first, I won't, and that's the end on't." Very likely she said the same thing, for your mother was a spirited sort of woman when her temper *was* up; so there we were, more like enemies sworn against each other than man and wife who had loved each other true for fifteen years,—a whole winter, and danger, and death perhaps, coming between us, too.

It may seem very queer to you, Johnny,—it did to me when I was your age, and didn't know any more than you do,—how folks can work themselves up into great quarrels out of such little things; but they do, and into worse, if it's a man who likes his own way, and a woman that knows how to talk. It's my opinion, two thirds of all the divorce cases in the law-books just grow up out of things no bigger than that lamp-wick.

But how people that ever loved each other could come to hard words like that, you don't see? Well, ha, ha! Johnny, that amuses me, that really does amuse me, for I never saw a young man nor a young woman either,—and young men and young women in general are very much like fresh-hatched chickens, to my mind, and know just about as much of the world, Johnny,—well, I never saw one yet who didn't say that very thing. And what's more, I never saw one who could get it into his head that old folks knew better.

But I say I had loved your mother true, Johnny, and she had loved me true, for more than fifteen years; and I loved her more the fifteenth year than I did the first, and we couldn't have got along without each other, any more than you could get along if somebody cut your heart right out. We had laughed together and cried together; we had been sick, and we'd been well together; we'd had our hard times and our pleasant times right along, side by side; we'd baptized the babies, and we'd buried 'm, holding on to each other's hand; we had grown along year after year, through ups and downs and downs and ups, just like one person, and there wasn't any more dividing of us. But for all that we'd been put out, and we'd had our two ways, and we had spoken our sharp words like any other two folks, and this wasn't our first quarrel by any means.

I tell you, Johnny, young folks they start in life with very pretty ideas,—very pretty. But take it as a general thing, they don't know any more what they're talking about than they do about each other, and they don't know any more about each other than they do about the man in the moon. They begin very nice, with their new carpets and teaspoons, and a little mending to do, and coming home early evenings to talk; but by and by the shine wears off. Then come the babies, and worry and wear and temper. About that time they begin to be a little acquainted, and to find out that there are two wills and two sets of habits to be fitted somehow. It takes them anywhere along from one year to three to get jostled down together. As for smoothing off, there's more or less of that to be done always.

Well, I didn't sleep very well that night, dropping into naps and waking up. The baby was worrying over his teeth every half-hour, and Nancy getting up to walk him off to sleep in her arms,—it was the

only way you *would* be hushed up, and you'd lie and yell till somebody did it.

Now, it wasn't many times since we'd been married that I had let her do that thing all night long. I used to have a way of getting up to take my turn, and sending her off to sleep. It isn't a man's business, some folks say. I don't know anything about that; maybe, if I'd been broiling my brain in book learning all day till come night, and I was hard put to it to get my sleep anyhow, like the parson there, it wouldn't; but all I know is, what if I had been breaking my back in the potato-patch since morning? so she'd broken her's over the oven; and what if I did need nine hours' sound sleep? I could chop and saw without it next day, just as well as she could do the ironing, to say nothing of my being a great stout fellow,—there wasn't a chap for ten miles round with my muscle,—and she with those blue veins on her forehead. Howsomever that may be, I wasn't used to letting her do it by herself, and so I lay with my eyes shut, and pretended that I was asleep; for I didn't feel like giving in, and speaking up gentle, not about that nor anything else.

I could see her though, between my eyelashes, and I lay there, every time I woke up, and watched her walking back and forth, back and forth, up and down, with the heavy little fellow in her arms, all night long.

Sometimes, Johnny, when I'm gone to bed now of a winter night, I think I see her in her white nightgown with her red-plaid shawl pinned over her shoulders and over the baby, walking up and down, and up and down. I shut my eyes, but there she is, and I open them again, but I see her all the same.

I was off very early in the morning; I don't think it could have been much after three o'clock when I woke up. Nancy had my breakfast all laid out overnight, except the coffee, and we had fixed it that I was to make up the fire, and get off without waking her, if the baby was very bad. At least, that was the way I wanted it; but she stuck to it she should be up,—that was before there'd been any words between us.

The room was very gray and still,—I remember just how it looked, with Nancy's clothes on a chair, and the baby's shoes lying round. She had got him off to sleep in his cradle, and had dropped into a nap, poor thing! with her face as white as the sheet, from watching.

I stopped when I was dressed, half-way out of the room, and looked round at it,—it was so white, Johnny! It would be a long time before I should see it again,—five months were a long time; then there was the risk, coming down in the freshets, and the words I'd said last night. I thought, you see, if I should kiss it once,—I needn't wake her up,—maybe I should go off feeling better. So I stood there looking: she was lying so still, I couldn't see any more stir to her than if she had her breath held in. I wish I had done it, Johnny,—I can't get over wishing I'd done it, yet. But I was just too proud, and I turned round and went out, and shut the door.

We were going to meet down at the post-office, the whole gang of us, and I had quite a spell to walk. I was going in on Bob Stokes's team. I remember how fast I walked with my hands in my pockets, looking along up at the stars,—the sun was putting them out pretty fast,—and trying not to think of Nancy. But I didn't think of anything else.

It was so early, that there wasn't many folks about to see us off; but Bob Stokes's wife,—she lived nigh the office, just across the road,—she was there to say good-by, kissing of him, and crying on his shoulder. I don't know what difference that should make with Bob Stokes, but I snapped him up well, when he came along, and said good morning.

There were twenty-one of us just, on that gang, in on contract for Dove and Beadle. Dove and Beadle did about the heaviest thing on woodland of anybody, about that time. Good, steady men we were, most of us,—none of your blundering Irish, that wouldn't know a maple from a hickory, with their gin-bottles in their pockets,—but our solid, Down-East Yankee heads, owning their farms all along the river, with schooling enough to know what they were about 'lection day. You didn't catch any of *us* voting your new-fangled tickets when he had meant to go up on Whig, for want of knowing the difference, nor visa vussy. To say nothing of Bob Stokes, and Holt, and me, and another fellow,—I forget his name,—being members in good and reg'lar standing, and paying in our five dollars to the parson every quarter, charitable.

Yes, though I say it that shouldn't say it, we were as fine a looking gang as any in the county, starting off that morning in our red uniform,—Nancy took a sight of pains with my shirt, sewing it up stout, for fear it should bother me ripping, and I with nobody to take a stitch for me all winter. The boys went off in good spirits, singing till they were out of sight of town, and waving their caps at their wives and babies standing in the window along on the way. I didn't sing. I thought the wind blew too hard,—seems to me that was the reason,—I'm sure there must have been a reason, for I had a voice of my own in those days, and had led the choir perpetual for five years.

We weren't going in very deep; Dove and Beadle's lots lay about thirty miles from the nearest house; and a straggling, lonely sort of place that was too, five miles out of the village, with nobody but a dog and a deaf old woman in it. Sometimes, as I was telling you, we had been in a hundred miles from any human creature but ourselves.

It took us two days to get there though, with the oxen; and the teams were loaded down well, with so many axes and the pork-barrels;—I don't know anything like pork for hefting down more than you expect it to, reasonable. It was one of your ugly gray days, growing dark at four o'clock, with snow in the air, when we hauled up in the lonely place. The trees were blazed pretty thick, I remember, especially the pines; Dove and Beadle always had that done up prompt in October. It's pretty work going in blazing while the sun is warm, and the woods like a great bonfire with the maples. I used to like it, but your mother wouldn't hear of it when she could help herself, it kept me away so long.

It's queer, Johnny, how we do remember things that ain't of no account; but I remember, as plainly as if it were yesterday morning, just how everything looked that night, when the teams came up, one by one, and we went to work spry to get to rights before the sun went down.

There were three shanties,—they don't often have more than two or three in one place,—they were empty, and the snow had drifted in; Bob Stokes's oxen were fagged out with their heads hanging down, and the horses were whinnying for their supper. Holt had one of his great brush-fires going,—there was nobody like Holt for making fires,—and the boys were hurrying round in their red shirts, shouting at the oxen, and singing a little, some of them low, under their breath, to keep their spirits up. There was snow as far as you could see,—down the cart-path, and all around, and away into the woods; and there was snow in the sky now, setting in for a regular nor'easter. The trees stood up straight all around without any leaves, and under the bushes it was as black as pitch.

"Five months," said I to myself,—"five months!"

"What in time's the matter with you, Hollis?" says Bob Stokes, with a great slap on my arm; "you're giving that 'ere ox molasses on his hay!"

Sure enough I was, and he said I acted like a dazed creatur, and very likely I did. But I couldn't have told Bob the reason. You see, I knew Nancy was just drawing up her little rocking-chair—the one with the red cushion—close by the fire, sitting there with the children to wait for the tea to boil. And I knew —I couldn't help knowing, if I'd tried hard for it—how she was crying away softly in the dark, so that none of them could see her, to think of the words we'd said, and I gone in without ever making of them up. I was sorry for them then. O Johnny, I was sorry, and she was thirty miles away. I'd got to be sorry five months, thirty miles away, and couldn't let her know.

The boys said I was poor company that first week, and I shouldn't wonder if I was. I couldn't seem to get over it any way, to think I couldn't let her know.

If I could have sent her a scrap of a letter, or a message, or something, I should have felt better. But there wasn't any chance of that this long time, unless we got out of pork or fodder, and had to send down,—which we didn't expect to, for we'd laid in more than usual.

We had two pretty rough weeks' work to begin with, for the worst storms of the season set in, and kept in, and I never saw their like, before or since. It seemed as if there'd never be an end to them. Storm after storm, blow after blow, freeze after freeze; half a day's sunshine, and then at it again! We were well tired of it before they stopped; it made the boys homesick.

However, we kept at work pretty brisk,—lumber-men aren't the fellows to be put out for a snow-storm,—cutting and hauling and sawing, out in the sleet and wind. Bob Stokes froze his left foot that second week, and I was frost-bitten pretty badly myself. Cullen—he was the boss—he was well out of sorts, I tell you, before the sun came out, and cross enough to bite a tenpenny nail in two.

But when the sun *is* out, it isn't so bad a kind of life, after all. At work all day, with a good hot dinner in the middle; then back to the shanties at dark, to as rousing a fire and tiptop swagan as anybody could ask for. Holt was cook that season, and Holt couldn't be beaten on his swagan.

Now you don't mean to say you don't know what swagan is? Well, well! To think of it! All I have to say is, you don't know what's good then. Beans and pork and bread and molasses,—that's swagan,—all stirred up in a great kettle, and boiled together; and I don't know anything—not even your mother's fritters—I'd give more for a taste of now. We just about lived on that; there's nothing you can cut and haul all day on like swagan. Besides that, we used to have doughnuts,—you don't know what doughnuts are here in Massachusetts; as big as a dinner-plate those doughnuts were, and—well, a little hard, perhaps. They used to have it about in Bangor that we used them for clock pendulums, but I don't know about that.

I used to think a great deal about Nancy nights, when we were sitting up by the fire,—we had our fire right in the middle of the hut, you know, with a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. When supper was eaten, the boys all sat up around it, and told stories, and sang, and cracked their jokes; then they had their backgammon and cards; we got sleepy early, along about nine or ten o'clock, and turned in under the roof with our blankets. The roof sloped down, you know, to the ground; so we lay with our heads in under the little eaves, and our feet to the fire,—ten or twelve of us to a shanty, all round in a row. They built the huts up like a baby's cob-house, with the logs fitted in together. I used to think a great deal about your mother, as I was saying; sometimes I would lie awake when the rest were off as sound as a top, and think about her. Maybe it was foolish, and I'm sure I wouldn't have told anybody of it; but I couldn't get rid of the notion that something might happen to her or to me before five months were out, and I with those words unforgiven.

Then, perhaps, when I went to sleep, I would dream about her, walking back and forth, up and down, in her nightgown and little red shawl, with the great heavy baby in her arms.

So it went along till come the last of January, when one day I saw the boys all standing round in a heap, and talking.

"What's the matter?" says I.

"Pork's given out," says Bob, with a whistle. "Beadle got that last lot from Jenkins there, his son-in-law, and it's sp'ilt. I could have told him that beforehand. Never knew Jenkins to do the fair thing by anybody yet."

"Who's going down?" said I, stopping short. I felt the blood run all over my face, like a woman's.

"Cullen hasn't made up his mind yet," says Bob, walking off.

Now you see there wasn't a man on the ground who wouldn't jump at the chance to go; it broke up the winter for them, and sometimes they could run in home for half an hour, driving by; so there wasn't much of a hope for me. But I went straight to Mr. Cullen.

"Too late! Just promised Jim Jacobs," said he, speaking up quick; it was just business to him, you know.

I turned off, and I didn't say a word. I wouldn't have believed it, I never would have believed it, that I could have felt so cut up about such a little thing. Cullen looked round at me sharp.

"Hilloa, Hollis!" said he. "What's to pay?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir," says I, and walked off, whistling.

I had a little talk with Jim alone. He said he would take good care of anything I'd give him, and carry it straight. So when night came I went and borrowed Mr. Cullen's pencil, and Holt tore me off a bit of clean brown paper he found in the flour-barrel, and I went off among the trees with it alone. I built a little fire for myself out of a huckleberry-bush, and sat down there on the snow to write. I couldn't do it in the shanty, with the noise and singing. The little brown paper wouldn't hold much; but these were the words I wrote,—I remember every one of them,—it is curious now I should, and that more than twenty years ago:—

"Dear Nancy,"—that was it,—"Dear Nancy, I can't get over it, and I take them all back. And if anything happens coming down on the logs—"

I couldn't finish that anyhow, so I just wrote "Aaron" down in the corner, and folded the brown paper up. It didn't look any more like "Aaron" than it did like "Abimelech," though; for I didn't see a single letter I wrote,—not one.

After that I went to bed, and wished I was Jim Jacobs.

Next morning somebody woke me up with a push, and there was the boss.

"Why, Mr. Cullen!" says I, with a jump.

"Hurry up, man, and eat your breakfast," said he; "Jacobs is down sick with his cold."

"*Oh!*" said I.

"You and the pork must be back here day after to-morrow,—so be spry," said he.

I rather think I was, Johnny.

It was just eight o'clock when I started; it took some time to get breakfast, and feed the nags, and get orders. I stood there, slapping the snow with my whip, crazy to be off, hearing the last of what Mr. Cullen had to say.

They gave me the two horses,—we hadn't but two,—oxen are tougher for going in, as a general thing,—and the lightest team on the ground; it was considerably lighter than Bob Stokes's. If it hadn't been for the snow, I might have put the thing through in two days, but the snow was up to the creatures' knees in the shady places all along; off from the road, in among the gullies, you could stick a four-foot measure down anywhere. So they didn't look for me back before Wednesday night.

"I must have that pork Wednesday night sure," says Cullen.

"Well, sir," says I, "you shall have it Wednesday noon, Providence permitting; and you shall have it Wednesday night anyway."

"You will have a storm to do it in, I'm afraid," said he, looking at the clouds, just as I was whipping up. "You're all right on the road, I suppose?"

"All right," said I; and I'm sure I ought to have been, for the times
I'd been over it.

Bess and Beauty—they were the horses, and of all the ugly nags that ever I saw Beauty was the ugliest—started off on a round trot, slewing along down the hill; they knew they were going home just as well as I did. I looked back, as we turned the corner, to see the boys standing round in their red shirts, with the snow behind them, and the fire and the shanties. I felt a mite lonely when I couldn't see them any more; the snow was so dead still, and there were thirty miles of it to cross before I could see human face again.

The clouds had an ugly look,—a few flakes had fallen already,—and the snow was purple, deep in as far as you could see under the trees. Something made me think of Ben Gurnell, as I drove on, looking along down the road to keep it straight. You never heard about it? Poor Ben! Poor Ben! It was in '37, that was; he had been out hunting up blazed trees, they said, and wandered away somehow into the Gray Goth, and went over,—it was two hundred feet; they didn't find him, not till spring,—just a little heap of bones; his wife had them taken home and buried, and by and by they had to take her away to a hospital in Portland,—she talked so horribly, and thought she saw bones round everywhere.

There is no place like the woods for bringing a storm down on you quick; the trees are so thick you don't mind the first few flakes, till, first you know, there's a whirl of 'em, and the wind is up.

I was minding less about it than usual, for I was thinking of Nannie,—that's what I used to call her, Johnny, when she was a girl, but it seems a long time ago, that does. I was thinking how surprised she'd be, and pleased. I knew she would be pleased. I didn't think so poorly of her as to suppose she wasn't just as sorry now as I was for what had happened. I knew well enough how she would jump and throw down her sewing with a little scream, and run and put her arms about my neck and cry, and couldn't help herself.

So I didn't mind about the snow, for planning it all out, till all at once I looked up, and something slashed into my eyes and stung me,—it was sleet.

"Oho!" said I to myself, with a whistle,—it was a very long whistle, Johnny; I knew well enough then it was no play-work I had before me till the sun went down, nor till morning either.

That was about noon,—it couldn't have been half an hour since I'd eaten my dinner; I eat it driving, for I couldn't bear to waste time.

The road wasn't broken there an inch, and the trees were thin; there'd been a clearing there years ago, and wide, white, level places wound off among the trees; one looked as much like a road as another, for the matter of that. I pulled my visor down over my eyes to keep the sleet out,—after they're stung too much they're good for nothing to see with, and I *must* see, if I meant to keep that road.

It began to be cold. You don't know what it is to be cold, you don't, Johnny, in the warm gentleman's life you've lived. I was used to Maine forests, and I was used to January, but that was what I call cold.

The wind blew from the ocean, straight as an arrow. The sleet blew every way,—into your eyes, down your neck, in like a knife into your cheeks. I could feel the snow crunching in under the runners, crisp, turned to ice in a minute. I reached out to give Bess a cut on the neck, and the sleeve of my coat was stiff as pasteboard before I bent my elbow up again.

If you looked up at the sky, your eyes were shut with a snap as if somebody'd shot them. If you looked

in under the trees, you could see the icicles a minute, and the purple shadows. If you looked straight ahead, you couldn't see a thing.

By and by I thought I had dropped the reins, I looked at my hands, and there I was holding them tight. I knew then that it was time to get out and walk.

I didn't try much after that to look ahead; it was of no use, for the sleet was fine, like needles, twenty of 'em in your eye at a wink; then it was growing dark. Bess and Beauty knew the road as well as I did, so I had to trust to them. I thought I must be coming near the clearing where I'd counted on putting up overnight, in case I couldn't reach the deaf old woman's.

There was a man just out of Bangor the winter before, walking just so beside his team, and he kept on walking, some folks said, after the breath was gone, and they found him frozen up against the sleigh-poles. I would have given a good deal if I needn't have thought of that just then. But I did, and I kept walking on.

Pretty soon Bess stopped short. Beauty was pulling on,—Beauty always did pull on,—but she stopped too. I couldn't stop so easily, so I walked along like a machine, up on a line with the creaturs' ears. I *did* stop then, or you never would have heard this story, Johnny.

Two paces,—and those two hundred feet shot down like a plummet. A great cloud of snow-flakes puffed up over the edge. There were rocks at my right hand, and rocks at my left. There was the sky overhead. I was in the Gray Goth!

I sat down as weak as a baby. If I didn't think of Ben Gurnell then, I never thought of him. It roused me up a bit, perhaps, for I had the sense left to know that I couldn't afford to sit down just yet, and I remembered a shanty that I must have passed without seeing; it was just at the opening of the place where the rocks narrowed, built, as they build their light-houses, to warn folks to one side. There was a log or something put up after Gurnell went over, but it was of no account, coming on it suddenly. There was no going any farther that night, that was clear; so I put about into the hut, and got my fire going, and Bess and Beauty and I, we slept together.

It was an outlandish name to give it, seems to me, anyway. I don't know what a Goth is, Johnny; maybe you do. There was a great figger up on the rock, about eight feet high; some folks thought it looked like a man. I never thought so before, but that night it did kind of stare in through the door as natural as life.

When I woke up in the morning I thought I was on fire. I stirred and turned over, and I was ice. My tongue was swollen up so I couldn't swallow without strangling. I crawled up to my feet, and every bone in me was stiff as a shingle.

Bess was looking hard at me, whinnying for her breakfast. "Bess," says
I, very slow, "we must get home—to-night—*any*—how."

I pushed open the door. It creaked out into a great drift, and slammed back. I squeezed through and limped out. The shanty stood up a little, in the highest part of the Goth. I went down a little,—I went as far as I could go. There was a pole lying there, blown down in the night; it came about up to my head. I sunk it into the snow, and drew it up.

Just six feet.

I went back to Bess and Beauty, and I shut the door. I told them I couldn't help it,—something ailed my arms,—I couldn't shovel them out to-day. I must lie down and wait till to-morrow.

I waited till to-morrow. It snowed all day, and it snowed all night. It was snowing when I pushed the door out again into the drift. I went back and lay down. I didn't seem to care.

The third day the sun came out, and I thought about Nannie. I was going to surprise her. She would jump up and run and put her arms about my neck. I took the shovel, and crawled out on my hands and knees. I dug it down, and fell over on it like a baby.

After that, I understood. I'd never had a fever in my life, and it's not strange that I shouldn't have known before.

It came all over me in a minute, I think. I couldn't shovel through. Nobody could hear. I might call, and I might shout. By and by the fire would go out. Nancy would not come. Nancy did not know. Nancy and I should never kiss and make up now.

I struck my arm out into the air, and shouted out her name, and yelled it out. Then I crawled out once

more into the drift.

I tell you, Johnny, I was a stout-hearted man, who'd never known a fear. I could freeze. I could burn up there alone in the horrid place with fever. I could starve. It wasn't death nor awfulness I couldn't face,—not that, not *that*; but I loved her true, I say,—I loved her true, and I'd spoken my last words to her, my very last; I had left her *those* to remember, day in and day out, and year upon year, as long as she remembered her husband, as long as she remembered anything.

I think I must have gone pretty nearly mad with the fever and the thinking. I fell down there like a log, and lay groaning. "God Almighty! God Almighty!" over and over, not knowing what it was that I was saying, till the words strangled in my throat.

Next day, I was too weak so much as to push open the door. I crawled around the hut on my knees with my hands up over my head, shouting out as I did before, and fell, a helpless heap, into the corner; after that I never stirred.

How many days had gone, or how many nights, I had no more notion than the dead. I knew afterwards; when I knew how they waited and expected and talked and grew anxious, and sent down home to see if I was there, and how she—But no matter, no matter about that.

I used to scoop up a little snow when I woke up from the stupors. The bread was the other side of the fire; I couldn't reach round. Beauty eat it up one day; I saw her. Then the wood was used up. I clawed out chips with my nails from the old rotten logs the shanty was made of, and kept up a little blaze. By and by I couldn't pull any more. Then there were only some coals,—then a little spark. I blew at that spark a long while,—I hadn't much breath. One night it went out, and the wind blew in. One day I opened my eyes, and Bess had fallen down in the corner, dead and stiff. Beauty had pushed out of the door somehow and gone. I shut up my eyes. I don't think I cared about seeing Bess,—I can't remember very well.

Sometimes I thought Nancy was there in the plaid shawl, walking round the ashes where the spark went out. Then again I thought Mary Ann was there, and Isaac, and the baby. But they never were. I used to wonder if I wasn't dead, and hadn't made a mistake about the place that I was going to.

One day there was a noise. I had heard a great many noises, so I didn't take much notice. It came up crunching on the snow, and I didn't know but it was Gabriel or somebody with his chariot. Then I thought more likely it was a wolf.

Pretty soon I looked up, and the door was open; some men were coming in, and a woman. She was ahead of them all, she was; she came in with a great spring, and had my head against her neck, and her arm holding me up, and her cheek down to mine, with her dear, sweet, warm breath all over me; and that was all I knew.

Well, there was brandy, and there was a fire, and there were blankets, and there was hot water, and I don't know what; but warmer than all the rest I felt her breath against my cheek, and her arms about my neck, and her long hair, which she had wrapped all in, about my hands.

So by and by my voice came. "Nannie!" said I.

"O don't!" said she, and first I knew she was crying.

"But I will," says I, "for I'm sorry."

"Well, so am I," says she.

Said I, "I thought I was dead, and hadn't made up, Nannie."

"O *dear*!" said she; and down fell a great hot splash right on my face.

Says I, "It was all me, for I ought to have gone back and kissed you."

"No, it was *me*" said she, "for I wasn't asleep, not any such thing. I peeked out, this way, through my lashes, to see if you wouldn't come back. I meant to wake up then. Dear me!" says she, "to think what a couple of fools we were, now!"

"Nannie," says I, "you can let the lamp smoke all you want to!"

"Aaron—" she began, just as she had begun that other night,—"Aaron—" but she didn't finish, and—Well, well, no matter; I guess you don't want to hear any more, do you?

But sometimes I think, Johnny, when it comes my time to go,—if ever it does,—I've waited a good

while for it,—the first thing I shall see will be her face, looking as it looked at me just then.

Calico.

It was about time for the four-o'clock train.

After all, I wonder if it is worth telling,—such a simple, plotless record of a young girl's life, made up of Mondays and Tuesdays and Wednesdays, like yours or mine. Sharley was so exactly like other people! How can it be helped that nothing remarkable happened to her? But you would like the story?

It was about time for the four-o'clock train, then.

Sharley, at the cost of half a sugar-bowl (never mind syntax; you know I mean the sugar, not the glass), had enticed Moppet to betake himself out of sight and out of mind till somebody should signify a desire for his engaging presence; had steered clear of Nate and Methuselah, and was standing now alone on the back doorsteps opposite the chaise-house. One could see a variety of things from those doorsteps,—the chaise-house, for instance, with the old, solid, square-built wagon rolled into it (Sharley passed many a long "mending morning" stowed in among the cushions of that old wagon); the great sweet-kept barn, where the sun stole in warm at the chinks and filtered through the hay; the well-curb folded in by a shadow; the wood-pile, and the chickens, and the kitchen-garden; a little slope, too, with a maple on it and shades of brown and gold upon the grass; brown and golden tints across the hills, and a sky of blue and gold to dazzle one. Then there was a flock of robins dipping southward. There was also the railroad.

Sharley may have had her dim consciousness of the cosey barn and chicken's chirp, of brown and gold and blue and dazzle and glory; but you don't suppose *that* was what she had outgeneralled Moppet and stolen the march upon Nate and Methuselah for. The truth is, that the child had need of none of these things—neither skies nor dazzle nor glory—that golden autumn afternoon. Had the railroad bounded the universe just then, she would have been content. For Sharley was only a girl,—a very young, not very happy, little girl,—and Halcombe Dike was coming home to spend the Sunday.

Halcombe Dike,—her old friend Halcombe Dike. She said the words over, apologizing a bit to herself for being there to watch that railroad. Hal used to be good to her when she was bothered with the children and more than half tired of life. "Keep up good courage, Sharley," he would say. For the long summer he had not been here to say it. And to-night he would be here. To-night—to-night! Why should not one be glad when one's old friends come back?

Mrs. Guest, peering through the pantry window, observed—and observed with some motherly displeasure, which she would have expressed had it not been too much trouble to open the window—that Sharley had put on her barbe,—that black barbe with the pink watered ribbons run through it. So extravagant in Sharley! Sharley would fain have been so extravagant as to put on her pink muslin too this afternoon; she had been more than half inclined to cry because she could not; but as it was not orthodox in Green Valley to wear one's "best clothes" on week-days, except at picnics or prayer-meetings, she had submitted, sighing, to her sprigged calico. It would have been worth while, though, to have seen her half an hour ago up in her room under the eaves, considering the question; she standing there with the sleeves of her dressing-sack fallen away from her pink, bare arms, and the hair clinging loose and moist to her bare white neck; to see her smooth the shimmering folds,—there were rose-buds on that muslin,—and look and long, hang it up, and turn away. Why could there not be a little more rose-bud and shimmer in people's lives! "Seems to me it's all calico!" cried Sharley.

Then to see her overturning her ribbon-box! Nobody but a girl knows how girls dream over their ribbons.

"He is coming!" whispered Sharley to the little bright barbe, and to the little bright face that flushed and fluttered at her in the glass,—"He is coming!"

Sharley looked well, waiting there in the calico and lace upon the doorstep. It is not everybody who would look well in calico and lace; yet if you were to ask me, I could not tell you how pretty Sharley is, or if she is pretty at all. I have a memory of soft hair—brown, I think—and wistful eyes; and that I never saw her without a desire to stroke her, and make her pur as I would a kitten.

How stiff and stark and black the railroad lay on its yellow ridge! Sharley drew her breath when the sudden four-o'clock whistle smote the air, and a faint, far trail of smoke puffed through the woods, and wound over the barren outline.

Her mother, seeing her steal away through the kitchen-garden, and down the slope, called after her:—

"Charlotte! going to walk? I wish you'd let the baby go too. Well, she doesn't hear!"

I will not assert that Sharley did not hear. To be frank, she was rather tired of that baby.

There was a foot-path through the brown and golden grass, and Sharley ran over it, under the maple, which was dropping yellow leaves, and down to the knot of trees which lined the farther walls. There was a nook here—she knew just where—into which one might creep, tangled in with the low-hanging green of apple and spruce, and wound about with grape-vines. Stooping down, careful not to catch that barbe upon the brambles, and careful not to soil so much as a sprig of the clean light calico, Sharley hid herself in the shadow. She could see unseen now the great puffs of purple smoke, the burning line of sandy bank, the station, and the uphill road to the village. Oddly enough, some old Scripture words—Sharley was not much in the habit of quoting Scripture—came into her thoughts just as she had curled herself comfortably up beside the wall, her watching face against the grape-leaves: "But what went ye out for to see?" "What went ye out for to see?" She went on, dreamily finishing, "A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet," and stopped, scarlet. What had prophets to do with her old friend Halcombe Dike?

Ah, but he was coming! he was coming! To Sharley's eyes the laboring, crazy locomotive which puffed him asthmatically up to the little depot was a benevolent dragon,—if there were such things as benevolent dragons,—very horrible, and she was very much afraid of it; but very gracious, and she should like to go out and pat it on the shoulder.

The train slackened, jarred, and stopped. An old woman with thirteen bundles climbed out laboriously. Two small boys turned somersaults from the platform. Sharley strained her wistful eyes till they ached. There was nobody else. Sharley was very young, and very much disappointed, and she cried. The glory had died from the skies. The world had gone out.

She was sitting there all in a heap, her face in her hands, and her heart in her foolish eyes, when a step sounded near, and a voice humming an old army song. She knew it; he had taught it to her himself. She knew the step; for she had long ago trained her slippered feet to keep pace with it. He had stepped from the wrong side of the car, perhaps, or her eager eyes had missed him; at any rate here he was,—a young man, with honest eyes, and mouth a little grave; a very plainly dressed young man,—his coat was not as new as Sharley's calico,—but a young man with a good step of his own,—strong, elastic,—and a nervous hand.

He passed, humming his army song, and never knew how the world lighted up again within a foot of him. He passed so near that Sharley by stretching out her hand could have touched him,—so near that she could hear the breath he drew. He was thinking to himself, perhaps, that no one had come from home to meet him, and he had been long away; but then, it was not his mother's fashion of welcome, and quickening his pace at the thought of her, he left the tangle of green behind, and the little wet face crushed breathless up against the grape-leaves, and was out of sight and knew nothing.

Sharley sprang up and bounded home. Her mother opened her languid eyes wide when the child came in.

"Dear me, Charlotte, how you do go chirping and hopping round, and me with this great baby and my sick-headache! *I* can't chirp and hop. You look as if somebody'd set you on fire! What's the matter with you, child?"

What was the matter, indeed! Sharley, in a little spasm of penitence,—one can afford to be penitent when one is happy,—took the baby and went away to think about it. Surely he would come to see her to-night; he did not often come home without seeing Sharley; and he had been long away. At any rate he was here; in this very Green Valley where the days had dragged so drearily without him; his eyes saw the same sky that hers saw; his breath drank the same sweet evening wind; his feet trod the roads that she had trodden yesterday, and would tread again to-morrow. But I will not tell them any more of this,—shall I, Sharley?

She threw her head back and looked up, as she walked to and fro through the yard with the heavy baby fretting on her shoulder. The skies were aflame now, for the sun was dropping slowly. "He is here!" they said. A belated robin took up the word: "He is here!" The yellow maple glittered all over with it: "Sharley, he is here!"

"The butter is here," called her mother relevantly from the house. "The butter is here now, and it's time to see about supper, Charlotte."

"More calico!" said impatient Sharley, and she gave the baby a jerk.

Whether he came or whether he did not come, there was no more time for Sharley to dream that night. In fact, there seldom was any time to dream in Mrs. Guest's household. Mrs. Guest believed in keeping people busy. She was busy enough herself when her head did not ache. When it did, it was the least she could do to see that other people were busy.

So Sharley had the table to set, and the biscuit to bake, and the tea to make, and the pears to pick over; she must run upstairs to bring her mother a handkerchief; she must hurry for her father's clothes-brush when he came in tired, and not so good-humored as he might be, from his store; she must stop to rebuild the baby's block-house, that Moppet had kicked over, and snap Moppet's dirty, dimpled fingers for kicking it over, and endure the shriek that Moppet set up therefor. She must suggest to Methuselah that he could find, perhaps, a more suitable book-mark for Robinson Crusoe than his piece of bread and molasses, and intimate doubts as to the propriety of Nate's standing on the table-cloth and sitting on the toast-rack. And then Moppet was at that baby again, dropping very cold pennies down his neck. They must be made presentable for supper, too, Moppet and Nate and Methuselah,—Methuselah, Nate, and Moppet; brushed and washed and dusted and coaxed and scolded and borne with. There was no end to it. Would there ever be any end to it? Sharley sometimes asked of her weary thoughts. Sharley's life, like the lives of most girls at her age, was one great unanswered question. It grew tiresome occasionally, as monologues are apt to do.

"I'm going to holler to-night," announced Moppet at supper, pausing in the midst of his berry-cake, by way of diversion, to lift the cat up by her tail. "I'm going to holler awful, and make you sit up and tell me about that little boy that ate the giant, and Cinderella,—how she lived in the stove-pipe,—and that man that builded his house out of a bungle of straws: and—well, there's some more, but I don't remember 'em just now, you know."

"O Moppet!"

"I am," glared Moppet over his mug. "You made me put on a clean collar.
You see if I don't holler an' holler an' holler an' keep-a-hollerin'!"

Sharley's heart sank; but she patiently cleared away her dishes, mixed her mother's ipecac, read her father his paper, went upstairs with the children, treated Moppet with respect as to his buttons and boot-lacing, and tremblingly bided her time.

"Well," condescended that young gentleman, before his prayers were over, "I b'lieve—give us our debts—I'll keep that hollerin'—forever 'n ever—Namen—till to-morrow night. I ain't a—bit—sleepy, but —" And nobody heard anything more from Moppet.

The coast was clear now, and happy Sharley, with bright cheeks, took her little fall hat that she was trimming, and sat down on the front doorsteps; sat there to wait and watch, and hope and dream and flutter, and sat in vain. Twilight crept up the path, up to her feet, folded her in; the warm color of her plaided ribbons faded away under her eyes, and dropped from her listless fingers; with them had faded her bit of a hope for that night; Hal always came before dark.

"Who cares?" said Sharley, with a toss of her soft, brown head. Somebody did care nevertheless. Somebody winked hard as she went upstairs.

However, she could light a lamp and finish her hat. That was one comfort. It always *is* a comfort to finish one's hat. Girls have forgotten graver troubles than Sharley's in the excitement of hurried Saturday-night millinery.

A bonnet is a picture in its way, and grows up under one's fingers with a pretty sense of artistic triumph. Besides, there is always the question: Will it be becoming? So Sharley put her lamp on a cricket, and herself on the floor, and began to sing over her work. A pretty sight it was,—the low, dark room with the heavy shadows in its corners; all the light and color drawn to a focus in the middle of it; Sharley, with her head bent—bits of silk like broken rainbows tossed about her—and that little musing smile, considering gravely, Should the white squares of the plaid turn outward? and where should she put the coral? and would it be becoming after all? A pretty, girlish sight, and you may laugh at it if you choose; but there was a prettier woman's tenderness underlying it, just as a strain of fine, coy sadness will wind through a mazourka or a waltz. For who would see the poor little hat to-morrow at church? and would he like it? and when he came to-morrow night,—for of course he would come to-morrow night,—would he tell her so?

When everybody else was in bed and the house still, Sharley locked her door, furtively stole to the bureau-glass, shyly tied on that hat, and more shyly peeped in. A flutter of October colors and two great brown eyes looked back at her encouragingly.

"I should like to be pretty," said Sharley, and asked the next minute to be forgiven for the vanity. "At any rate," by way of modification, "I should like to be pretty to-morrow."

She prayed for Halcombe Dike when she kneeled, with her face hidden in her white bed, to say "Our Father." I believe she had prayed for him now every night for a year. Not that there was any need of it, she reasoned, for was he not a great deal better than she could ever be? Far above her; oh, as far above her as the shining of the stars was above the shining of the maple-tree; but perhaps if she prayed very hard they would give one extra, beautiful angel charge over him. Then, was it not quite right to pray for one's old friends? Besides—besides, they had a pleasant sound, those two words: "*Our* Father."

"I will be good to-morrow," said Sharley, dropping into sleep. "Mother's head will ache, and I can go to church. I will listen to the minister, and I won't plan out my winter dresses in prayer-time. I won't be cross to Moppet, nor shake Methuselah. I will be good. Hal will help me to be good. I shall see him in the morning,—in the morning."

Sharley's self-knowledge, like the rest of her, was in the bud yet.

Her Sun-day, her one warm, shining day, opened all in a glow. She danced down stairs at ten o'clock in the new hat, in a haze of merry colors. She had got breakfast and milked one cow and dressed four boys that morning, and she felt as if she had earned the right to dance in a haze of anything. The sunlight quivered in through the blinds. The leaves of the yellow maple drifted by on the fresh, strong wind. The church-bells rang out like gold. All the world was happy.

"Charlotte!" Her mother bustled out of the "keeping-room" with her hat on. "I've changed my mind, Sharley, and feel so much better I believe I will go to church. I'll take Methuselah, but Nate and Moppet had better stay at home with the baby. The last time I took Moppet he fired three hymn-books at old Mrs. Perkins,—right into the crown of her bonnet, and in the long prayer, too. That child will be the death of me some day. I guess you'll get along with him, and the baby isn't quite as cross as he was yesterday. You'd just as lief go in the afternoon, I suppose? Pin my shawl on the shoulder, please."

But Sharley, half-way down the stairs, stood still. She was no saint, this disappointed little girl. Her face, in the new fall hat, flushed angrily and her hands dropped.

"O mother! I did want to go! You're always keeping me at home for something. I did *want* to go!"—and rushed up stairs noisily, like a child, and slammed her door.

"Dear me!" said her mother, putting on her spectacles to look after her,—"dear me! what a temper! I'm sure I don't see what difference it makes to her which half of the day she goes. Last Sunday she must go in the afternoon, and wouldn't hear of anything else. Well, there's no accounting for girls! Come, Methuselah."

Is there not any "accounting for girls," my dear madam? What is the matter with those mothers, that they cannot see? Just as if it never made any difference to them which half of the day they went to church! Well, well! we are doing it, all of us, as fast as we can,—going the way of all the earth, digging little graves for our young sympathies, one by one, covering them up close. It grows so long since golden mornings and pretty new bonnets and the sweet consciousness of watching eyes bounded life for us! We have dreamed our dreams; we have learned the long lesson of our days; we are stepping on into the shadows. Our eyes see that ye see not; our ears hear that which ye have not considered. We read your melodious story through, but we have read other stories since, and only its *haec fabula docet* remains very fresh. You will be as obtuse as we are some day, young things! It is not neglect; it is not disapproval,—we simply forget. But from such forgetfulness may the good Lord graciously deliver us, one and all!

There! I fancy that I have made for Mrs. Guest—sitting meantime in her cushioned pew (directly behind Halcombe Dike), and comfortably looking over the "Watts and Select" with Methuselah—a better defence than ever she could have made for herself. Between you and me, girls,—though you need not tell your mother,—I think it is better than she deserves.

Sharley, upstairs, had slammed her door and locked it, and was pacing hotly back and forth across her room. Poor Sharley! Sun and moon and stars were darkened; the clouds had returned after the rain. She tore off the new hat and Sunday things savagely; put on her old chocolate-colored morning-dress, with a grim satisfaction in making herself as ugly as possible; pulled down the ribboned chignon which she had braided, singing, half an hour ago (her own, that chignon); screwed her hair under a net into the most unbecoming little pug of which it was capable, and went drearily down stairs. Nate, enacting the cheerful drama of "Jeff Davis on a sour apple-tree," hung from the balusters, purple, gasping, tied to the verge of strangulation by the energetic Moppet. The baby was calmly sitting in the squash-pies.

Halcombe Dike, coming home from church that morning a little in advance of the crowd, saw a "Pre-raphaelite" in the doorway of Mr. Guest's barn, and quietly unlatching the gate came nearer to examine it. It was worth examining. There was a ground of great shadows and billowy hay; a pile of crimson apples struck out by the light through a crack; two children and a kitten asleep together in a sunbeam; a girl on the floor with a baby crawling over her; a girl in a chocolate-colored dress with yellow leaves in her hair,—her hair upon her shoulders, and her eyelashes wet.

"Well, Sharley!"

She looked up to see him standing there with his grave, amused smile.
Her first thought was to jump and run; her second, to stand fire.

"Well, Mr. Halcombe! Moppet's stuck yellow leaves all over me; my hair's down; I've got on a horrid old morning-dress; look pretty to see company, don't I?"

"Very, Sharley."

"Besides," said Sharley, "I've been crying, and my eyes are red."

"So I see."

"No, you don't, for I'm not looking at you."

"But I am looking at you."

"Oh!"

"What were you crying about, Sharley!"

"Because my grandmother's dead," said Sharley, after some reflection.

"Ah, yes, I remember! about '36, I think, her tombstone gives as the date of that sad event?"

"I think it's wicked in people to laugh at people's dead grandmothers," said Sharley, severely. "You ought to be at church."

"So I was."

"I wasn't; mother wouldn't—" But her lip quivered, and she stopped. The memory of the new hat and Sunday dress, of the golden church-bells, and hush of happy Sabbath-morning thoughts came up. That he should see her now, in this plight, with her swollen eyes and pouting lips, and her heart full of wicked discontent!

"Wouldn't what, Sharley?"

"*Don't!*" she pleaded, with a sob; "I'm cross; I can't talk. Besides, I shall cry again, and I *won't* cry again. You may let me alone, or you may go away. If you don't go away you may just tell me what you have been doing with yourself this whole long summer. Working hard, of course. I don't see but that everybody has to work hard in this world! I hate this world! I suppose you're a rich man by this time?"

The young man looked at the chocolate dress, the yellow leaves, the falling hair, and answered gravely,—a little coldly, Sharley thought,—that his prospects were not encouraging just now. Perhaps they never had been encouraging; only that he in his young ardor had thought so. He was older now, and wiser. He understood what a hard pull was before young architects in America,—any young architect, the best of young architects,—and whether there was a place for him remained to be proved. He was willing to work hard, and to hope long; but he grew a little tired of it sometimes, and so—He checked himself suddenly. "As if," thought Sharley, "he were tired of talking so long to me! He thought my question impertinent." She hid her face in her drooping hair, and wished herself a mile away.

"There was something you once told me about some sort of buildings?" she ventured, timidly, in a pause.

"The Crumpet Buildings. Yes, I sent my proposals, but have not heard from them yet; I don't know that I ever shall. That is a large affair, rather. The name of the thing would be worth a good deal to me if I succeeded. It would give me a start, and—"

"Ough!" exclaimed Sharley. She had been sitting at his feet, with her face raised, and red eyes forgotten, when, splash! an icy stream of water came into her eyes, into her mouth, down her neck, up her sleeves. She gasped, and stood drenched.

"O, it's only a rain-storm," said Moppet, appearing on the scene with his empty dipper. "I got tired of sleeping. I dreamed about three giants. I didn't like it. I wanted something to do. It's only *my* rain-storm, and you needn't mind it, you know."

Dripping Sharley's poor little temper, never of the strongest, quivered to its foundations. She took hold of Moppet without any observation, and shook him just about as hard as she could shake. When she came to her senses her mother was coming in at the gate, and Halcombe Dike was gone.

* * * * *

"I s'pose I've got to 'tend to that hollering to-night," said Moppet, with a gentle sigh.

This was at a quarter past seven. Nate and Methuselah were in bed. The baby was asleep. Moppet had thrown his shoes into the water-pitcher but twice, and run down stairs in his nightgown only four times that evening; and Sharley felt encouraged. Perhaps, after all, he would be still by half past seven; and by half past seven—If Halcombe Dike did not come to-night, something was the matter. Sharley decided this with a sharp little nod.

She had devoted herself to Moppet with politic punctiliousness. Would he lie at his lazy length, with his feet on her clean petticoat, while she bent and puzzled over his knotted shoestrings? Very well. Did he signify a desire to pull her hair down and tickle her till she gasped? She was at his service. Should he insist upon being lulled to slumber by the recounted adventures of Old Mother Hubbard, Red Riding-Hood, and Tommy Tucker? Not those exactly, it being thought proper to keep him in a theologic mood of mind till after sundown, but he should have David and Goliath and Moses in the bulrushes with pleasure; then Moses and Goliath and David again; after that, David and Goliath and Moses, by way of variety. She conducted every Scriptural dog and horse of her acquaintance entirely round the globe in a series of somewhat apocryphal adventures. She ransacked her memory for biblical boys, but these met with small favor. "Pooh! *they* weren't any good! They couldn't play stick-knife and pitch-in. Besides, they all died. Besides, they weren't any great shakes. Jack the Giant-Killer was worth a dozen of 'em, sir! Now tell it all over again, or else I won't say my prayers till next winter!"

After some delicate plotting, Sharley manoeuvred him through "Now I lay me," and tucked him up, and undertook a little Sunday-night catechizing, conscientiously enough.

"Has Moppet been a good boy to-day?"

"Well, that's a pretty question! Course I have!"

"But have you had any good thoughts, dear, you know?"

"O yes, lots of 'em! been thinking about Blessingham."

"Who? O, Absalom!"

"O yes, I've been thinking about Blessingham, you know; how he must have looked dreadful funny hanging up there onto his hair, with all the darts 'n things stickin' into him! _Would_n't you like to seen him! No, you needn't go off, 'cause I ain't begun to be asleep yet."

Time and twilight were creeping on together. Sharley was sure that she had heard the gate shut, and that some one sat talking with her mother upon the front doorsteps.

"O Moppet! _Could_n't you go to sleep without me this one night,—not this one night?" and the hot, impatient tears came in the dark.

"O no," said immovable Moppet, "of course I can't; and I 'spect I'm going to lie awake all night too. You'd ought to be glad to stay with your little brothers. The girl in my library-book, she was glad, anyhow."

Sharley threw herself back in the rocking-chair and let her eyes brim over. She could hear the voices on the doorsteps plainly; her mother's wiry tones and the visitor's; it was a man's voice, low and less frequent. Why did not her mother call her? Had not he asked to see her? Had he not? Would nobody ever come up to take her place? Would Moppet never go to sleep? There he was peering at her over the top of the sheet, with two great, mischievous, wide-awake eyes. And time and twilight were wearing on.

Let us talk about "affliction" with our superior, reproving smile! Graves may close and hearts may break, fortunes, hopes, and souls be ruined, but Moppet wouldn't go to sleep; and Sharley in her rocking-chair doubted her mother's love, the use of life, and the benevolence of God.

"I'm lying awake to think about Buriah," observed Moppet, pleasantly.

"David wanted to marry Buriah's wife. She was a very nice woman."

Silence followed this announcement.

"Sharley? you needn't think I'm asleep,—any such thing. Besides, if you go down you'd better believe I'll holler! See here: s'pose I'd slung my dipper at Hal Dike, jest as David slung the stone at Go-li—"

Another silence. Encouraged, Sharley dried her tears and crept half-way across the floor. Then a board creaked.

"O Sharley! Why don't people shut their eyes when they die? Why, Jim Snow's dorg, he didn't. I punched a frog yesterday. I want a drink of water."

Sharley resigned herself in despair to her fate. Moppet lay broad and bright awake till half past eight. The voices by the door grew silent. Steps sounded on the walk. The gate shut.

"That child has kept me up with him the whole evening long," said Sharley, coming sullenly down. "You didn't even come and speak to him, mother. I suppose Halcombe Dike never asked for me?"

"Halcombe Dike! Law! that wasn't Halcombe Dike. It was Deacon Snow,—the old Deacon,—come in to talk over the revival. Halcombe Dike was at meeting, your father says, with his cousin Sue. Great interest up his way, the Deacon says. There's ten had convictions since Conference night. I wish you were one of the interested, Sharley."

But Sharley had fled. Fled away into the windy, moonless night, down through the garden, out into the sloping field. She ran back and forth through the grass with great leaps, like a wounded thing. All her worry and waiting and disappointment, and he had not come! All the thrill and hope of her happy Sunday over and gone, and he had not come! All the winter to live without one look at him,—and he knew it, and he would not come!

"I don't care!" sobbed Sharley, like a defiant child, but threw up her hands with the worlds and wailed. It frightened her to hear the sound of her own voice—such a pitiful, shrill voice—in the lonely place. She broke into her great leaps again, and so ran up and down the slope, and felt the wind in her face. It drank her breath away from her after a while; it was a keen, chilly wind. She sat down on a stone in the middle of the field, and it came over her that it was a cold, dark place to be in alone; and just then she heard her father calling her from the yard. So she stood up very slowly and walked back.

"You'll catch your death!" fretted her mother, "running round bareheaded in all this damp. You know how much trouble you are when you are sick, too, and I think you ought to have more consideration for me, with all my care. Going to bed? Be sure and not forget to put the baby's gingham apron in the wash."

Sharley lighted her kerosene lamp without reply. It was the little kerosene with the crack in the handle. Some vague notion that everything in the world had cracked came to her as she crept upstairs. She put her lamp out as soon as she was in her room, and locked her door hard. She sat down on the side of the bed and crossed her hands, and waited for her father and mother to come upstairs. They came up by and by and went to bed. The light that shone in through the chink under the door went out. The house was still.

She went over to the window then, threw it wide open, and sat down crouched upon the broad sill. She did not sob now nor wail out. She did not feel like sobbing or wailing. She only wanted to think; she must think, she had need to think. That this neglect of Halcombe Dike's meant something she did not try to conceal from her bitter thoughts. He had not neglected her in all his life before. It was not the habit, either, of this grave young man with the earnest eyes to do or not to do without a meaning. He would put silence and the winter between them. That was what he meant. Sharley, looking out upon the windy dark with straight-lidded eyes, knew that beneath and beyond the silence of the winter lay the silence of a life.

The silence of a life! The wind hushed into a moment's calm while the words turned over in her heart. The branches of a cherry-tree, close under her sight, dropped lifelessly; a homesick bird gave a little, still, mournful chirp in the dark. Sharley gasped.

"It's all because I shook Moppet! That's it. Because I shook Moppet this morning. He used to like me,—yes, he did. He didn't know how cross and ugly I am. No wonder he thought such a cross and ugly thing could never be—could never be—"

She broke off, crimson. "His wife?" She would have said the words without blush or hesitation a week ago. Halcombe Dike had spoken no word of love to her. But she had believed, purely and gravely, in the

deeps of her maiden thought, that she was dear to him. Gravely and purely too she had dreamed that this October Sunday would bring some sign to her of their future.

He had been toiling at that business in the city now a long while. Sharley knew nothing about business, but she had fancied that, even though his "prospects" were not good, he must be ready now to think of a home of his own,—at least that he would give her some hope of it to keep through the dreary, white winter. But he had given her nothing to keep through the winter, or through any winter of a wintry life; nothing. The beautiful Sunday was over. He had come, and he had gone. She must brush away the pretty fancy. She must break the timid dream. So that grave, sweet word had died in shame upon her lips. She should not be his wife. She should never be anybody's wife.

The Sunday Night Express shrieked up the valley, and thundered by and away in the dark. Sharley leaned far out into the wind to listen to the dying sound, and wondered what it would seem like to-morrow morning when it carried him away. With its pause one of those sudden hushes fell again upon the wind. The homesick bird fluttered about a little, hunting for its nest.

"Never to be his wife!" moaned Sharley. What did it mean? "Never to be his wife?" She pressed her hands up hard against her two temples, and considered:—

Moppet and the baby, and her mother's headaches; milking the cow, and kneading the bread, and darning the stockings; going to church in old hats,—for what difference was it going to make to anybody now, whether she trimmed them with Scotch plaid or sarcenet cambric?—coming home to talk over revivals with Deacon Snow, or sit down in a proper way, like other old people, in the house with a lamp, and read Somebody's Life and Letters. Never any more moonlight, and watching, and strolling! Never any more hoping, or wishing, or expecting, for Sharley.

She jumped a little off her window-sill; then sat down again. That was it. Moppet, and the baby, and her mother, and kneading, and milking, and darning, for thirty, for forty, for—the dear Lord, who pitied her, only knew how many years.

But Sharley did not incline to think much about the Lord just then. She was very miserable, and very much alone and unhelped. So miserable, so alone and unhelped, that it never occurred to her to drop down right there with her despairing little face on the window-sill and tell Him all about it. O Sharley! did you not think He would understand?

She had made up her mind—decidedly made up her mind—not to go to sleep that night. The unhappy girls in the novels always sit up, you know. Besides, she was too wretched to sleep. Then the morning train went early, at half past five, and she should stay here till it came.

This was very good reasoning, and Sharley certainly was very unhappy,—as unhappy as a little girl of eighteen can well be; and I suppose it would sound a great deal better to say that the cold morning looked in upon her sleepless pain, or that Aurora smiled upon her unrested eyes, or that she kept her bitter watch until the stars grew pale (and a fine chance that would be to describe a sunrise too); but truth compels me to state that she did what some very unhappy people have done before her,—found the window-sill uncomfortable, cramped, neuralgic, and cold,—so undressed and went to bed and to sleep, very much as she would have done if there had been no Halcombe Dike in the world. Sharley was not used to lying awake, and Nature would not be cheated out of her rights in such a round, young, healthful little body.

But that did not make her much the happier when she woke in the cold gray of the dawn to listen for the early train. It was very cold and very gray, not time for the train yet, but she could not bear to lie still and hear the shrill, gay concert of the birds, to watch the day begin, and think how many days must have beginning,—so she crept faintly up and out into the chill. She wandered about for a time in the raw, brightening air. The frost lay crisp upon the short grass; the elder-bushes were festooned with tiny white tassels; the maple-leaves hung fretted with silver; the tangle of apple-trees and spruces was powdered and pearled. She stole into it, as she had stolen into it in the happy sunset-time so long ago—why! was it only day before yesterday?—stole in and laid her cheek up against the shining, wet vines, which melted warm beneath her touch, and shut her eyes. She thought how she would like to shut and hide herself away in a place where she could never see the frescoed frost or brightening day, nor hear the sound of chirping birds, nor any happy thing.

By and by she heard the train coming, and footsteps. He came springing by in his strong, man's way as he had come before. As before, he passed near—how very near!—to the quivering white face crushed up against the vine-leaves, and went his way and knew nothing.

The train panted and raced away, shrieked a little in a doleful, breathless fashion, grew small, grew less, grew dim, died from sight in pallid smoke. The track stood up on its mound of frozen bank, blank

and mute, like a corpse from which the soul had fled.

Sharley came into the kitchen at six o'clock. The fire was burning hotly under the boiler. The soiled clothes lay scattered about. Her mother stood over the tubs, red-faced and worried, complaining that Sharley had not come to help her. She turned, when the girl opened the door, to scold her a little. The best of mothers are apt to scold on Monday morning.

Sharley stood still a moment and looked around. She must begin it with a washing-day then, this other life that had come to her. Her heart might break; but the baby's aprons must be boiled—to-day, next week, another week; the years stretched out into one wearisome, endless washing-day. O, the dreadful years! She grew a little blind and dizzy, sat down on a heap of table-cloths, and held up her arms.

"Mother, don't be cross to me this morning,—*don't* O mother, mother, mother! I wish there were anybody to help me!"

* * * * *

The battle-fields of life lie in ambush. We trip along on our smiling way and they give no sign. We turn sharp corners where they hide in shadow. No drum-beat sounds alarum. It is the music and the dress-parade to-night, the groaning and the blood to-morrow.

Sharley had been little more than a child, in her unreasoning young joy, when she knotted the barbe at her throat on Saturday night. "I am an old woman now," she said to herself on Monday morning. Not that her saying so proved anything,—except, indeed, that it was her first trouble, and that she was very young to have a trouble. Yet, since she had the notion, she might as well, to all intents and purposes, have shrivelled into the caps and spectacles of a centenarian. "Imaginary griefs *are* real." She took, indeed, a grim sort of pleasure in thinking that her youth had fled away, and forever, in thirty-six hours.

However that might be, that October morning ushered Sharley upon battle-ground; nor was the struggle the less severe that, she was so young and so unused to struggling.

I have to tell of nothing new or tragic in the child's days; only of the old, slow, foolish pain that gnaws at the roots of things. Something was the matter with the sunsets and the dawns. Moonrise was an agony. The brown and golden grass had turned dull and dead. She would go away up garret and sit with her fingers in her ears, that she might not hear the frogs chanting in the swamp at twilight.

One night she ran away from her father and mother. It chanced to be an anniversary of their wedding-day; they had kissed each other after tea and talked of old times and blushed a little, their married eyes occupied and content with one another; she felt with a sudden, dreary bitterness that she should not be missed, and so ran out into the field and sat down there on her stone in the dark. She rather hoped that they would wonder where she was before bedtime. It would be a bit of comfort. She was so cold and comfortless. But nobody thought of her; and when she came weakly up the yard at ten o'clock, the door was locked.

For a week she went about her work like a sleepwalker. Her future was settled. Life was over. Why make ado? The suns would set and the moons would rise: let them; there would always be suns to set and moons to rise. There were dinners to get and stockings to mend; there would always be dinners to get and stockings to mend. She was put into the world for the sake of dinners and stockings, apparently. Very well; she was growing used to it; one could grow used to it. She put away the barbe and the pink muslin, locked her ribbon-box into the lower drawer, gave up crimping her hair, and wore the chocolate calico all day. She went to the Thursday-evening conference, discussed the revival with Deacon Snow, and locked herself into her room one night to put the lamp on the bureau before the glass and shake her soft hair down about her colorless, inexpectant face, to see if it were not turning gray. She was disappointed to find it as brown and bright as ever.

But Sharley was very young, and the sweet, persistent hopes of youth were strong in her. They woke up presently with a sting like the sting of a frost-bite.

"O, to think of being an old maid, in a little black silk apron, and having Halcombe Dike's wedding-cards laid upon a shelf!"

She was holding the baby when this "came all over her," and she let him drop into the coal-hod, and sat down to cry.

What had she done that life should shut down before her in such cruel bareness? Was she not young, very young to be unhappy? She began to fight a little with herself and Providence in savage mood; favored the crimped hair and Scotch plaids again, tried a nutting-party and a sewing-circle, as well as a

little flirtation with Jim Snow. This lasted for another week. At the end of that time she went and sat down alone one noon on a pile of kindlings in the wood-house, and thought it over.

"Why, I can't!" her eyes widening with slow terror. "Happiness *won't* come. I *can't* make it. I can't ever make it. And O, I'm just at the beginning of everything!"

Somebody called her just then to peel the potatoes for dinner. She thought—she thought often in those days—of that fancy of hers about calico-living. Was not that all that was left for her? Little dreary, figures, all just alike, like the chocolate morning-dress? O, the rose-bud and shimmer that might have been waiting somewhere! And O, the rose-bud and shimmer that were forever gone!

The frosted golds of autumn melted into a clear, sharp, silvered winter, carrying Sharley with them, round on her old routine. It never grew any the easier or softer. The girl's little rebellious feet trod it bitterly. She hated the darning and the sweeping and the baking and the dusting. She hated the sound of the baby's worried cry. She was tired of her mother's illnesses, tired of Moppet's mischief, tired of Methuselah's solemnity. She used to come in sometimes from her walk to the office, on a cold, moonlight evening, and stand looking in at them all through the "keeping-room" window,—her father prosing over the state of the flour-market, her mother on the lounge, the children waiting for her to put them to bed; Methuselah poring over his arithmetic in his little-old-mannish way; Moppet tying the baby and the kitten together,—stand looking till the hot, shamed blood shot to her forehead, for thought of how she was wearied of the sight.

"I can't think what's got into Sharley," complained her mother; "she has been as cross as a bear this good while. If she were eight years old, instead of eighteen, I should give her a good whipping and send her to bed!"

Poor Sharley nursed her trouble and her crossness together, in her aggrieved, girlish way, till the light went out of her wistful eyes, and little sharp bones began to show at her wrists. She used to turn them about and pity them. They were once so round and winsome!

Now it was probably a fact that, as for the matter of hard work, Sharley's life was a sinecure compared to what it would be as the wife of Halcombe Dike. Double your toil into itself, and triple it by the measure of responsibility, and there you have your married life, young girls,—beautiful, dim Eden that you have made of it! But there was never an Eden without its serpent, I fancy. Besides, Sharley, like the rest of them, had not thought as far as that.

Then—ah then, what toil would not be play-day for the sake of Halcombe Dike? what weariness and wear could be too great, what pain too keen, if they could bear it together?

O, you mothers! do you not see that this makes "a' the difference"? You have strength that your daughter knows not of. There are hands to help you over the thorns (if not, there ought to be). She gropes and cuts her way alone. Be very patient with her in her little moods and selfishnesses. No matter if she might help you more about the baby: be patient. Her position in your home is at best an anomalous one,—a grown woman, with much of the dependence of a child. She must have all the jars and tasks and frets of family life, without the relief of housewifely invention and authority. God and her own heart will teach her in time what she owes to you. Never fear for that. But bear long with her. Do not exact too much. The life you give her did not come at her asking. Consider this well; and do not press the debt beyond its due.

"I don't see that there is ever going to be any end to anything!" gasped Sharley at night between Moppet's buttons.

This set her to thinking. What if one made an end?

She went out one cold, gray afternoon in the thick of a snow-storm and wandered up and down the railroad. It was easy walking upon the sleepers, the place was lonely, and she had come out to be alone. She liked the beat of the storm in her face for a while, the sharp turns of the wind, and the soft touch of the snow that was drifting in little heaps about her feet. Then she remembered of how small use it was to like anything in the world now, and her face grew as wild as the storm.

Fancy yourself hemmed in with your direst grief by a drifting sleet in such a voiceless, viewless place as that corpse-like track,—the endless, painless track, stretching away in the white mystery, at peace, like all dead things.

What Sharley should have done was to go home as straight as she could go, put on dry stockings, and get her supper. What she did was to linger, as all people linger, in the luxury of their first wretchedness,—till the uncanny twilight fell and shrouded her in. Then a thought struck her.

A freight-train was just coming in, slowly but heavily. Sharley, as she stepped aside to let it pass, fixed her eyes upon it for a moment, then, with a little hesitation, stopped to pick up a bit of iron that lay at her feet,—a round, firm rod-end,—and placed it diagonally upon the rail. The cars rumbled by and over it. Sharley bent to see. It was crushed to a shapeless twist. Her face whitened. She sat down and shivered a little. But she did not go home. The Evening Accommodation was due now in about ten minutes.

Girls, if you think I am telling a bit of sensational fiction, I wish you would let me know.

"It would be quick and easy," thought Sharley. The man of whom she had read in the Journal last night,—they said he must have found it all over in an instant. An instant was a very short time! And forty years,—and the little black silk apron,—and the cards laid up on a shelf! O, to go out of life,—anywhere, anyhow, out of life! No, the Sixth Commandment had nothing to do with ending one's self!

An unearthly, echoing shriek broke through the noise of the storm,—nothing is more unearthly than a locomotive in a storm. Sharley stood up,—sat down again. A red glare struck the white mist, broadened, brightened, grew.

Sharley laid her head down with her small neck upon the rail, and—I am compelled to say that she took it up again faster than she laid it down. Took it up, writhed off the track, tumbled down the banking, hid her face in a drift, and crouched there with the cold drops on her face till the hideous, tempting thing shot by.

"I guess con-sumption would be—a—little better!" she decided, crawling to her feet.

But the poor little feet could scarcely carry her. She struggled to the street, caught at the fences for a while, then dropped.

Somebody stumbled over her. It was Cousin Sue—Halcombe Dike's Cousin Sue.

"Deary me!" she said; and being five feet seven, with strong Yankee arms of her own, she took Sharley up in them, and carried her to the house as if she had been a baby.

Sharley did not commit the atrocity of fainting, but found herself thoroughly chilled and weak. Cousin Sue bustled about with brandy and blankets, and Sharley, watching her through her half-closed eyes, speculated a little. Had *she* anybody's wedding-cards laid up on a shelf? She had the little black apron at any rate. Poor Cousin Sue! Should she be like that? "Poor Cousin Charlotte!" people would say.

Cousin Sue had gone to see about supper when Sharley opened her eyes and sat strongly up. A gentle-faced woman sat between her and the light, in a chair cushioned upon one side for a useless arm. Halcombe had made that chair. Mrs. Dike had been a busy, cheery woman, and Sharley had always felt sorry for her since the sudden day when paralysis crippled her good right hand; three years ago that was now; but she was not one of those people to whom it comes natural to say that one is sorry for them, and she was Halcombe's mother, and so Sharley had never said it. It struck her freshly now that this woman had seen much ill-fortune in her widowed years, and that she had kept a certain brave, contented look in her eyes through it all.

It struck her only as a passing thought, which might never have come back had not Mrs. Dike pushed her chair up beside her, and given her a long, quiet look straight in the eyes.

"It was late for you to be out in the storm, my dear, and alone."

"I'd been out a good while. I had been on—the track," said Sharley, with a slight shiver. "I think I could not have been exactly well. I would not go again. I must go home now. But oh"—her voice sinking—"I wish nobody had found me, I wish nobody had found me! The snow would have covered me up, you see."

She started up flushing hot and frightened. What had she been saying to Halcombe's mother?

But Halcombe's mother put her healthy soft hand down on the girl's shut fingers. Women understand each other in flashes.

"My dear," she said, without prelude or apology, "I have a thing to say to you. God does not give us our troubles to think about; that's all. I have lived more years than you. I know that He never gives us our troubles to think about."

"I don't know who's going to think about them if we don't!" said

Sharley, half aggrieved.

"Supposing nobody thinks of them, where's the harm done? Mark my words, child: He sends them to drive us out of ourselves,—to *drive* us out. He had much rather we would go of our own accord, but if we won't go we must be sent, for go we must. That's just about what we're put into this world for, and we're not fit to go out of it till we have found this out."

Now the moralities of conversation were apt to glide off from Sharley like rain-drops from gutta-percha, and I cannot assert that these words would have made profound impression upon her had not Halcombe Dike's mother happened to say them.

Be that as it may, she certainly took them home with her, and pondered them in her heart; pondered till late in her feverish, sleepless night, till her pillow grew wet, and her heart grew still. About midnight she jumped out into the cold, and kneeled, with her face hidden in the bed.

"O, I've been a naughty girl!" she said, just as she might have said it ten years ago. She felt so small, and ignorant, and weak that night.

Out of such smallness, and ignorance, and weakness great knowledge and strength may have beautiful growth. They came in time to Sharley, but it was a long, slow time. Moppet was just as unendurable, the baby just as fretful, life just as joyless, as if she had taken no new outlook upon it, made no new, tearful plans about it.

"Calico! calico!" she cried out a dozen times a day; "nothing *but* calico!"

But by and by it dawned in her thoughts that this was a very little matter to cry out about. What if God meant that some lives should be "all just alike," and like nothing fresh or bonnie, and that hers should be one? That was his affair. Hers was to use the dull gray gift he gave—*whatever* gift he gave—as loyally and as cheerily as she would use treasures of gold and rose-tint. He knew what he was doing. What he did was never forgetful or unkind. She felt—after a long time, and in a quiet way—that she could be sure of that.

No matter about Halcombe Dike, and what was gone. No matter about the little black aprons, and what was coming. He understood all about that. He would take care of it.

Meantime, why could she not as well wash Moppet's face with a pleasant word as with a cross one? darn the stockings with a smile as well as a frown? stay and hear her mother discuss her headaches as well as run away and think of herself? Why not give happiness since she could not have it? be of use since nobody was of much use to her? Easier saying than doing, to be sure, Sharley found; but she kept the idea in mind as the winter wore away.

She was thinking about it one April afternoon, when she had stolen out of the house for a walk in the budding woods. She had need enough of a walk. It was four weeks now since she had felt the wide wind upon her face; four weeks pleasantly occupied in engineering four boys through the measles; and if ever a sick child had the capacity for making of himself a seraph upon earth it was Moppet. It was a thin little face which stood out against the "green mist" of the unfurling leaves as Sharley wandered in and out with sweet aimlessness among the elms and hickories; very thin, with its wistful eyes grown hollow; a shadow of the old Sharley who fluttered among the plaid ribbons one October morning. It was a saddened face—it might always be a saddened face—but a certain pleasant, rested look had worked its way about her mouth, not unlike the rich mellowness of a rainy sunset. Not that Sharley knew much about sunsets yet; but she thought she did, which, as I said before, amounts to about the same thing.

She was thinking with a wee glow of pleasure how the baby's arms clung around her neck that morning, and how surprised her mother looked when Methuselah cried at her taking this walk. As you were warned in the beginning, nothing remarkable ever happened to Sharley. Since she had begun in practice to approve Mrs. Dike's theory, that no harm is done if we never think of our troubles, she had neither become the village idol, nor in any remarkable degree her mother's pride. But she had nevertheless cut for herself a small niche in the heart of her home,—a much larger niche, perhaps, than the excellent Mrs. Guest was well aware of.

"I don't care how small it is," cried Sharley, "as long as I have room to put my two feet on and look up."

And for that old pain? Ah, well, God knew about that, and Sharley,—nobody else. Whatever the winter had taught her she had bound and labelled in her precise little way for future use. At least she had learned—and it is not everybody who learns it at eighteen,—to wear her life bravely—"a rose with a golden thorn."

I really think that this is the place to end my story, so properly polished off with a moral. So many Sharleys, too, will never read beyond. But being bound in honor to tell the whole moral or no moral, I must add, that while Sharley walked and thought among her hickories there came up a thunder-storm. It fell upon her without any warning. The sky had been clear when she looked at it last. It gaped at her now out of the throats of purple-black clouds. Thunders crashed over and about her. All the forest darkened and reeled. Sharley was enough like other girls to be afraid of a thunder-storm. She started with a cry to break her way through the matted undergrowth; saw, or felt that she saw, the glare of a golden arrow overhead; threw out her hands, and fell crushed, face downward, at the foot of a scorched tree.

When she opened her eyes she was sitting under a wood-pile. Or, to speak more accurately, she was sitting in Mr. Halcombe Dike's lap, and Mr. Halcombe Dike was under the wood-pile.

It was a low, triangular wood-pile, roofed with pine boards, through which the water was dripping. It stood in the centre of a large clearing, exposed to the rain, but safe.

"Oh!" said Sharley.

"That's right," said he, "I knew you were only stunned. I've been rubbing your hands and feet. It was better to come here than to run the blockade of that patch of woods to a house. Don't try to talk."

"I'm not," said Sharley, with a faint little laugh, "it's you that are talking"; and ended with a weak pause, her head falling back where she had found it, upon his arm.

"I *wouldn't* talk," repeated the young man, relevantly, after a profound silence of five minutes. "I was coming 'across lots' from the station. You fell—Sharley, you fell right at my feet!"

He spoke carelessly, but Sharley, looking up, saw that his face was white.

"I believe I will get down," she observed, after some consideration, lifting her head.

"I don't see how you can, you know," he suggested, helplessly; "it pours as straight as a deluge out there. There isn't room in this place for two people to sit."

So they "accepted the situation."

The clouds broke presently, and rifts of yellow light darted in through the fragrant, wet pine boards. Sharley's hair had fallen from her net and covered her face. She felt too weak to push it away. After some thought Halcombe Dike pushed it away for her, reverently, with his strong, warm hand. The little white, trembling face shone out. He turned and looked at it—the poor little face!—looked at it gravely and long.

But Sharley, at the look, sat up straight. Her heart leaped out into the yellow light. All her dreary winter danced and dwindled away. Through the cracks in the pine boards a long procession of May-days came filing in. The scattering rain-drops flamed before her. "All the world and all the waters blushed and bloomed." She was so very young!

"I could not speak," he told her quietly, "when I was at home before. I could never speak till now. Last October I thought"—his voice sinking hoarsely—"I thought, Sharley, it could never be. I could barely eke out my daily bread; I had no right to ask you—to bind you. You were very young; I thought, perhaps, Sharley, you might forget. Somebody else might make you happier. I would not stand in the way of your happiness. I asked God to bless you that morning when I went away in the cars, Sharley. Sharley!"

Something in her face he could not understand. All that was meant by the upturned face perhaps he will never understand. She hid it in her bright, brown hair; put her hand up softly upon his cheek and cried.

"If you would like to hear anything about the business part of it—" suggested the young man, clearing his throat. But Sharley "hated business." She would not hear.

"Not about the Crumpet Buildings? Well, I carried that affair through,—that's all."

They came out under the wide sky, and walked home hand in hand. All the world was hung with crystals. The faint shadow of a rainbow quivered across a silver cloud.

The first thing that Sharley did when she came home was to find Moppet and squeeze him.

"O Moppet, we can be good girls all the same if we are happy, can't we?"

"No, sir!" said injured Moppet. "You don't catch me!"

"But O Moppet, see the round drops hanging and burning on the blinds!
And how the little mud-puddles shine, Moppet!"

Out of her pain and her patience God had brought her beautiful answer. It was well for Sharley. But if such answer had not come? That also would have been well.

Kentucky's Ghost.

True? Every syllable.

That was a very fair yarn of yours, Tom Brown, very fair for a landsman, but I'll bet you a doughnut I can beat it; and all on the square, too, as I say,—which is more, if I don't mistake, than you could take oath to. Not to say that I never stretched my yarn a little on the fo'castle in my younger days, like the rest of 'em; but what with living under roofs so long past, and a call from the parson regular in strawberry time, and having to do the flogging consequent on the inakkeracies of statement follering on the growing up of six boys, a man learns to trim his words a little, Tom, and no mistake. It's very much as it is with the talk of the sea growing strange to you from hearing nothing but lubbers who don't know a mizzen-mast from a church-steeple.

It was somewhere about twenty years ago last October, if I recollect fair, that we were laying in for that particular trip to Madagascar. I've done that little voyage to Madagascar when the sea was like so much burning oil, and the sky like so much burning brass, and the fo'castle as nigh a hell as ever fo'castle was in a calm; I've done it when we came sneaking into port with nigh about every spar gone and pumps going night and day; and I've done it with a drunken captain on starvation rations,—duff that a dog on land wouldn't have touched and two teaspoonfuls of water to the day,—but someways or other, of all the times we headed for the East Shore I don't seem to remember any quite as distinct as this.

We cleared from Long Wharf in the ship Madonna,—which they tell me means, My Lady, and a pretty name it was; it was apt to give me that gentle kind of feeling when I spoke it, which is surprising when you consider what a dull old hull she was, never logging over ten knots, and uncertain at that. It may have been because of Moll's coming down once in a while in the days that we lay at dock, bringing the boy with her, and sitting up on deck in a little white apron, knitting. She was a very good-looking woman, was my wife, in those days, and I felt proud of her,—natural, with the lads looking on.

"Molly," I used to say, sometimes,—"Molly Madonna!"

"Nonsense!" says she, giving a clack to her needles,—pleased enough though, I warrant you, and turning a very pretty pink about the cheeks for a four-years' wife. Seeing as how she was always a lady to me, and a true one, and a gentle, though she wasn't much at manners or book-learning, and though I never gave her a silk gown in her life, she was quite content, you see, and so was I.

I used to speak my thought about the name sometimes, when the lads weren't particularly noisy, but they laughed at me mostly. I was rough enough and bad enough in those days; as rough as the rest, and as bad as the rest, I suppose, but yet I seemed to have my notions a little different from the others. "Jake's poetry," they called 'em.

We were loading for the East Shore trade, as I said, didn't I? There isn't much of the genuine, old-fashioned trade left in these days, except the whiskey branch, which will be brisk, I take it, till the Malagasy carry the prohibitory law by a large majority in both houses. We had a little whiskey in the hold, I remember, that trip, with a good stock of knives, red flannel, handsaws, nails, and cotton. We were hoping to be at home again within the year. We were well provisioned, and Dodd,—he was the cook,—Dodd made about as fair coffee as you're likely to find in the galley of a trader. As for our officers, when I say the less said of them the better, it ain't so much that I mean to be disrespectful as that I mean to put it tenderly. Officers in the merchant service, especially if it happens to be the African service, are brutal men quite as often as they ain't (at least, that's my experience; and when some of your great ship-owners argue the case with me,—as I'm free to say they have done before now,—I say, "That's *my* experience, sir," which is all I've got to say);—brutal men, and about as fit for their positions as if they'd been imported for the purpose a little indirect from Davy Jones's Locker. Though they do say that the flogging is pretty much done away with in these days, which makes a difference.

Sometimes on a sunshiny afternoon, when the muddy water showed a little muddier than usual, on

account of the clouds being the color of silver, and all the air the color of gold, when the oily barrels were knocking about on the wharves, and the smells were strong from the fish-houses, and the men shouted and the mates swore, and our baby ran about deck a-play with everybody (he was a cunning little chap with red stockings and bare knees, and the lads took quite a shine to him), "Jake," his mother would say, with a little sigh,—low, so that the captain never heard,—"think if it was *him* gone away for a year in company the like of that!"

Then she would drop her shining needles, and call the little fellow back sharp, and catch him up into her arms.

Go into the keeping-room there, Tom, and ask her all about it. Bless you! she remembers those days at dock better than I do. She could tell you to this hour the color of my shirt, and how long my hair was, and what I ate, and how I looked, and what I said. I didn't generally swear so thick when she was about.

Well; we weighed, along the last of the month, in pretty good spirits. The Madonna was as stanch and seaworthy as any eight-hundred-tonner in the harbor, if she was clumsy; we turned in, some sixteen of us or thereabouts, into the fo'castle,—a jolly set, mostly old messmates, and well content with one another; and the breeze was stiff from the west, with a fair sky.

The night before we were off, Molly and I took a walk upon the wharves after supper. I carried the baby. A boy, sitting on some boxes, pulled my sleeve as we went by, and asked me, pointing to the Madonna, if I would tell him the name of the ship.

"Find out for yourself," said I, not over-pleased to be interrupted.

"Don't be cross to him," says Molly. The baby threw a kiss at the boy, and Molly smiled at him through the dark. I don't suppose I should ever have remembered the lubber from that day to this, except that I liked the looks of Molly smiling at him through the dark.

My wife and I said good-by the next morning in a little sheltered place among the lumber on the wharf; she was one of your women who never like to do their crying before folks.

She climbed on the pile of lumber and sat down, a little flushed and quivery, to watch us off. I remember seeing her there with the baby till we were well down the channel. I remember noticing the bay as it grew cleaner, and thinking that I would break off swearing; and I remember cursing Bob Smart like a pirate within an hour.

The breeze held steadier than we'd looked for, and we'd made a good offing and discharged the pilot by nightfall. Mr. Whitmarsh—he was the mate—was aft with the captain. The boys were singing a little; the smell of the coffee was coming up, hot and home-like, from the galley. I was up in the maintop, I forget what for, when all at once there came a cry and a shout; and, when I touched deck, I saw a crowd around the fore-hatch.

"What's all this noise for?" says Mr. Whitmarsh, coming up and scowling.

"A stow-away, sir! A boy stowed away!" said Bob, catching the officer's tone quick enough. Bob always tested the wind well, when a storm was brewing. He jerked the poor fellow out of the hold, and pushed him along to the mate's feet.

I say "poor fellow," and you'd never wonder why if you'd seen as much of stowing away as I have.

I'd as lief see a son of mine in a Carolina slave-gang as to see him lead the life of a stow-away. What with the officers from feeling that they've been taken in, and the men, who catch their cue from their superiors, and the spite of the lawful boy who hired in the proper way, he don't have what you may call a tender time.

This chap was a little fellow, slight for his years, which might have been fifteen, I take it. He was palish, with a jerk of thin hair on his forehead. He was hungry, and homesick, and frightened. He looked about on all our faces, and then he cowered a little, and lay still just as Bob had thrown him.

"We—ell," says Whitmarsh, very slow, "if you don't repent your bargain before you go ashore, my fine fellow,—me, if I'm mate of the Madonna! and take that for your pains!"

Upon that he kicks the poor little lubber from quarter-deck to bowsprit, or nearly, and goes down to his supper. The men laugh a little, then they whistle a little, then they finish their song quite gay and well acquainted, with the coffee steaming away in the galley. Nobody has a word for the boy,—bless you, no!

I'll venture he wouldn't have had a mouthful that night if it had not been for me; and I can't say as I

should have bothered myself about him, if it had not come across me sudden, while he sat there rubbing his eyes quite violent, with his face to the west'ard (the sun was setting reddish), that I had seen the lad before; then I remembered walking on the wharves, and him on the box, and Molly saying softly that I was cross to him.

Seeing that my wife had smiled at him, and my baby thrown a kiss at him, it went against me, you see, not to look after the little rascal a bit that night.

"But you've got no business here, you know," said I; "nobody wants you."

"I wish I was ashore!" said he,—"I wish I was ashore!"

With that he begins to rub his eyes so very violent that I stopped. There was good stuff in him too; for he choked and winked at me, and did it all up, about the sun on the water and a cold in the head, as well as I could myself just about.

I don't know whether it was on account of being taken a little notice of that night, but the lad always kind of hung about me afterwards; chased me round with his eyes in a way he had, and did odd jobs for me without the asking.

One night before the first week was out, he hauled alongside of me on the windlass. I was trying a new pipe (and a very good one, too), so I didn't give him much notice for a while.

"You did this job up shrewd, Kent," said I, by and by; "how did you steer in?"—for it did not often happen that the Madonna got fairly out of port with a boy unbeknown in her hold.

"Watch was drunk; I crawled down ahind the whiskey. It was hot, you bet, and dark. I lay and thought how hungry I was," says he.

"Friends at home?" says I.

Upon that he gives me a nod, very short, and gets up and walks off whistling.

The first Sunday out that chap didn't know any more what to do with himself than a lobster just put on to boil. Sunday's cleaning day at sea, you know. The lads washed up, and sat round, little knots of them, mending their trousers. Bob got out his cards. Me and a few mates took it comfortable under the to'gallant fo'castle (I being on watch below), reeling off the stiffest yarns we had in tow. Kent looked on at euchre awhile, then listened to us awhile, then walked about uneasy.

By and by says Bob, "Look over there,—spry!" and there was Kent, sitting curled away in a heap under the stern of the long-boat. He had a book. Bob crawls behind and snatches it up, unbeknown, out of his hands; then he falls to laughing as if he would strangle, and gives the book a toss to me. It was a bit of Testament, black and old. There was writing on the yellow leaf, this way:—

"Kentucky Hodge,
from his Affecshunate mother
who prays, For you evry day, Amen,"

The boy turned first red, then white, and straightened up quite sudden, but he never said a word, only sat down again and let us laugh it out. I've lost my reckoning if he ever heard the last of it. He told me one day how he came by the name, but I forget exactly. Something about an old fellow—uncle, I believe—as died in Kentucky, and the name was moniment-like, you see. He used to seem cut up a bit about it at first, for the lads took to it famously; but he got used to it in a week or two, and, seeing as they meant him no unkindness, took it quite cheery.

One other thing I noticed was that he never had the book about after that. He fell into our ways next Sunday more easy.

They don't take the Bible just the way you would, Tom,—as a general thing, sailors don't; though I will say that I never saw the man at sea who didn't give it the credit of being an uncommon good yarn.

But I tell you, Tom Brown, I felt sorry for that boy. It's punishment bad enough for a little scamp like him leaving the honest shore, and folks to home that were a bit tender of him maybe, to rough it on a trader, learning how to slush down a back-stay, or tie reef-points with frozen fingers in a snow-squall.

But that's not the worst of it, by no means. If ever there was a cold-blooded, cruel man, with a wicked eye and a fist like a mallet, it was Job Whitmarsh, taken at his best. And I believe, of all the trips I've taken, him being mate of the Madonna, Kentucky found him at his worst. Bradley—that's the second mate—was none too gentle in his ways, you may be sure; but he never held a candle to Mr. Whitmarsh.

He took a spite to the boy from the first, and he kept it on a steady strain to the last, right along, just about so.

I've seen him beat that boy till the blood ran down in little pools on deck; then send him up, all wet and red, to clear the to'sail halliards; and when, what with the pain and faintness, he dizzied a little, and clung to the ratlines, half blind, he would have him down and flog him till the cap'n interfered,—which would happen occasionally on a fair day when he had taken just enough to be good-natured. He used to rack his brains for the words he slung at the boy working quiet enough beside him. It was odd, now, the talk he would get off. Bob Smart couldn't any more come up to it than I could: we used to try sometimes, but we had to give in always. If curses had been a marketable article, Whitmarsh would have taken out his patent and made his fortune by inventing of them, new and ingenious. Then he used to kick the lad down the fo'castle ladder; he used to work him, sick or well, as he wouldn't have worked a dray-horse; he used to chase him all about deck at the rope's end; he used to mast-head him for hours on the stretch; he used to starve him out in the hold. It didn't come in my line to be over-tender, but I turned sick at heart, Tom, more times than one, looking on helpless, and me a great stout fellow.

I remember now—don't know as I've thought of it for twenty years—a thing McCallum said one night; McCallum was Scotch,—an old fellow with gray hair; told the best yarns on the fo'castle always.

"Mark my words, shipmates," says he, "when Job Whitmarsh's time comes to go as straight to hell as Judas, that boy will bring his summons. Dead or alive, that boy will bring his summons."

One day I recollect especial that the lad was sick with fever on him, and took to his hammock. Whitmarsh drove him on deck, and ordered him aloft. I was standing near by, trimming the spanker. Kentucky staggered for'ard a little and sat down. There was a rope's-end there, knotted three times. The mate struck him.

"I'm very weak, sir," says he.

He struck him again. He struck him twice more. The boy fell over a little, and lay where he fell.

I don't know what ailed me, but all of a sudden I seemed to be lying off Long Wharf, with the clouds the color of silver, and the air the color of gold, and Molly in a white apron with her shining needles, and the baby a-play in his red stockings about the deck.

"Think if it was him!" says she, or she seems to say,—"think if it was *him*!"

And the next I knew I'd let slip my tongue in a jiffy, and given it to the mate that furious and onrespectful as I'll wager Whitmarsh never got before. And the next I knew after that they had the irons on me.

"Sorry about that, eh?" said he, the day before they took 'em off.

"*No,* sir," says I. And I never was. Kentucky never forgot that. I had helped him occasional in the beginning,—learned him how to veer and haul a brace, let go or belay a sheet,—but let him alone generally speaking, and went about my own business. That week in irons I really believe the lad never forgot.

One time—it was on a Saturday night, and the mate had been oncommon furious that week—Kentucky turned on him, very pale and slow (I was up in the mizzen-top, and heard him quite distinct).

"Mr. Whitmarsh," says he,—"Mr. Whitmarsh,"—he draws his breath in,—"Mr. Whitmarsh,"—three times,—"you've got the power and you know it, and so do the gentlemen who put you here; and I'm only a stow-away boy, and things are all in a tangle, but *you'll be sorry yet for every time you've laid your hands on me*!"

He hadn't a pleasant look about the eyes either, when he said it.

Fact was, that first month on the Madonna had done the lad no good. He had a surly, sullen way with him, some'at like what I've seen about a chained dog. At the first, his talk had been clean as my baby's, and he would blush like any girl at Bob Smart's stories; but he got used to Bob, and pretty good, in time, at small swearing.

I don't think I should have noticed it so much if it had not been for seeming to see Molly, and the sun, and the knitting-needles, and the child upon the deck, and hearing of it over, "Think if it was *him*!" Sometimes on a Sunday night I used to think it was a pity. Not that I was any better than the rest, except so far as the married men are always steadier. Go through any crew the sea over, and it is the lads who have homes of their own and little children in 'em as keep the straightest.

Sometimes, too, I used to take a fancy that I could have listened to a word from a parson, or a good brisk psalm-tune, and taken it in very good part. A year is a long pull for twenty-five men to be becalmed with each other and the devil. I don't set up to be pious myself, but I'm not a fool, and I know that if we'd had so much as one officer aboard who feared God and kept his commandments, we should have been the better men for it. It's very much with religion as it is with cayenne pepper,—if it's there, you know it.

If you had your ships on the sea by the dozen, you'd bethink you of that? Bless you, Tom! if you were in Rome you'd do as the Romans do. You'd have your ledgers, and your children, and your churches and Sunday schools, and freed niggers, and 'lections, and what not, and never stop to think whether the lads that sailed your ships across the world had souls, or not,—and be a good sort of man too. That's the way of the world. Take it easy, Tom,—take it easy.

Well, things went along just about so with us till we neared the Cape.
It's not a pretty place, the Cape, on a winter's voyage. I can't say as
I ever was what you may call scar't after the first time rounding it,
but it's not a pretty place.

I don't seem to remember much about Kent along there till there come a Friday at the first of December. It was a still day, with a little haze, like white sand sifted across a sunbeam on a kitchen table. The lad was quiet-like all day, chasing me about with his eyes.

"Sick?" says I.

"No," says he.

"Whitmarsh drunk?" says I.

"No," says he.

A little after dark I was lying on a coil of ropes, napping it. The boys were having the Bay of Biscay quite lively, and I waked up on the jump in the choruses. Kent came up while they were telling

"How she lay
On that day
In the *Bay* of BISCAY O!"

He was not singing. He sat down beside me, and first I thought I wouldn't trouble myself about him, and then I thought I would.

So I opens one eye at him encouraging. He crawls up a little closer to me. It was rather dark where we sat, with a great greenish shadow dropping from the mainsail. The wind was up a little, and the light at helm looked flickery and red.

"Jake," says he all at once, "where's your mother?"

"In—heaven!" says I, all taken aback; and if ever I came nigh what you might call a little disrespect to your mother, it was on that occasion, from being taken so aback.

"Oh!" said he. "Got any women-folks to home that miss you?" asks he, by and by.

Said I, "Shouldn't wonder."

After that he sits still a little with his elbows on his knees; then he speers at me sidewise awhile; then said he, "I s'pose *I've* got a mother to home. I ran away from her."

This, mind you, is the first time he has ever spoke about his folks since he came aboard.

"She was asleep down in the south chamber," says he. "I got out the window. There was one white shirt she'd made for meetin' and such. I've never worn it out here. I hadn't the heart. It has a collar and some cuffs, you know. She had a headache making of it. She's been follering me round all day, a sewing on that shirt. When I come in she would look up bright-like and smiling. Father's dead. There ain't anybody but me. All day long she's been follering of me round."

So then he gets up, and joins the lads, and tries to sing a little; but he comes back very still and sits down. We could see the flickery light upon the boys' faces, and on the rigging, and on the cap'n, who was damning the bo'sen a little aft.

"Jake," says he, quite low, "look here. I've been thinking. Do you reckon there's a chap here—just one, perhaps—who's said his prayers since he came aboard?"

"*No!*" said I, quite short: for I'd have bet my head on it.

I can remember, as if it was this morning, just how the question sounded, and the answer. I can't seem to put it into words how it came all over me. The wind was turning brisk, and we'd just eased her with a few reefs; Bob Smart, out furling the flying jib, got soaked; me and the boy sitting silent, were spattered. I remember watching the curve of the great swells, mahogany color, with the tip of white, and thinking how like it was to a big creature hissing and foaming at the mouth, and thinking all at once something about Him holding of the sea in a balance, and not a word bespoke to beg his favor respectful since we weighed our anchor, and the cap'n yonder calling on Him just that minute to send the Madonna to the bottom, if the bo'sen hadn't disobeyed his orders about the squaring of the after-yards.

"From his Affecshunate mother who prays, For you evry day, Amen," whispers Kentucky, presently, very soft. "The book's tore up. Mr. Whitmarsh wadded his old gun with it. But I remember."

Then said he: "It's 'most bedtime to home. She's setting in a little rocking-chair,—a green one. There's a fire, and the dog. She sets all by herself."

Then he begins again: "She has to bring in her own wood now. There's a gray ribbon on her cap. When she goes to meetin' she wears a gray bunnet. She's drawed the curtains and the door is locked. But she thinks I'll be coming home sorry some day,—I'm sure she thinks I'll be coming home sorry."

Just then there comes the order, "Port watch ahoy! Tumble up there lively!" so I turns out, and the lad turns in, and the night settles down a little black, and my hands and head are full. Next day it blows a clean, all but a bank of gray, very thin and still,—about the size of that cloud you see through the side window, Tom,—which lay just abeam of us.

The sea, I thought, looked like a great purple pincushion, with a mast or two stuck in on the horizon for the pins. "Jake's poetry," the boys said that was.

By noon that little gray bank had grown up thick, like a wall. By sundown the cap'n let his liquor alone, and kept the deck. By night we were in chop-seas, with a very ugly wind.

"Steer small, there!" cries Whitmarsh, growing hot about the face,—for we made a terribly crooked wake, with a broad sheer, and the old hull strained heavily,—"steer small there, I tell you! Mind your eye now, McCallum, with your foresail! Furl the royals! Send down the royals! Cheerily, men! Where's that lubber Kent? Up with you, lively now!"

Kentucky sprang for'ard at the order, then stopped short. Anybody as knows a royal from an anchor wouldn't have blamed the lad. I'll take oath to't it's no play for an old tar, stout and full in size, sending down the royals in a gale like that; let alone a boy of fifteen year on his first voyage.

But the mate takes to swearing (it would have turned a parson faint to hear him), and Kent shoots away up,—the great mast swinging like a pendulum to and fro, and the reef-points snapping, and the blocks creaking, and the sails flapping to that extent as you wouldn't consider possible unless you'd been before the mast yourself. It reminded me of evil birds I've read of, that stun a man with their wings; strike *you* to the bottom, Tom, before you could say Jack Robinson.

Kent stuck bravely as far as the cross-trees. There he slipped and struggled and clung in the dark and noise awhile, then comes sliding down the back-stay.

"I'm not afraid, sir," says he; "but I cannot do it."

For answer Whitmarsh takes to the rope's-end. So Kentucky is up again, and slips and struggles and clings again, and then lays down again.

At this the men begin to grumble a little low.

"Will you kill the lad?" said I. I get a blow for my pains, that sends me off my feet none too easy; and when I rub the stars out of my eyes the boy is up again, and the mate behind him with the rope. Whitmarsh stopped when he'd gone far enough. The lad climbed on. Once he looked back. He never opened his lips; he just looked back. If I've seen him once since, in my thinking, I've seen him twenty times,—up in the shadow of the great gray wings, a looking back.

After that there was only a cry, and a splash, and the Madonna racing along with the gale twelve knots. If it had been the whole crew overboard, she could never have stopped for them that night.

"Well," said the cap'n, "you've done it now."

Whitmarsh turns his back.

By and by, when the wind fell, and the hurry was over, and I had the time to think a steady thought, being in the morning watch, I seemed to see the old lady in the gray bunnet setting by the fire. And the dog. And the green rocking-chair. And the front door, with the boy walking in on a sunny afternoon to take her by surprise.

Then I remember leaning over to look down, and wondering if the lad were thinking of it too, and what had happened to him now, these two hours back, and just about where he was, and how he liked his new quarters, and many other strange and curious things.

And while I sat there thinking, the Sunday-morning stars cut through the clouds, and the solemn Sunday-morning light began to break upon the sea.

We had a quiet run of it, after that, into port, where we lay about a couple of months or so, trading off for a fair stock of palm-oil, ivory, and hides. The days were hot and purple and still. We hadn't what you might call a blow, if I recollect accurate, till we rounded the Cape again, heading for home.

We were rounding that Cape again, heading for home, when that happened which you may believe me or not, as you take the notion, Tom; though why a man who can swallow Daniel and the lion's den, or take down t'other chap who lived three days comfortable into the inside of a whale, should make faces at what I've got to tell I can't see.

It was just about the spot that we lost the boy that we fell upon the worst gale of the trip. It struck us quite sudden. Whitmarsh was a little high. He wasn't apt to be drunk in a gale, if it gave him warning sufficient.

Well, you see, there must be somebody to furl the main-royal again, and he pitched onto McCallum. McCallum hadn't his beat for fighting out the royal in a blow.

So he piled away lively, up to the to'-sail yard. There, all of a sudden, he stopped. Next we knew he was down like heat-lightning.

His face had gone very white.

"What's to pay with *you*?" roared Whitmarsh.

Said McCallum, "*There's somebody up there, sir*."

Screamed Whitmarsh, "You're gone an idiot!"

Said McCallum, very quiet and distinct: "There's somebody up there, sir. I saw him quite plain. He saw me. I called up. He called down. Says he, *'Don't you come up*!' and hang me if I'll stir a step for you or any other man to-night!"

I never saw the face of any man alive go the turn that mate's face went. If he wouldn't have relished knocking the Scotchman dead before his eyes, I've lost my guess. Can't say what he would have done to the old fellow, if there'd been any time to lose.

He'd the sense left to see there wasn't overmuch, so he orders out Bob
Smart direct.

Bob goes up steady, with a quid in his cheek and a cool eye. Half-way amid to'-sail and to'-gallant he stops, and down he comes, spinning.

"Be drowned if there ain't!" said he. "He's sitting square upon the yard. I never see the boy Kentucky, if he isn't sitting on that yard. '*Don't you come up!*' he cries out,—'*don't you come up!*'"

"Bob's drunk, and McCallum's a fool!" said Jim Welch, standing by. So Welch wolunteers up, and takes Jaloffe with him. They were a couple of the coolest hands aboard,—Welch and Jaloffe. So up they goes, and down they comes like the rest, by the back-stays, by the run.

"He beckoned of me back!" says Welch. "He hollered not to come up! not to come up!"

After that there wasn't a man of us would stir aloft, not for love nor money.

Well, Whitmarsh he stamped, and he swore, and he knocked us about furious; but we sat and looked at one another's eyes, and never stirred. Something cold, like a frost-bite, seemed to crawl along from man to man, looking into one another's eyes.

"I'll shame ye all, then, for a set of cowardly lubbers!" cries the mate; and what with the anger and the drink he was as good as his word, and up the ratlines in a twinkle.

In a flash we were after him,—he was our officer, you see, and we felt ashamed,—me at the head, and the lads following after.

I got to the futtock shrouds, and there I stopped, for I saw him myself,—a palish boy, with a jerk of thin hair on his forehead; I'd have known him anywhere in this world or t'other. I saw him just as distinct as I see you, Tom Brown, sitting on that yard quite steady with the royal flapping like to flap him off.

I reckon I've had as much experience fore and aft, in the course of fifteen years aboard, as any man that ever tied a reef-point in a nor'easter; but I never saw a sight like that, not before nor since.

I won't say that I didn't wish myself well on deck; but I will say that I stuck to the shrouds, and looked on steady.

Whitmarsh, swearing that that royal should be furled, went on and went up.

It was after that I heard the voice. It came straight from the figure of the boy upon the upper yard.

But this time it says, "*Come up! Come up!*" And then, a little louder, "*Come up! Come up! Come up!*" So he goes up, and next I knew there was a cry,—and next a splash,—and then I saw the royal flapping from the empty yard, and the mate was gone, and the boy.

Job Whitmarsh was never seen again, alow or aloft, that night or ever after.

I was telling the tale to our parson this summer,—he's a fair-minded chap, the parson, in spite of a little natural leaning to strawberries, which I always take in very good part,—and he turned it about in his mind some time.

"If it was the boy," says he,—"and I can't say as I see any reason especial why it shouldn't have been,—I've been wondering what his spiritooal condition was. A soul in hell,"—the parson believes in hell, I take it, because he can't help himself; but he has that solemn, tender way of preaching it as makes you feel he wouldn't have so much as a chicken get there if he could help it,—"a lost soul," says the parson (I don't know as I get the words exact),—"a soul that has gone and been and got there of its own free will and choosing would be as like as not to haul another soul alongside if he could. Then again, if the mate's time had come, you see, and his chances were over, why, that's the will of the Lord, and it's hell for him whichever side of death he is, and nobody's fault but hisn; and the boy might be in the good place, and do the errand all the same. That's just about it, Brown," says he. "A man goes his own gait, and, if he won't go to heaven, he *won't*, and the good God himself can't help it. He throws the shining gates all open wide, and he never shut them on any poor fellow as would have entered in, and he never, never will."

Which I thought was sensible of the parson, and very prettily put.

There's Molly frying flapjacks now, and flapjacks won't wait for no man, you know, no more than time and tide, else I should have talked till midnight, very like, to tell the time we made on that trip home, and how green the harbor looked a sailing up, and of Molly and the baby coming down to meet me in a little boat that danced about (for we cast a little down the channel), and how she climbed up a laughing and a crying all to once, about my neck, and how the boy had grown, and how when he ran about the deck (the little shaver had his first pair of boots on that very afternoon) I bethought me of the other time, and of Molly's words, and of the lad we'd left behind us in the purple days.

Just as we were hauling up, I says to my wife: "Who's that old lady setting there upon the lumber, with a gray bunnet, and a gray ribbon on her cap?"

For there was an old lady there, and I saw the sun all about her, and all on the blazing yellow boards, and I grew a little dazed and dazzled.

"I don't know," said Molly, catching onto me a little close. "She comes there every day. They say she sits and watches for her lad as ran away."

So then I seemed to know, as well as ever I knew afterwards, who it was. And I thought of the dog. And the green rocking-chair. And the book that Whitmarsh wadded his old gun with. And the front-door, with the boy a walking in.

So we three went up the wharf,—Molly and the baby and me,—and sat down beside her on the yellow

boards. I can't remember rightly what I said, but I remember her sitting silent in the sunshine till I had told her all there was to tell.

"*Don't* cry!" says Molly, when I got through,—which it was the more surprising of Molly, considering as she was doing the crying all to herself. The old lady never cried, you see. She sat with her eyes wide open under her gray bunnet, and her lips a moving. After a while I made it out what it was she said: "The only son—of his mother—and she—"

By and by she gets up, and goes her ways, and Molly and I walk home together, with our little boy between us.

The End.

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