Title: Macaria

Author: Augusta J. Evans

Release date: January 14, 2009 [eBook #27811]

Language: English

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MACARIA

A·J·EVANS WILSON

WARD·LOCK·&·CO

"Urging her to visit them as often as possible, Mr. Young withdrew." (*Chapter IX*) *Frontispiece*

MACARIA

BY

AUGUSTA J. EVANS WILSON

AUTHOR OF
"BEULAH," "ST. ELMO," "INFELICE,"
ETC., ETC.

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON AND MELBOURNE

1921

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MACARIA

CHAPTER I

RUSSELL AUBREY

The town-clock was on the last stroke of twelve, the solitary candle measured but two inches from its socket, and as the summer wind rushed through the half-closed shutters, the melted tallow dripped slowly into the brightly-burnished brazen candlestick. The flickering light fell upon the pages of a ledger, and flashed fitfully in the face of the accountant, as he bent over his work. Sixteen years growth had given him unusual height and remarkable breadth of chest, and it was difficult to realize that the stature of manhood had been attained by a mere boy in years. A grey suit (evidently home-made), of rather coarse texture, bespoke poverty; and, owing to the oppressive heat of the atmosphere, the coat was thrown partially off. He wore no vest, and the loosely-tied black ribbon suffered the snowy white collar to fall away from the throat and expose its well-turned outline. The head was large, but faultlessly proportioned, and the thick black hair, cut short and clinging to the temples, added to its massiveness. The lofty forehead, white and smooth, the somewhat heavy brows matching the hue of the hair, the straight, finely-formed nose with its delicate but clearly defined nostril, the full firm lips unshaded by moustache, combined to render the face one of uncommon beauty. Yet, as he sat absorbed by his figures, there was nothing prepossessing or winning in his appearance, for though you could not carp at the moulding of his features, you involuntarily shrank from the prematurely grave, nay, austere expression which seemed habitual to them. He looked just what he was, youthful in years, but old in trials and labours, and to one who analysed his countenance, the conviction was inevitable that his will was gigantic, his ambition unbounded, his intellect wonderfully acute and powerful.

"Russell, do you know it is midnight?"

He frowned, and answered without looking up—

"Yes."

"How much longer will you sit up?"

"Till I finish my work."

The speaker stood on the threshold, leaning against the door facing, and, after waiting a few moments, softly crossed the room and put her hand on the back of his chair. She was two years his junior, and though evidently the victim of recent and severe illness, even in her feebleness she was singularly like him. Her presence seemed to annoy him, for he turned round and said hastily: "Electra, go to bed. I told you good-night three hours ago."

She stood still, but silent.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

He wrote on for some ten minutes longer, then closed the ledger and put it aside. The candle had burned low; he took a fresh one from the drawer of the table, and, after lighting it, drew a Latin dictionary near to him, opened a worn copy of Horace, and began to study. Quiet as his own shadow stood the fragile girl behind his chair, but as she watched him a heavy sigh escaped her.

"If I thought I should be weak and sickly all my life I would rather die at once, and burden you and auntie no longer."

"Electra, who told you that you burdened me?"

"Oh, Russell! don't I know how hard you have to work; and how difficult it is for you to get even bread and clothes? Don't I see how auntie labours day after day, and month after month? You are good and kind, but does that prevent my feeling the truth, that you are working for me too? If I could only help you in some way." She knelt down by his chair and leaned her head on his knee, holding his hands between both hers.

"Electra, you do help me; all day long when I am at the store your face haunts, strengthens me; I feel that I am striving to give you comforts, and when at night you meet me at the gate, I am repaid for all I have done. You must put this idea out of your head, little one; it is altogether a mistake. Do you hear what I say? Get up, and go to sleep like a good child, or you will have another wretched headache to-morrow, and can't bring me my lunch."

He lifted her from the floor, and kissed her hastily. She raised her arms as if to wind them about his neck, but his grave face gave her no encouragement, and turning away she retired to her room, with hot tears rolling over her cheeks. Russell had scarcely read half a dozen lines after his cousin's departure when a soft hand swept back the locks of hair on his forehead, and wiped away the heavy drops that moistened them.

"My son, you promised me you would not sit up late to-night."

"Well, mother, I have almost finished. Remember the nights are very short now, and twelve o'clock comes early."

"The better reason that you should not be up so late. My son, I am afraid you will ruin your health by this unremitting application."

"Why—look at me. I am as strong as an athlete of old." He shook his limbs and smiled, proud of his great physical strength.

"True, Russell; but, robust as you are, you cannot stand such toil without detriment. Put up your books."

"Not yet; I have more laid out, and you know I invariably finish all I set apart to do. But, mother, your hand is hot; you are not well." He raised the thin hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"A mere headache, nothing more. Mr. Clark was here to-day; he is very impatient about the rent. I told him we were doing all we could, and thought that by September we should be able to pay the whole." He knew she watched him, and answered with a forced smile. "Yes, he came to the store this morning. I told him we had been very unfortunate this year, that sickness had forced us to incur more expense than usual. However, I drew fifty dollars, and paid him all I could. True, I anticipated my dues, but Mr. Watson gave me permission. So for the present you need not worry about rent."

"What is the amount of that grocery bill you would not let me see last week?"

"My dear mother, do not trouble yourself with these little matters; the grocery bill will very soon be paid. I have arranged with Mr. Hill to keep his books at night, and therefore, you may be easy. Trust all to me, mother; only take care of your dear self, and I ask no more."

"Oh, Russell! my son, my dear son!"

She had drawn a chair near him, and now laid her head on his shoulder, while tears dropped on his hand. He had not seen her so unnerved for years, and as he looked down on her grief-stained, yet resigned face, his countenance underwent a marvellous change; and, folding his arms about her, he kissed her pale, thin cheek repeatedly.

"Mother, it is not like you to repine in this way; you who have suffered and endured so much must not despond when, after a long, starless night, the day begins to dawn."

"I fear 'it dawns in clouds, and heralds only storms.' For myself I care not, but for you, Russell —my pride, my only hope, my brave boy? it is for you that I suffer. I have been thinking to-night that this is a doomed place for you, and that if we could only save money enough to go to California, you might take the position you merit; for there none would know of the blight which fell upon you; none could look on your brow and dream it seemed sullied. Here you have such bitter prejudice to combat; such gross injustice heaped upon you."

He lifted his mother's head from his bosom, and rose, with a haughty, defiant smile on his lip.

"Not so; I will stay here, and live down their hate. Mark me, mother, I will live it down, so surely as I am Russell Aubrey, the despised son of a ——! Go to California! not I! not I! In this state will I work and conquer; here, right here, I will plant my feet upon the necks of those that now strive to grind me to the dust. I swore it over my father's coffin!"

"Hush, Russell, you must subdue your fierce temper; you must! you must! Remember it was this ungovernable rage which brought disgrace upon your young, innocent head. Oh! it grieves me, my son, to see how bitter you have grown. Once you were gentle and forgiving; now scorn and defiance rule you."

"I am not fierce, I am not in a rage. If I should meet the judge and jury who doomed my father to the gallows, I think I would serve them if they needed aid. But I am proud; I inherited my nature; I writhe, yes, mother, writhe under the treatment I constantly receive."

"We have trouble enough, my son, without dwelling upon what is past and irremediable. So long as you seem cheerful I am content. I know that God will not lay more on me than I can bear; 'As my day so shall my strength be.' Thy will be done, oh! my God."

There was a brief pause, and Russell Aubrey passed his hand over his eyes, and dashed off a tear. His mother watched him, and said cautiously—

"Have you noticed that my eyes are rapidly growing worse?"

"Yes, mother, I have been anxious for some weeks."

"You know it all then?"

"Yes, mother."

"I shall not murmur; I have become resigned at last; though for many weeks I have wrestled for strength, for patience. It was so exceedingly bitter to know that the time drew near when I should see you no more; to feel that I should stretch out my hands to you, and lean on you, and yet look no longer on the dear face of my child, my boy, my all. But my prayers were heard; the

sting has passed away, and I am resigned. I am glad that we have spoken of it; now my mind is calmer, and I can sleep. Good night, my son."

She pressed the customary good night kiss on his lips, and left him. He closed the dictionary, leaned his elbow on the table, and rested his head on his hand. His piercing black eyes were fixed gloomily on the floor, and now and then his broad chest heaved as dark and painful thoughts crowded up.

Mrs. Aubrey was the only daughter of wealthy and ambitious parents, who refused to sanction her marriage with the object of her choice; and threatened to disinherit her if she persisted in her obstinate course. Mr. Aubrey was poor, but honest, highly cultivated and, in every sense of that much abused word, a gentleman. His poverty was not to be forgiven, however, and when the daughter left her father's roof, and wedded the man whom her parents detested, she was banished for ever from a home of affluence, and found that she had indeed forfeited her fortune. For this she was prepared, and bore it bravely; but ere long severer trials came upon her. Unfortunately, her husband's temper was fierce and ungovernable; and pecuniary embarrassments rarely have the effect of sweetening such. He removed to an inland town, and embarked in mercantile pursuits; but misfortune followed him, and reverses came thick and fast. One miserable day, when from early morning everything had gone wrong, an importunate creditor, of wealth and great influence in the community, chafed at Mr. Aubrey's tardiness in repaying some trifling sum, proceeded to taunt and insult him most unwisely. Stung to madness, the wretched man resented the insults; a struggle ensued, and at its close Mr. Aubrey stood over the corpse of the creditor. There was no mode of escape, and the arm of the law consigned him to prison. During the tedious weeks that elapsed before the trial his devoted wife strove to cheer and encourage him. Russell was about eleven years of age, and, boy though he was, realized most fully the horrors of his parent's situation. The days of his trial came at last; but the accused had surrendered himself to the demon Rage, had taken the life of a fellow creature; what could legal skill accomplish? The affair produced great and continued excitement; the murdered man had been exceedingly popular, and the sympathies of the citizens were enlisted in behalf of his family. Although clearly a case of manslaughter only, to the astonishment of the counsel on both sides, the cry of "blood for blood," went out from that crowded court-room, and in defiance of precedent, Mr. Aubrey was unjustly sentenced to be hanged. When the verdict was known, Russell placed his insensible mother on a couch from which it seemed probable she would never rise. But there is an astonishing amount of endurance in even a feeble woman's frame, and after a time she went about her house once more, doing her duty to her child and learning to "suffer and grow strong." Fate had ordained, however, that Russell's father should not die upon the gallows; and soon after the verdict was pronounced, when all Mrs. Aubrey's efforts to procure a pardon had proved unavailing, the proud and desperate man, in the solitude of his cell, with no eye but Jehovah's to witness the awful deed, took his own life with the aid of a lancet. Such was the legacy of shame which Russell inherited; was it any marvel that at sixteen that boy had lived ages of sorrow? Mrs. Aubrey found her husband's financial affairs so involved that she relinquished the hope of retaining the little she possessed, and retired to a small cottage on the outskirts of the town, where she endeavoured to support herself and the two dependent on her by taking in sewing. Electra Grey was the orphan child of Mr. Aubrey's only sister, who, dying in poverty, bequeathed the infant to her brother. He had loved her as well as his own Russell, and his wife, who cradled her in her arms and taught her to walk by clinging to her finger, would almost as soon have parted with her son as the little Electra. For five years the widow had toiled by midnight lamps to feed these two; now oppressed nature rebelled, the long over-taxed eyes refused to perform their office; filmy cataracts stole over them, veiling their sadness and their unshed tears—blindness was creeping on. At his father's death Russell was forced to quit school, and with some difficulty he succeeded in obtaining a situation in a large dry-goods store, where his labours were onerous in the extreme, and his wages a mere pittance. Though Russell's employer, Mr. Watson, shrank from committing a gross wrong, and prided himself on his scrupulous honesty, his narrow mind and penurious habits strangled every generous impulse, and, without being absolutely cruel or unprincipled, he contrived to gall the boy's proud spirit and render his position one of almost purgatorial severity. His eldest son was just Russell's age, had been sent to various schools from his infancy, was indolent, self-indulgent, and thoroughly dissipated. Having been a second time expelled from school for most disgraceful misdemeanours, he lounged away his time about the store, or passed it still more disreputably with reckless companions.

The daily contrast presented by Cecil and Russell irritated the father, and hence his settled dislike of the latter. The faithful discharge of duty on the part of the clerk afforded no plausible occasion for invective; he felt that he was narrowly watched, and resolved to give no ground for fault-finding; yet during the long summer days, when the intense heat prevented customers from thronging the store, and there was nothing to be done, when Russell, knowing that the books were written up and the counters free from goods, took his Latin grammar and improved every leisure half-hour, he was not ignorant of the fact that an angry scowl darkened his employer's visage, and understood why he was constantly interrupted to perform most unnecessary labours. What the day denied him he reclaimed from night, and succeeded in acquiring a tolerable knowledge of Greek, besides reading several Latin books. Finding that his small salary was inadequate, now that his mother's failing sight prevented her from accomplishing the usual amount of sewing, he solicited and obtained permission to keep an additional set of books for the grocer who furnished his family with provisions, though by this arrangement few hours remained for necessary sleep. The protracted illness and death of an aged and faithful servant, together with Electra's tedious sickness, bringing the extra expense of medical aid, had prevented the

prompt payment of rent due for the three-roomed cottage, and Russell was compelled to ask for a portion of his salary in advance. His mother little dreamed of the struggle which took place in his heart ere he could force himself to make the request, and he carefully concealed from her the fact that at the moment of receiving the money, he laid in Mr. Watson's hands, by way of pawn, the only article of any value which he possessed—the watch his father had always worn, and which the coroner took from the vest pocket of the dead, dabbled with blood. The gold chain had been sold long before, and the son wore it attached to a simple black ribbon. His employer received the watch, locked it in the iron safe, and Russell fastened a small weight to the ribbon, and kept it around his neck that his mother might not suspect the truth. It chanced that Cecil stood near at the time; he saw the watch deposited in the safe, whistled a tune, fingered his own gold repeater, and walked away. Such was Russell Aubrey's history; such his situation at the beginning of his seventeenth year.

CHAPTER II

IRENE'S FRIENDSHIP

"Irene, your father will be displeased if he sees you in that plight."

"Pray, what is wrong about me now? You seem to glory in finding fault. What is the matter with my 'plight' as you call it?"

"You know very well your father can't bear to see you carrying your own satchel and basket to school. He ordered Martha to take them every morning and evening, but she says you will not let her carry them. It is just sheer obstinacy in you."

"There it is again! because I don't choose to be petted like a baby, or made a wax doll of, it is set down to obstinacy, as if I had the temper of a heathen. See here, Aunt Margaret, I am tired of having Martha tramping eternally at my heels as though I were a two-year-old child. There is no reason in her walking after me when I am strong enough to carry my own books, and I don't intend she shall do it any longer."

Irene Huntingdon stood on the marble steps of her palatial home, and talked with the maiden aunt who governed her father's household. The girl was about fourteen, tall for her age, straight, finely-formed, slender. The broad straw hat shaded but by no means concealed her features, and as she looked up at her aunt the sunshine fell upon a face of extraordinary beauty, such as is rarely seen, save in the idealized heads of the old masters. Her eyes were strangely, marvellously beautiful; they were larger than usual, and of that rare shade of purplish blue which borders the white velvet petals of a clematis. When the eyes were uplifted, as on this occasion, long, curling lashes of the bronze hue of her hair rested against her brow. Save the scarlet lines which marked her lips, her face was of that clear colourlessness which can be likened only to the purest ivory. Though there was an utter absence of the rosy hue of health, the transparency of the complexion seemed characteristic of her type, and precluded all thought of disease. Miss Margaret muttered something inaudible in reply to her last remark, and Irene walked on to school. Her father's residence was about a mile from the town, but the winding road rendered the walk somewhat longer; and on one side of this road stood the small house occupied by Mrs. Aubrey. As Irene approached it she saw Electra Grey coming from the opposite direction, and at the cottage gate they met. Both paused: Irene held out her hand cordially—

"Good morning. I have not seen you for a fortnight. I thought you were coming to school again as soon as you were strong enough?"

"No; I am not going back to school."

"Why?"

"Because auntie can't afford to send me any longer. You know her eyes are growing worse every day, and she is not able to take in sewing as she used to do. I am sorry; but it can't be helped."

"How do you know it can't be helped? Russell told me he thought she had cataracts on her eyes, and they can be removed."

"Perhaps so, if we had the means of consulting that celebrated physician in New Orleans. Money removes a great many things, Irie, but unfortunately we haven't it."

"The trip would not cost much; suppose you speak to Russell about it."

"Much or little it will require more than we can possibly spare. Everything is so high, we can barely live as it is. But I must go in; my aunt is waiting for me."

They shook hands and Irene walked on. Soon the brick walls of the academy rose grim and uninviting, and taking her place at the desk she applied herself to her books. When school was dismissed in the afternoon, instead of returning home as usual, she walked down the principal street, entered Mr. Watson's store, and put her books on the counter. It happened that the proprietor stood near the front door, and he came forward instantly to wait upon her.

"Ah, Miss Irene! happy to see you. What shall I have the pleasure of showing you?"

"Russell Aubrey, if you please."

The merchant stared, and she added—

"I want some kid gauntlets, but Russell can get them for me."

The young clerk stood at the desk in the rear of the store, with his back toward the counter; and Mr Watson called out—

"Here, Aubrey, some kid gauntlets for this young lady."

He laid down his pen, and taking a box of gloves from the shelves, placed it on the counter before her. He had not noticed her particularly, and when she pushed back her hat and looked up at him he started slightly.

"Good evening, Miss Huntingdon. What number do you wish?"

Perhaps it was from the heat of the day, or from stooping over his desk, or perhaps it was from something else, but his cheek was flushed, and gradually it grew pale again.

"Russell, I want to speak to you about Electra. She ought to be at school, you know."

"Yes."

"But she says your mother can't afford the expense."

"Just now she cannot; next year things will be better."

"What is the tuition for her?"

"Five dollars a month."

"Is that all?"

He selected a delicate fawn-coloured pair of gloves and laid them before her, while a faint smile passed over his face.

"Russell, has anything happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"What is troubling you so?"

"Nothing more than usual. Do those gloves suit you?"

"Yes, they will fit me, I believe." She looked at him very intently.

He met her gaze steadily, and for an instant his face brightened; then she said abruptly—

"Your mother's eyes are worse."

"Yes, much worse."

"Have you consulted Dr. Arnold about them?"

"He says he can do nothing for her."

"How much would it cost to take her to New Orleans and have that celebrated oculist examine them?"

"More than we can afford just now; at least two hundred dollars."

"Oh, Russell! that is not much. Would not Mr. Watson lend you that little?"

"I shall not ask him."

"Not even to restore your mother's sight?"

"Not to buy my own life. Besides, the experiment is a doubtful one."

"Still it is worth making."

"Yes, under different circumstances it certainly would be."

"Have you talked to Mr. Campbell about it?"

"No, because it is useless to discuss the matter."

"It would be dangerous to go to New Orleans now, I suppose?"

"October or November would be better."

Again she looked at him very earnestly, then stretched out her little hand.

"Good-bye, Russell. I wish I could do something to help you, to make you less sorrowful."

He held the slight waxen fingers, and his mouth trembled as he answered—

"Thank you, Miss Huntingdon. I am not sorrowful, but my path in life is not quite so flowery as yours."

"I wish you would not call me 'Miss Huntingdon' in that stiff, far-off way, as if we were not friends. Or maybe it is a hint that you desire me to address you as Mr. Aubrey. It sounds strange, unnatural, to say anything but Russell."

She gathered up her books, took the gloves, and went slowly homeward, and Russell returned to his desk with a light in his eyes which, for the remainder of the day, nothing could quench. As Irene ascended the long hill on which Mr. Huntingdon's residence stood, she saw her father's buggy at the door, and as she approached the steps, he came out, drawing on his gloves.

"You are late, Irene. What kept you?"

"I have been shopping a little. Are you going to ride? Take me with you."

"Going to dine at Mr. Carter's."

"Why, the sun is almost down now. What time will you come home? I want to ask you something."

"Not till long after you are asleep."

The night passed very slowly; Irene looked at the clock again and again. Finally the house became quiet, and at last the crush of wheels on the gravel-walk announced her father's return. He came into the library for a cigar, and, without noticing her, drew his chair to the open window. She approached and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Irene! what is the matter, child?"

"Nothing sir; only I want to ask you something."

"Well, Queen, what is it?"

He drew her tenderly to his knee, and passed his hand over her floating hair.

Leonard Huntingdon was forty years old; tall, spare, with an erect and martial carriage. He had been trained at West Point, and perhaps early education contributed somewhat to the air of unbending haughtiness which many found repulsive. His black hair was slightly sprinkled with grey, and his features were still decidedly handsome, though the expression of mouth and eyes was, ordinarily, by no means winning. Irene was his only child; her mother had died during her infancy, and on this beautiful idol he lavished all the tenderness of which his nature was capable. His tastes were cultivated, his house was elegant and complete, and furnished magnificently; every luxury that money could yield him he possessed, yet there were times when he seemed moody and cynical, and no one could surmise the cause of his gloom. The girl looked up at him fearing no denial.

"Father, I wish, please, you would give me two hundred dollars."

"What would you do with it, Queen?"

"I do not want it for myself; I should like to have that much to enable a poor woman to recover her sight. She has cataracts on her eyes, and there is a physician in New Orleans who can relieve her. Father, won't you give me the money?"

He took the cigar from his lips, shook off the ashes, and asked indifferently—

"What is the woman's name? Has she no husband to take care of her?"

"Mrs. Aubrey; she——"

"What!"

The cigar fell from his fingers, he put her from his knee, and rose instantly. His swarthy cheek glowed, and she wondered at the expression of his eyes, so different from anything she had ever seen there before.

"Who gave you permission to visit that house?"

"No permission was necessary. I go there because I love her and Electra, and because I like Russell. Why shouldn't I go there, sir? Is poverty disgrace?"

"Irene, mark me. You are to visit that house no more in future; keep away from the whole family. I will have no such association. Never let me hear their names again. Go to bed."

"Give me one good reason, and I will obey you."

"Reason! My will, my command, is sufficient reason. What do you mean by catechising me in this way? Implicit obedience is your duty."

The calm, holy eyes looked wonderingly into his; and as he marked the startled expression of the girl's pure face his own eyes drooped.

"Father, has Mrs. Aubrey ever injured you?"

No answer.

"If she has not, you are very unjust to her; if she has, remember she is a woman, bowed down with many sorrows, and it is unmanly to hoard up old differences. Father, please give me that money."

"I will bury my last dollar in the Red Sea first! Now are you answered?"

She put her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out some painful vision; and he saw the slight form shudder. In perfect silence she took her books and went up to her room. Mr. Huntingdon reseated himself as the door closed behind her, and the lamplight showed a sinister smile writhing over his dark features. He sat there, staring out into the starry night, and seeing by the shimmer of the setting moon only the graceful form and lovely face of Amy Aubrey, as she had appeared to him in other days. Could he forget the hour when she wrenched her cold fingers from his clasp, and, in defiance of her father's wishes, vowed she would never be his wife? No; revenge was sweet, very sweet; his heart had swelled with exultation when the verdict of death upon the gallows was pronounced upon the husband of her choice; and now, her poverty, her

humiliation, her blindness gave him deep, unutterable joy. The history of the past was a sealed volume to his daughter, but she was now for the first time conscious that her father regarded the widow and her son with unconquerable hatred; and with strange, foreboding dread she looked into the future, knowing that forgiveness was no part of his nature; that insult or injury was never forgotten.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSING WATCH

Whether the general rule of implicit obedience to parental injunction admitted of no exceptions, was a problem which Irene readily solved; and on Saturday, as soon as her father and cousin had started to the plantation (twenty-five miles distant), she put on her hat, and walked to town. Wholly absorbed in philanthropic schemes, she hurried along the sidewalk, ran up a flight of steps, and knocked at a door, on which was written in large gilt letters "Dr. Arnold."

"Ah, Beauty! come in. Sit down, and tell me what brought you to town so early."

He was probably a man of fifty; gruff in appearance, and unmistakably a bachelor. His thick hair was grizzled, so was the heavy beard; and the shaggy grey eyebrows slowly unbent, as he took his visitor's little hands and looked kindly down into her grave face. From her infancy he had petted and fondled her and she stood as little in awe of him as of Paragon.

"Doctor, are you busy this morning?"

"I am never too busy to attend to you, little one. What is it?"

"Of course you know that Mrs. Aubrey is almost blind."

"Of course I do, having been her physician."

"Those cataracts can be removed, however."

"Perhaps they can, and perhaps they can't."

"But the probabilities are that a good oculist can relieve her."

"I rather think so."

"Two hundred dollars would defray all the expenses of a trip to New Orleans for this purpose, but she is too poor to afford it."

"Decidedly too poor."

His grey eyes twinkled promisingly, but he would not anticipate her.

"Dr. Arnold, don't you think you could spare that small sum without much inconvenience?"

"Really! is that what you trudged into town for?"

"Yes. I have not the necessary amount at my disposal just now, and I came to ask you to lend it to me."

"Do you want the money now?"

"Yes, if you please; but before you give it to me I ought to tell you that I want the matter kept secret. No one is to know anything about it—not even my father."

She looked so unembarrassed that for a moment he felt puzzled.

"I knew Mrs. Aubrey before her marriage." He bent forward to watch the effect of his words, but if she really knew or suspected aught of the past there was not the slightest intimation of it. Putting back her hair, she looked up and answered—

"That should increase your willingness to aid her in her misfortunes."

"Hold out your hand; fifty, one hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred. There, will that do?"

"Thank you! thank you. You will not need it soon, I hope?"

"Not until you are ready to pay me."

"Dr. Arnold, you have given me a great deal of pleasure—more than I can express. I——"

"Don't try to express it, Queen. You have given me infinitely more, I assure you."

Her splendid eyes were lifted toward him, and with some sudden impulse she touched her lips to the hand he had placed on her shoulder. Something like a tremor crossed the doctor's habitually stern mouth as he looked at the marvellous beauty of the girl's countenance, and he kissed her slender fingers as reverently as though he touched something consecrated.

"Irene, shall I take you home in my buggy?"

"No, thank you, I would rather walk. Oh! Doctor, I am so much obliged to you."

In answer to Irene's knock, Electra opened the cottage door, and ushered her into the small room which served as both kitchen and dining-room. Everything was scrupulously neat, not a spot on the bare polished floor, not a speck to dim the purity of the snowy dimity curtains, and on the table in the centre stood a vase filled with fresh fragrant flowers. In a low chair before the open window sat the widow knitting a blue and white nubia. She glanced round as Irene entered.

"Who is it, Electra?"

"Miss Irene, aunt."

"Sit down, Miss Irene; how are you to-day?"

"Mrs. Aubrey, I am sorry to hear your eyes are no better."

"Thank you for your kind sympathy. My sight grows more dim every day."

"You shan't suffer much longer; these veils shall be taken off. Here is the money to enable you to go to New Orleans and consult that physician. As soon as the weather turns cooler you must start."

"Miss Irene, I cannot tax your generosity so heavily; I have no claim on your goodness. Indeed I——"

"Mrs. Aubrey, don't you think it is your duty to recover your sight if possible?"

"Yes, if I could command the means."

"You have the means; you must employ them. There, I will not take back the money; it is yours."

"Don't refuse it, auntie, you will wound Irie," pleaded Electra.

There was silence for a few seconds; then Mrs. Aubrey took the hands from her face and said, —"Irene, I will accept your generous offer. If my sight is restored, I can repay you some day; if not, I am not too proud to be under this great obligation to you. Oh, Irene! I can't tell you how much I thank you; my heart is too full for words." She threw her arm round the girl's waist and strained her to her bosom, and the hot tears fell fast on the waves of golden hair. A moment after, Irene threw a tiny envelope into Electra's lap, and without another word glided out of the room. The orphan broke the seal, and as she opened a sheet of note-paper a ten-dollar bill slipped out.

"Electra, come to school Monday. The enclosed will pay your tuition for two months longer. Please don't hesitate to accept it if you really love

"Your friend IRENE."

Thinking of the group she had just left, Irene approached the gate and saw that Russell stood holding it open for her to pass. Looking up she stopped, for the expression of his face frightened and pained her.

"Russell, what is the matter? oh! tell me."

"I have been injured and insulted. Just now I doubt all people and all things, even the justice and mercy of God."

"Russell, 'shall not the righteous Judge of all the earth do right?'"

"Shall the rich and the unprincipled eternally trample upon the poor and the unfortunate?"

"Who has injured you?"

"A meek-looking man who passes for a Christian, who turns pale at the sound of a violin, who exhorts to missionary labours, and talks often about widows and orphans. Such a man, knowing the circumstances that surround me, my poverty, my mother's affliction, on bare and most unwarrantable suspicion turns me out of my situation as clerk, and endeavours to brand my name with infamy. To-day I stand disgraced in the eyes of the community, thanks to the vile slanders of that pillar of the church, Jacob Watson. I could bear it myself, but my mother! my noble, patient, suffering mother! I must go in, and add a yet heavier burden to those already crushing out her life. Pleasant tidings, these I bring her; that her son is disgraced, branded as a rogue!"

There was no moisture in the keen eye, no tremor in the metallic ring of his voice, no relaxation of the curled lip.

"Can't you prove your innocence? Was it money?"

"No, it was a watch, which I gave up as security for drawing a portion of my salary in advance. It was locked up in the iron safe; this morning it was missing, and they accuse me of having stolen it."

He took off his hat as if it oppressed him, and tossed back his hair.

"What will you do, Russell?"

"I don't know yet."

"Oh! if I could only help you."

She clasped her hands over her heart, and for the first time since her infancy tears rushed down her cheeks. It was painful to see that quiet girl so moved, and Russell hastily took the folded hands in his, and bent his face close to hers.

"Irene, the only comfort I have is that you are my friend. Don't let them influence you against me. No matter what you may hear, believe in me. Oh! Irene, Irene! believe in me always!"

He held her hands in a clasp so tight that it pained her, then suddenly dropped them and left her.

Mrs. Aubrey recognized the step and looked round in surprise.

"Electra, I certainly hear Russell coming."

He drew near and touched her cheek with his lips, saying tenderly—

"How is my mother?"

"Russell, what brings you home so early?"

"That is rather a cold welcome, mother, but I am not astonished. Can you bear to hear something unpleasant? Here, put your hands in mine; now listen to me. You know I drew fifty dollars of my salary in advance, to pay Clark. At that time I gave my watch to Mr. Watson by way of pawn, he seemed so reluctant to let me have the money; you understand, mother, why I did not mention it at the time. He locked it up in the iron safe, to which no one has access except him and myself. Late yesterday I locked the safe as usual, but do not remember whether the watch was still there or not; this morning Mr. Watson missed it; we searched safe, desk, store, could find it nowhere, nor the twenty-dollar gold piece deposited at the same time. No other money was missing, though the safe contained nearly a thousand dollars. The end of it all is that I am accused as the thief, and expelled in disgrace for——"

A low, plaintive cry escaped the widow's lips, and her head sank heavily on the boy's shoulder. Passing his arm fondly around her, he kissed her white face, and continued in the same hushed, passionless tone, like one speaking under his breath, and stilling some devouring rage—

"Mother, I need not assure you of my innocence. You know that I never could be guilty of what is imputed to me; but, not having it in my power to prove my innocence, I shall have to suffer the disgrace for a season. Only for a season, I trust, mother, for in time the truth must be discovered. I have been turned out of my situation, and, though they have no proof of my guilt, they will try to brand me with the disgrace."

For a few moments deep silence reigned in the little kitchen, and only the Infinite eye pierced the heart of the long-tried sufferer. When she raised her head from the boy's bosom, the face, though tear-stained, was serene, and, pressing her lips twice to his, she said slowly—

"'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you; as though some strange thing happened unto you. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' I will wait patiently, my son, hoping for proofs which shall convince the world of your innocence. I wish I could take the whole burden on my shoulders, and relieve you, my dear boy."

"You have, mother; it ceases to crush me, now that you are yourself once more." He spoke with difficulty, however, as if something stifled him, and, rising hastily, poured out and drank a glass of water.

"And now, Russell, sit down and let me tell you a little that is pleasant and sunshiny. There is still a bright spot left to look upon."

Stealing her hand into his, the mother informed him of all that had occurred during Irene's visit, and concluded by laying the money in his palm.

Electra sat opposite, watching the change that came over the face she loved best on earth. Her large, eager midnight eyes noted the quick flush and glad light which overspread his features; the deep joy that kindled in his tortured soul; and unconsciously she clutched her fingers till the nails grew purple, as though striving to strangle some hideous object thrusting itself before her. Her breathing became laboured and painful, her gaze more concentrated and searching, and when her cousin exclaimed: "Oh, mother! she is an angel! I have always known it. She is unlike everybody else!" Electra's heart seemed to stand still; and from that moment a sombre curtain fell between the girl's eyes and God's sunshine. She rose, and a silent yet terrible struggle took place in her passionate soul. Justice and jealousy wrestled briefly; she would be just though every star fell from her sky, and with a quick uncertain step she reached Russell, thrust Irene's note into his fingers, and fled into solitude. An hour later, Russell knocked at the door of an office, which bore on a square tin plate these words, "Robert Campbell, Attorney at Law." The door was partially closed, and as he entered an elderly man looked up from a desk, covered with loose papers and open volumes, from which he was evidently making extracts. The thin hair hung over his forehead as if restless fingers had ploughed carelessly through it, and, as he kept one finger on a half-copied paragraph, the cold blue eye said very plainly, "This is a busy time with me; despatch your errand at once."

"Good morning, Mr. Campbell; are you particularly engaged?"

"How-d'ye-do, Aubrey. I am generally engaged; confoundedly busy this morning. What do you want?"

His pen resumed its work, but he turned his head as if to listen.

"I will call again when you are at leisure," said Russell, turning away.

"That will be—next month—next year; in fine, postponing your visit indefinitely. Sit down—somewhere—well—clear those books into a corner, and let's hear your business. I am at your service for ten minutes—talk fast."

He put his pen behind his ear, crossed his arms on the desk, and looked expectant.

"I came here to ask whether you wished to employ anyone in your office."

"And what the deuce do you suppose I want with an office lad like yourself? I tried that experiment to my perfect satisfaction a few months ago. Is that all?"

"That is all, sir."

The boy rose, but the bitter look that crossed his face as he glanced at the well-filled book-shelves arrested the lawyer's attention, and he added—

"Why did you leave Watson, young man? It is a bad plan to change about in this style."

"I was expelled from my situation on a foul and most unjust accusation."

"Let's hear the whole business; sit down."

Without hesitation he narrated all the circumstances, once or twice pausing to still the tempest of passion that flashed from his eyes. While he spoke, Mr. Campbell's keen eyes searched him from head to foot, and at the conclusion he said—

"I see fate has thumped none of your original obstinacy out of you. Aubrey, suppose I shut my eyes to the watch transaction, and take you into my office?"

"If so, I shall do my duty faithfully. But you said you did not need anyone here, and though I am anxious to find work, I do not expect or desire to be taken in from charity. I intend to earn my wages, sir, and from your own account I should judge you had very little use for an assistant."

"Humph! a bountiful share of pride along with prodigious obstinacy. Though I am a lawyer, I told you the truth; I have no earthly use for such assistants as I have been plagued with for several years. In the main, office-boys are a nuisance, comparable only to the locusts of Egypt; I washed my hands of the whole tribe months since. But if I could only get an intelligent, ambitious, honourable, trustworthy young man, he would be a help to me. I had despaired of finding such, but, on the whole, I rather like you; believe you can suit me exactly if you will, and I am disposed to give you a trial. Sit down here and copy this paragraph; let me see what sort of hieroglyphics I shall have to decipher if I make you my copyist."

Russell silently complied, and after a careful examination it seemed the chirography was satisfactory.

"Aubrey, you and I can work peaceably together; I value your candour, I like your resolution. Come to me on Monday, and in the matter of salary you shall find me liberal enough. I think you told me you had a cousin as well as your mother to support; I shall not forget it. Now, good morning, and leave me unless you desire to accumulate work for yourself."

CHAPTER IV

ELECTRA'S DISCOVERY

From early childhood Irene had experienced a sensation of loneliness. Doubtless the loss of her mother enhanced this feeling, but the peculiarity of her mental organization would have necessitated it even under happier auspices. Miss Margaret considered her "a strange little thing," and rarely interfered with her plans in any respect, while her father seemed to take it for granted that she required no looking after. He knew that her beauty was extraordinary; he was proud of the fact; and having provided her with a good music master, and sent her to the best school in the county, he left her to employ her leisure as inclination prompted. Occasionally her will conflicted with his, and more than once he found it impossible to make her yield assent to his wishes. To the outward observances of obedience and respect she submitted, but whenever these differences occurred, he felt that in the end she was unconquered. Inconsistent as it may appear, though fretted for the time by her firmness, he loved her the more for her "wilfulness," as he termed it; and despotic and exacting though he certainly was in many respects, he stood somewhat in awe of his pure-hearted, calm-eyed child. His ward and nephew, Hugh Seymour, had resided with him for several years, and it was well known that Mr. Huntingdon had pledged his daughter's hand to his sister's son. Irene had never been officially apprised of her destiny, but surmised very accurately the true state of the case. Between the two cousins there existed not the slightest congeniality of taste or disposition; not a sympathetic link save the tie of relationship. On her part there was a moderate share of cousinly affection; on his, as much love and tenderness as his selfish nature was capable of feeling. They rarely quarrelled as most children do, for when (as frequently happened) he flew into a rage and tried to tyrannize, she scorned to retort in any way and generally locked him out of the library. What she thought of her father's intentions concerning herself, no one knew; she never alluded to the subject, and if in a frolicsome mood Hugh broached it, she invariably cut the discussion short. When he went to college in a distant state, she felt infinitely relieved, and during his vacations secluded herself as much as possible. Yet the girl's heart was warm and clinging; she loved her father devotedly, and loved most intensely Electra Grey, whom she had first met at school. They were nearly the same age, classmates, and firm friends. As totally different in character as appearance was Electra Grey. Rather smaller and much thinner than Irene, with shining, purplish black hair, large, sad, searching black eyes, from which there was no escape, a pale olive complexion, and full crimson lips that rarely smiled. Electra was a dreamer, richly gifted; dissatisfied because she could never attain that unreal world which her busy brain kept constantly before her.

Electra's love of drawing had early displayed itself; first, in strange, weird figures on her slate, then in her copy-book, on every slip of paper which she could lay her hands upon; and, finally, for want of more suitable material, she scrawled all over the walls of the little bedroom, to the great horror of her aunt, who spread a coat of whitewash over the child's frescos, and begged her to be guilty of no such conduct in future, as Mr. Clark might, with great justice, sue for damages. In utter humiliation, Electra retreated to the garden, and here, after a shower had left the sandy walks white and smooth, she would sharpen a bit of pine, and draw figures and faces of all conceivable and inconceivable shapes. Chancing to find her thus engaged one Sunday afternoon, Russell supplied her with a package of drawing-paper, and pencils. So long as these lasted she was perfectly happy, but unluckily their straitened circumstances admitted of no such expenditure, and before many weeks she was again without materials. She would not tell Russell that she had exhausted his package, and passed sleepless nights trying to devise some method by which she could aid herself. It was positive torture for her to sit in school and see the drawing-master go round, giving lessons on this side and that, skipping over her every time, because her aunt could not afford the extra three dollars. Amid all these yearnings and aspirations she turned constantly to Russell, with a worshipping love that knew no bounds. She loved her meek affectionate aunt as well as most natures love their mothers, and did all in her power to lighten her labours, but her affection for Russell bordered on adoration. In a character so exacting and passionate as hers there is necessarily much of jealousy, and thus it came to pass that, on the day of Irene's visit to the cottage, the horrible suspicion took possession of her that he loved Irene better than herself. True, she was very young, but childish hearts feel as keenly as those of matured years; and Electra endured more agony during that day than in all her past life. Had Irene been other than she was, in every respect, she would probably have hated her cordially; as matters stood, she buried the suspicion deep in her own heart, and kept as much out of everybody's way as possible. Days and weeks passed very wearily; she busied herself with her text-books, and when the lessons had been recited, drew all over the margins—here a hand, there an entire arm, now and then a face, sad-eyed as Fate.

Mrs. Aubrey's eyes became so blurred that finally she could not leave the house without having some one to guide her, and, as cold weather had now arrived, preparations were made for her journey. Mr. Hill, who was going to New Orleans, kindly offered to take charge of her, and the day of departure was fixed. Electra packed the little trunk, saw it deposited on the top of the stage in the dawn of an October morning, saw her aunt comfortably seated beside Mr. Hill, and in another moment all had vanished. In the afternoon of that day, on returning from school, Electra went to the bureau, and, unlocking a drawer, took out a small paper box. It contained a miniature of her father, set in a handsome gold frame. She knew it had been her mother's most valued trinket; her aunt had carefully kept it for her, and as often as the temptation assailed her she had resisted; but now the longing for money triumphed over every other feeling. Having touched the spring, she took a knife and cautiously removed the bit of ivory beneath the glass, then deposited

the two last in the box, put the gold frame in her pocket, and went out to a jewellery store. As several persons had preceded her, she leaned against the counter, and, while waiting, watched with some curiosity the movements of one of the goldsmiths, who, with a glass over one eye, was engaged in repairing watches. Some had been taken from the cases, others were untouched; and as her eyes passed swiftly over the latter, they were suddenly riveted to a massive gold one lying somewhat apart. A half-smothered exclamation caused the workman to turn round and look at her, but in an instant she calmed herself; and thinking it a mere outbreak of impatience, he resumed his employment. Just then one of the proprietors approached, and said politely, "I am sorry we have kept you waiting, miss. What can I do for you?"

"What is this worth?"

She laid the locket down on the counter, and looked up with eyes that sparkled very joyously he thought. He examined it a moment, and said rather dryly—

"Well, how do I know, in the first place, that it belongs to you? Jewellers have to be very particular about what they buy."

She crimsoned, and drew herself proudly away from the counter, then smiled and held out her hand for the locket.

"It is mine; it held my father's miniature, but I took it out because I want a paint-box, and thought I could sell this case for enough to buy one. It was my mother's once; here are her initials on the back, H. G.—Harriet Grey. But of course you don't know whether I am telling the truth; I will bring my cousin with me, he can prove it. Sir, are you so particular about everything you buy?"

"We try to be."

Again her eyes sparkled; she bowed, and left the store.

Once in the street, she hurried to Mr. Campbell's office, ran up the steps, and rapped loudly at the door.

"Come in!" thundered the lawyer.

She stopped on the threshold, glanced round, and said timidly—

"I want to see Russell, if you please."

"Russell is at the post-office. Have you any particular spite at my door, that you belabour it in that style? or do you suppose I am as deaf as a gatepost?"

"I beg your pardon; I did not mean to startle you, sir. I was not thinking of either you or your door."

She sprang down the steps to wait on the sidewalk for her cousin, and met him at the entrance.

"Oh, Russell! I have found your watch."

A ray of light seemed to leap from his eyes as he seized her hand.

"Where?"

"At Mr. Brown's jewellery store."

"Thank God!"

He went up the stairway, delivered the letters, and came back accompanied by Mr. Campbell.

"This is my cousin, Electra Grey, Mr. Campbell."

"So I inferred from the unceremonious assault she made on my door just now. However, shake hands, little lady; it seems there is some reason for your haste. Let's hear about this precious watch business."

She simply told what she had seen. Presently Russell said—

"But how did you happen there, Electra?"

"Your good angel, sent me, I suppose; and," she added in a whisper, "I will tell you some other time."

On re-entering the store, she walked at once to the workman's corner, and pointed out the watch.

"Yes, it is mine. I would know it among a thousand."

"How can you identify it, Aubrey?"

He immediately gave the number, and name of the manufacturer, and described the interior tracery, not omitting the quantity of jewels. Mr. Campbell turned to the proprietor (the same gentleman with whom Electra had conversed), and briefly recapitulated the circumstances which had occurred in connection with the watch. Mr. Brown listened attentively, then requested

Russell to point out the particular one that resembled his. He did so, and on examination, the number, date, name, and all the marks corresponded so exactly that no doubt remained on the jeweller's mind.

"Young man, this watch was sold for ninety dollars by a man named Rufus Turner, who lives in New Orleans, No. 240 —— street. I will write to him at once, and find out, if possible, how it came into his possession. I rather think he had some horses here for sale."

"Did he wear green glasses," inquired Russell of the young man who had purchased the watch.

"Yes, and had one arm in a sling."

"I saw such a man here about the time my watch was missing."

After some directions from Mr. Campbell concerning the proper course to be pursued, Electra drew out her locket, saying—

"Now, Russell, is not this locket mine?"

"Yes; but where is the miniature? What are you going to do with it?"

"The miniature is at home, but I want to sell the frame, and Mr. Brown does not know but that it is another watch case."

"If it is necessary, I will swear that it belongs lawfully to you; but what do you want to sell it for? I should think you would prize it too highly to be willing to part with it."

"I do prize the miniature, and would not part with it for any consideration; but I want something far more than a gold case to keep it in."

"Tell me what you want, and I will get it for you," whispered her cousin.

"No—I am going to sell this frame."

"And I am going to buy it from you," said the kind-hearted merchant, taking it from her hand and weighing it.

Russell and Mr. Campbell left the store, and soon after Mr. Brown paid Electra several dollars for the locket.

In half an hour she had purchased a small box of paints, a supply of drawing-paper and pencils, and returned home, happier and prouder than many an empress, whose jewels have equalled those of the Begums of Oude. She had cleared Russell's character, and her hands were pressed over her heart to still its rapturous throbbing. Many days elapsed before Mr. Turner's answer arrived. He stated that he had won the watch from Cecil Watson, at a horse-race, where both were betting; and proved the correctness of his assertion by reference to several persons who were present, and who resided in the town. Russell had suspected Cecil from the moment of its disappearance, and now provided with both letter and watch, and accompanied by Mr. Brown, he repaired to Mr. Watson's store. Russell had been insulted, his nature was stern, and now he exulted in the power of disgracing the son of the man who had wronged him. There was no flush on his face, but a cold, triumphant glitter in his eyes as he approached his former employer, and laid watch and letter before him.

"What business have you here?" growled the merchant, trembling before the expression of the boy's countenance.

"My business is to clear my character which you have slandered, and to fix the disgrace you intended for me on your own son. I bring you the proofs of his, not my villainy."

"Come into the back-room; I will see Brown another time," said Watson, growing paler each moment.

"No, sir; you were not so secret in your dealings with me. Here, where you insulted me, you shall hear the whole truth. Read that. I suppose the twenty-dollar gold piece followed the watch."

The unfortunate father perused the letter slowly, and smothered a groan. Russell watched him with a keen joy which he might have blushed to acknowledge had he analysed his feelings. Writhing under his impaling eye, Mr. Watson said—

"Have you applied to the witnesses referred to?"

"Yes; they are ready to swear that they saw Cecil bet Turner the watch."

"You did not tell them the circumstances, did you?"

"No."

There was an awkward silence, broken by Mr. Watson.

"If I retract all that I have said against you, and avow your innocence, will it satisfy you? Will you be silent about Cecil?"

"No!" rose peremptorily to Russell's lips, but he checked it; and the patient teaching of years, his mother's precepts, and his mother's prayers brought forth their first fruit—golden charity.

"You merit no forbearance at my hands, and I came here intending to show you none; but, on reflection, I will not follow your example. Clear my name before the public, and I leave the whole affair with you. Good morning."

Afraid to trust himself, he turned away and joined Mr. Campbell in the office.

In the afternoon of the same day came a letter from Mr. Hill containing sad news. The oculist had operated on Mrs. Aubrey's eyes, but violent inflammation had ensued; he had done all that scientific skill could prompt, but feared she would be hopelessly blind. At the close of the letter Mr. Hill stated that he would bring her home the following week. One November evening, just before dark, while Russell was cutting wood for the kitchen-fire, the stage stopped at the cottage-gate, and he hurried forward to receive his mother in his arms. It was a melancholy reunion; for a moment the poor sufferer's fortitude forsook her, and she wept. But his caresses soothed her, and she followed Electra into the house while he brought in the trunk. When shawl and bonnet had been removed, and Electra placed her in the rocking-chair, the light fell on face and figure, and the cousins started at the change that had taken place. She was so ghastly pale, so very much reduced. She told them all that had occurred during the tedious weeks of absence; how much she regretted having gone since the trip proved so unsuccessful, how much more she deplored the affliction on their account than her own; and then from that hour no allusion was ever made to it.

CHAPTER V

IRENE IS SENT AWAY

Weeks and months slipped away, and total darkness came down on the widow. She groped with some difficulty from room to room, and Electra was compelled to remain at home and watch over her. Russell had become a great favourite with his crusty employer, and, when the labours of the office were ended, brought home such books as he needed, and spent his evenings in study. His powers of application and endurance were extraordinary, and his progress was in the same ratio. As he became more and more absorbed in these pursuits his reserve and taciturnity increased. His employer was particularly impressed by the fact that he never volunteered a remark on any subject, and rarely opened his lips except to ask some necessary information in connection with his business. He comprehended Russell's character, and quietly facilitated his progress. There was no sycophancy on the part of the young man, no patronage on that of the employer.

One afternoon Irene tapped lightly at the cottage-door, and entered the kitchen. Mrs. Aubrey sat in a low chair close to the fireplace, engaged in knitting; her smooth, neat calico dress and spotless linen collar told that careful hands tended her, and the soft auburn hair brushed over her temples showed broad bands of grey as the evening sun shone on it. She turned her brown, sightless eyes toward the door, and asked in a low voice—

"Who is it?"

"It is only me, Mrs. Aubrey."

Irene bent down, laid her two hands on the widow's, and kissed her forehead.

"I am glad to hear your voice, Irene; it has been a long time since you were here."

"Yes, a good many weeks, I know, but I could not come."

"Are you well? Your hands and face are cold."

"Yes, thank you, very well. I am always cold, I believe. Hugh says I am. Here are some flowers from the greenhouse. I brought them because they are so fragrant; and here, too, are a few oranges from the same place. Hush! don't thank me, if you please. I wish I could come here oftener. I always feel better after being with you."

Mrs. Aubrey had finished her knitting, and sat with her hands folded in her lap, the meek face more than usually serene, the sightless eyes directed toward her visitor. Sunshine reflected the bare boards under the window, flashed on the tin vessels ranged on the shelves, and lingered like a halo around Irene's head. Electra had been drawing at the table in the middle of the room, and now sat leaning on her hand watching the two at the fire. Presently Irene approached and began to examine the drawings, which were fragmentary, except one or two heads, and a sketch taken from the bank opposite the Falls. After some moments passed in looking over them, Irene addressed the quiet little figure.

"Have you been to Mr. Clifton's studio?"

"No; who is he?"

"An artist from New York. His health is poor, and he is spending the winter south. Haven't you heard of him? Everybody is having portraits taken. He is painting mine now—father would make me sit again, though he has a likeness which was painted four years ago. I am going down to-morrow for my last sitting, and should like very much for you to go with me. Perhaps Mr. Clifton can give you some valuable hints. Will you go?"

"With great pleasure."

"Then I will call for you a little before ten o'clock. Here are some crayons I bought for you a week ago. Good-bye."

The following day Miss Margaret accompanied her to the studio. As the carriage approached the cottage-gate, Irene directed the driver to stop.

"For what?" asked her aunt.

"Electra Grey is going with me; I promised to call for her. She has an extraordinary talent for drawing, and I want to introduce her to Mr. Clifton. Open the door, Andrew."

"Irene, are you deranged? Your father never would forgive you if he knew you associated with those people. I can't think of allowing that girl to enter this carriage. Drive on. I must really speak to Leonard about your obstinacy in visiting at that——"

"Stop, Andrew! If you don't choose to ride with Electra, Aunt Margaret, you may go on alone, for either she shall ride or I will walk with her."

Andrew opened the door, and she was stepping out, when Electra appeared in the walk and immediately joined her. Miss Margaret was thoroughly aroused and indignant, but thought it best to submit for the time, and when Irene introduced her friend she took no notice of her whatever, except by drawing herself up in one corner and lowering her veil. The girls talked during the remainder of the ride, and when they reached Mr. Clifton's door ran up the steps together, totally

unmindful of the august lady's ill humour.

The artist was standing before an easel which held Irene's unfinished portrait, and as he turned to greet his visitors, Electra saw that, though thin and pale, his face was one of rare beauty and benevolence. His brown, curling hair hung loosely about his shoulders, and an uncommonly long beard of the same silky texture descended almost to his waist. He shook hands with Irene, and looked inquiringly at her companion.

"Mr. Clifton, this is Miss Electra Grey, whose drawings I mentioned to you last week. I wish, if you please, you would examine some of them when you have leisure."

Electra looked for an instant into his large, clear grey eyes as he took her drawings and said he would be glad to assist her, and knew that henceforth the tangled path would be smoothed and widened. She stood at the back of his chair during the hour's sitting, and with peculiar interest watched the strokes of his brush as the portrait grew under his practised hand. When Irene rose, the orphan moved away and began to scrutinize the numerous pictures scattered about the room. A great joy filled her heart and illumined her face, and she waited for the words of encouragement that she felt assured would be spoken. The artist looked over her sketches slowly, carefully, and his eye went back to her brilliant countenance as if to read there answers to ciphers which perplexed him. But yet more baffling cryptography met him in the deep, flashing, appealing eyes, on the crimson, quivering lips, on the low, full brow, with its widely separated black arches. Evidently the face possessed far more attraction than the drawings, and he made her sit down beside him, and passed his hand over her head and temples, as a professed phrenologist might preparatory to rendering a chart.

"Your sketches are very rough, very crude, but they also display great power of thought, some of them singular beauty of conception; and I see from your countenance that you are dissatisfied because the execution falls so far short of the conception. Let me talk to you candidly; you have uncommon talent, but the most exalted genius cannot dispense with laborious study. Think well of all this."

"I have thought of it; I am willing to work any number of years; I have decided, and I am not to be frightened from my purpose. I am poor, I can barely buy the necessary materials, much less the books, but I will be an artist yet. I have decided, sir; it is no new whim; it has been a bright dream to me all my life, and I am determined to realize it."

"Amen; so let it be, then. I shall remain here some weeks longer; come to me every day at ten o'clock, and I will instruct you. You shall have such books as you need, and with perseverance you have nothing to fear."

He went into the adjoining room, and returned with a small volume. As he gave it to her, with some directions concerning the contents, she caught his hand to her lips, saying hastily—

"My guardian angel certainly brought you here to spend the winter. Oh, sir! I will prove my gratitude for your goodness by showing that I am not unworthy of it. I thank you from the very depths of my glad heart."

As she released his hand and left the studio he found two bright drops on his fingers, drops called forth by the most intense joy she had ever known. Having some commission from her aunt, she did not re-enter the carriage, and, after thanking Irene for her kindness, walked away.

The ride home was very silent. Miss Margaret sat stiff and icy, looking quite insulted, while her niece was too much engrossed by other reflections to notice her. The latter spent the remainder of the morning in writing to Hugh and correcting her French exercises, and when summoned to dinner she entered the room expecting a storm. A glance sufficed to show her that Miss Margaret had not yet spoken to her father, though it was evident from her countenance that she was about to make what she considered an important revelation. The meal passed, however, without any allusion to the subject, and, knowing what she had to expect, Irene immediately withdrew to the library to give her aunt an opportunity of unburdening her mind. The struggle must come some time, and she longed to have it over as soon as possible. She threw up the sash, seated herself on the broad cedar window-sill, and began to work out a sum in Algebra. Nearly a half-hour passed; the slamming of the dining-room door was like the first line of foam, curling and whitening the sea when the tempest sweeps forward; her father stamped into the library, and the storm broke over her.

"Irene! didn't I positively order you to keep away from that Aubrey family? What do you mean by setting me at defiance in this way, you wilful, spoiled, hard-headed piece? Do you suppose I intend to put up with your obstinacy all my life, and let you walk roughshod over me and my commands? You have queened it long enough, my lady. If I don't rein you up, you will turn your aunt and me out of the house next, and invite that precious Aubrey crew to take possession. Your confounded stubbornness will ruin you yet. You deserve a good whipping, miss; I can hardly keep my hands off of you."

He did not; rough hands seized her shoulder, jerked her from the window-sill, and shook her violently. Down fell book, slate, and pencil with a crash; down swept the heavy hair, blinding her. She put it back, folded her hands behind her as if for support, and, looking up at him, said in a low, steady, yet grieved tone—

"I am very sorry you are angry with me, father."

"Devilish sorry, I dare say! Don't be hypocritical! Didn't I tell you to keep away from those people? Don't stand there like a block of stone; answer me!"

"Yes, sir; but I did not promise to do so. I am not hypocritical, father."

"You did not promise, indeed! What do I care for promises? It was your duty to obey me."

"I don't think it was, father, when you refused to give me any reason for avoiding Mrs. Aubrey or her family. They are unfortunate but honourable people; and, being very poor and afflicted, I felt sorry for them. I can't see how my going there occasionally harms you or me, or anybody else. I know very well that you dislike them, but you never told me why, and I cannot imagine any good reason for it. Father, if I love them why should not I associate with them?"

"Because I say you shan't! you tormenting, headstrong little imp!"

"My father, that is no reason."

"Reason! I will put you where you will have no occasion for reasons. Oh! I can match you, you perverse little wretch! I am going to send you to a boarding-school, do you hear that? send you where you will have no Aubreys to abet your obstinacy and disobedience, where that temper of yours can be curbed. How will you relish getting up before day, kindling your own fire, if you have any, making your own bed, and living on bread and water? I will take you to New York, and keep you there till you are grown and learn common sense. Now get out of my sight!"

With a stamp of rage he pointed to the door. Hitherto she had stood quite still, but now an expression of anguish passed swiftly over her face, and she put out her hands appealingly—

"Father! my father! don't send me away. Please let me stay at home."

"Not if I live long enough to take you. Just as certainly as the sun shines in heaven you will go as soon as your clothes can be made. Your aunt will have you ready in a week. Don't open your mouth to me! I don't want to hear another word from you. Take yourself off."

She picked up her slate and book, and left the room.

The week which succeeded was wretched to the girl, for her father's *surveillance* prevented her from visiting the cottage, even to say adieu to its inmates; and no alternative presented itself but to leave for them (in the hands of Nellie, her devoted nurse) a note containing a few parting words and assurances of unfading friendship and remembrance. The day of departure dawned rainy, gloomy, and the wind sobbed and wailed down the avenue as Irene stood at her window, looking out on the lawn where her life had been passed. The breakfast-bell summoned her away, and, a half-hour after, she saw the lofty columns of the old house fade from view, and knew that many months, perhaps years, must elapse before the ancestral trees of the long avenue would wave again over the head of their young mistress. Her father sat beside her, moody and silent, and, when the brick wall and arched iron gate vanished from her sight, she sank back in one corner, and, covering her face with her hands, smothered a groan and fought desperately with her voiceless anguish.

CHAPTER VI

MASTER AND PUPIL

Day after day Electra toiled over her work. The rapidity of her progress astonished Mr. Clifton. He questioned her concerning the processes she employed in some of her curious combinations, but the fragmentary, abstracted nature of her conversation during the hours of instruction gave him little satisfactory information. His interest in her increased, until finally it became absorbing, and he gave her all the time she could spare from home. The eagerness with which she listened to his directions, the facility with which she applied his rules, fully repaid him; and from day to day he postponed his return to the North, reluctant to leave his indefatigable pupil. Now and then the time of departure was fixed, but ere it arrived he wavered and procrastinated.

Electra knew that his stay had been prolonged beyond his original intention, and she dreaded the hour when she should be deprived of his aid and advice. Though their acquaintance had been so short, a strangely strong feeling had grown up in her heart toward him; a feeling of clinging tenderness, blended with earnest and undying gratitude. She knew that he understood her character and appreciated her struggles, and it soothed her fierce, proud heart, in some degree to receive from him those tokens of constant remembrance which she so yearned to have from Russell. She felt, too, that she was not regarded as a stranger by the artist; she could see his sad eyes brighten at her entrance, and detect the tremor in his hand and voice when he spoke of going home. His health had improved, and the heat of summer had come; why did he linger? His evenings were often spent at the cottage, and even Mrs. Aubrey learned to smile at the sound of his step.

One morning, as Electra finished her lesson and rose to go, he said slowly, as if watching the effect of his words—

"This is the last hour I can give you. In two days I return to New York. Letters of importance came this morning; I have waited here too long already."

"Are you in earnest this time?"

"I am; it is absolutely necessary that I should return home."

"Mr. Clifton, what shall I do without you?"

"Suppose you had never seen me?"

"Then I should not have had to lose you. Oh, sir! I need you very much."

"Electra, child, you will conquer your difficulties without assistance from anyone. You have nothing to fear."

"Yes, I know I shall conquer at last, but the way would be so much easier if you were only with me. I shall miss you more than I can tell you."

He passed his hand over his short shining hair, and mused for a moment as if laying conflicting emotions in the balance. She heard his deep, laboured breathing, and saw the working of the muscles in his pale face; when he spoke his voice was husky—

"You are right; you need me, and I want you always with me; we must not be parted. Electra, I say we shall not. Come to me, put your hands in mine—promise me that you will be my child, my pupil. I will take you to my mother, and we need never be separated. You require aid, such as cannot be had here; in New York you shall have all that you want. Will you come with me?"

He held her hands in a vice-like grasp, and looked pleadingly into her astonished countenance. A mist gathered before her, and she closed her eyes.

"Electra, will you come?"

She raised her bloodless face, stamped with stern resolve, and ere the words were pronounced he read his answer in the defiant gleam of her eyes, in the hard, curved lines of the mouth.

"Mr. Clifton, I cannot go with you just now, for at present I cannot, ought not, to leave my aunt. Helpless as she is, it would be cruel, ungrateful to desert her; but things cannot continue this way much longer, and I promise you that as soon as I can I will go to you. I want to be with you; I want somebody to care for me, and I know you will be a kind friend to me always. Most gratefully will I accept your generous offer as soon as I feel that I can do so."

He stooped and touched her forehead with his lips.

"My dear Electra, you are right to remain with her, but when she needs you no more I shall expect you to come to me in New York. Meantime, I shall write to you frequently, and supply you with such books and materials as you require. My pupil, I long to have you in my own home. Remember, no matter what happens, you have promised yourself to me."

"I shall not forget;" but he saw her shudder.

"Shall I speak to your aunt about this matter before I go?"

"No, it would only distress her; leave it all with me. It is late, and I must go. Good-bye, sir."

He promised to see her again before his departure, and she walked home with her head bowed and a sharp continual pain gnawing at her heart.

In the calm, peaceful years of ordinary childhood the soul matures slowly; but a volcanic nature like Electra's, subjected to galling trials, rapidly hardens, and answers every stroke with the metallic ring of age. Keen susceptibility to joy or pain taught her early that less impressive characters are years in learning, and it was lamentably true that while yet a mere girl, she suffered as acutely as a woman. Russell knew that a change had come over his cousin, but was too constantly engaged, too entirely absorbed by his studies, to ask or analyse the cause. She never watched at the gate for him now, never sprang with outstretched arms to meet him, never hung over the back of his chair and caressed his hands as formerly. When not waiting upon her aunt, she was as intent upon her books as he, and though invariably kind and unselfish in her conduct toward him, she was evidently constrained in his presence. As the summer wore on, Mrs. Aubrey's health failed rapidly, and she was confined to her couch. One morning when Mr. Campbell, the pastor, had spent some time in the sick-room praying with the sufferer and administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Electra followed him to the door, leaving Russell with his mother. The gentle pastor took her hand kindly, and looked at her with filling eyes.

"You think my aunt is worse?"

"Yes, my child. I think that very soon she will be with her God. She will scarcely survive till night——"

She turned abruptly from him and threw herself down across the foot of the bed, burying her face in her arms. Russell sat with his mother's hands in his, while she turned her brown eyes toward him, and exhorted him to commit himself and his future to the hands of a merciful God. Electra was not forgotten; she advised her to go to a cousin of her mother, residing in Virginia. Long before she had written to this lady, informing her of her own feebleness and of the girl's helpless condition; and a kind answer had been returned, cordially inviting the orphan to share her home, to become an inmate of her house. Russell could take her to these relatives as soon as possible. To all this no reply was made, and, a few moments later, when Russell kissed her tenderly and raised her pillow, she said faintly—

"If I could look upon your face once more, my son, it would not be hard to die. Let me see you in heaven, my dear, dear boy." These were the last words, and soon after a stupor fell upon her. Hour after hour passed; Mrs. Campbell came and sat beside the bed, and the three remained silent, now and then lifting bowed heads to look at the sleeper. The autumn day died slowly as the widow, and when the clock dirged out the sunset hour Russell rose, and, putting back the window curtains, stooped and laid his face close to his mother's. No pulsation stirred the folds over the heart, or the soft bands of hair on the blue-veined temples; the still mouth had breathed its last sigh, and the meek brown eyes had opened in eternity.

The day bore her away on its wings, and as Russell touched the icy cheek a despairing cry rolled through the silent cottage—

"Oh, mother! my own precious dead mother!"

Falling on his knees, he laid his head on her pillow, and when kind friendly hands bore her into the adjoining room, he knelt there still, unconscious of what passed, knowing only that the keenest of many blows had fallen, that the last and bitterest vial of sorrows had been emptied.

At the window stood Electra, pressing her face against the frame, looking out into the moaning, struggling night, striving to read the mystic characters dimly traced on the ash-grey hurrying clouds as the reckless winds parted their wan folds. She shrank away from the window, and approached her cousin.

"Oh, Russell! say something to me, or I shall die."

It was the last wail she ever suffered to escape her in his presence. He raised his head and put his hand on her forehead, but the trembling lips refused their office, and as she looked up at him tears rolled slowly down and fell on her cheek. She would have given worlds to mingle her tears with his, but no moisture came to her burning eyes; and there these two, soon to separate, passed the remaining hours of that long wretched night of watching. The stormy day lifted her pale, mournful face at last, and with it came the dreary patter and sobbing of autumn rain, making it doubly harrowing to commit the precious form to its long, last resting-place. Electra stood up beside her cousin and folded her arms together.

"Russell, I am not going to that cousin in Virginia. I could owe my bread and clothes to you, but not to her. She has children, and I do not intend to live on her charity. I know you, and I must part; the sooner the better. I would not be willing to burden you a day longer. I am going to fit myself to work profitably. Mr. Clifton offered me a home in his house, said his mother was lonely, and would be rejoiced to have me; that letter which I received last week contained one from her, also urging me to come; and, Russell, I am going to New York to study with him as long as I need instruction. I did not tell aunt of this, because I knew it would grieve her to think that I would be thrown with strangers; and having fully determined to take this step, thought it best not to distress her by any allusion to it. You know it is my own affair, and I can decide it better than

anyone else."

"So you prefer utter strangers to your relatives and friends?"

"Ties of blood are not the strongest; strangers step in to aid where relatives sometimes stand aloof, and watch a fatal struggle. Remember Irene; who is nearer to you, she or your grandfather? Such a friend Mr. Clifton is to me, and go to him I will at all hazards. Drop the subject, if you please."

He looked at her an instant, then turned once more to his mother's face, and his cousin left them together.

The day was so inclement that only Mr. and Mrs. Campbell and Russell's employer attended the funeral. These few followed the gentle sleeper, and laid her down to rest till the star of eternity dawns; and the storm chanted a long, thrilling requiem as the wet mound rose above the coffin.

The kind-hearted pastor and his wife urged the orphans to remove to their house for a few days at least, until the future could be mapped; but they preferred to meet and battle at once with the spectre which they knew stood waiting in the desolate cottage. At midnight a heavy sleep fell on Russell, who had thrown himself upon his mother's couch; and, softly spreading a shawl over him, Electra sat down by the dying fire on the kitchen hearth, and looked her future in the face. A few days sufficed to prepare for her journey; and a gentleman from New York, who had met her cousin in Mr. Campbell's office, consented to take charge of her, and commit her to Mr. Clifton's hands. The scanty furniture was sent to an auction-room, and a piece of board nailed to the gatepost announced that the cottage was for rent. Russell decided to take his meals at a boarding-house, and occupy a small room over the office, which Mr. Campbell had placed at his disposal. On the same day, the cousins bade adieu to the only spot they had called "home" for many years; and as Russell locked the door and joined Electra, his melancholy face expressed, far better than words could have done, the pain it cost him to quit the house where his idolized mother had lived, suffered and died. Mr. Colton was waiting for Electra at the hotel, whither the stage had been driven for passengers; and as she drew near and saw her trunk among others piled on top, she stopped and grasped Russell's hand between both hers. A livid paleness settled on her face, while her wild black eyes fastened on his features. She might never see him again; he was far dearer to her than her life; how could she bear to leave him, to put hundreds of miles between that face and her own? An icy hand clutched her heart as she gazed into his deep, sad, beautiful eyes. His feeling for her was a steady, serene affection, such as brothers have for dear young sisters, and to give her up now filled him with genuine, earnest sorrow.

"Electra, it is very hard to tell you good-bye. You are all I have left, and I shall be desolate indeed when you are away. But the separation will not be long, I trust; in a few years we shall be able to have another home; and where my home is, yours must always be. Write to me often, and believe that I shall do all that a brother could for you. Mr. Colton is waiting; good-bye, darling."

He bent down to kiss her, and the strained, tortured look that greeted him he never forgot. She put her arms around his neck, and clung to him like a shivering weed driven by rough winds against a stone wall. He removed her clasping arms, and led her to Mr. Colton; but as the latter offered to assist her into the stage, she drew back, that Russell might perform that office. While he almost lifted her to a seat, her fingers refused to release his, and he was forced to disengage them. Other passengers entered, and the door was closed. Russell stood near the window, and said gently, pitying her suffering—

"Electra, won't you say good-bye?"

She leaned out till her cheek touched his, and in a hoarse tone uttered the fluttering words—

"Oh, Russell, Russell! good-bye! May God have mercy on me!"

CHAPTER VII

NEW FRIENDS

As tall tyrannous weeds and rank unshorn grass close over and crush out slender, pure, odorous flowerets on a hill-side, so the defects of Irene's character swiftly strengthened and developed in the new atmosphere in which she found herself. The school was on an extensive scale, thoroughly fashionable, and thither pupils were sent from every section of the United States. As regarded educational advantages, the institution was unexceptionable; the professors were considered unsurpassed in their several departments, and every provision was made for thorough tuition. But what a Babel reigned outside of the recitation room! One hundred and forty girls to spend their recesses in envy, ridicule, malice, and detraction. Anxious to shake off the loneliness which so heavily oppressed her, Irene at first mingled freely among her companions; but she soon became disgusted with the conduct and opinions of the majority, and endeavoured to find quiet in her own room. Early in winter a new pupil, a "day scholar," joined her class; she resided in New York, and very soon a strong friendship sprang up between them. Louisa Young was about Irene's age, very pretty, very gentle, and winning in her manners. She was the daughter of an affluent merchant, and was blessed in the possession of parents who strove to rear their children as Christian parents should. Louisa's attachment was very warm and lasting, and ere long she insisted that her friend should visit her. Weary of the school, the latter gladly availed herself of the invitation, and one Friday afternoon she accompanied Louisa home. The mansion was almost palatial, and as Irene entered the splendidly-furnished parlours her own Southern home rose vividly before her.

"Mother, this is Miss Huntingdon."

Mrs. Young received her cordially, and as she held the gloved hand, and kindly expressed her pleasure at meeting her daughter's friend, the girl's heart gave a quick bound of joy.

"Come upstairs and put away your bonnet."

In Louisa's beautiful room the two sat talking of various things till the tea-bell rang. Mr. Young's greeting was scarcely less friendly than his wife's, and as they seated themselves at the table, the stranger felt at home for the first time in New York.

"Where is brother?" asked Louisa, glancing at the vacant seat opposite her own.

"He has not come home yet; I wonder what keeps him? There he is now, in the hall," answered the mother.

A moment after, he entered and took his seat. He was tall, rather handsome, and looked about thirty. His sister presented her friend, and with a hasty bow he fastened his eyes on her face. Probably he was unconscious of the steadiness of his gaze, but Irene became restless under his fixed, earnest eye, and perceiving her embarrassment, Mrs. Young said—

"Harvey, where have you been? Dr. Melville called here for you at four o'clock; said you had made some engagement with him."

"Yes, mother; we have been visiting together this afternoon."

Withdrawing his eyes, he seemed to fall into a reverie and took no part in the conversation that ensued. As the party adjourned to the sitting-room, he paused on the rug, and leaned his elbow on the mantel. Louisa lingered and drew near. He passed his arm around her shoulders, and looked affectionately down at her.

"Go to your friend, and when you are at a loss for conversation, bring her to my study to see those sketches of Palmyra and Baalbec."

He passed on to his work, and she to the sitting-room. He read industriously for some time, occasionally pausing to annotate; and once or twice he raised his head and listened. A light tap at the door was followed by the entrance of the two girls. Irene came very reluctantly, fearful of intruding; but he rose, and placed a chair for her close to his own, assuring her that he was glad to see her there. Louisa found the portfolio, and, bringing it to the table, began to exhibit its treasures. The two leaned over it, and as Irene sat resting her cheek on her hand, the beauty of her face and figure was clearly revealed. Harvey remained silent, watching the changing expression of the visitor's countenance; and once he put out his hand to touch the hair floating over the back and arms of her chair. Gradually his still heart stirred, his brow flushed, and a new light burned in the deep clear eyes.

He told her of his visit to the old world, of its mournful ruins, its decaying glories; of the lessons he learned there; the sad but precious memories he brought back, and as he talked time passed unheeded—she forgot her embarrassment, they were strangers no longer. The clock struck ten; Louisa rose at once.

"Thank you, Harvey, for giving us so much of your time. Father and mother will be waiting for you."

"Yes, I will join you at once."

She led the way back to the sitting-room, and a few moments after, to Irene's great surprise,

the student came in, and sitting down before the table, opened the Bible and read a chapter. Then all knelt and he prayed. There was a strange spell on the visitor; in all this there was something so unexpected. It was the first time she had ever knelt around the family altar, and, as she rose, that sitting-room seemed suddenly converted into a temple of worship. Mutual "good nights" were exchanged, and as Irene turned toward the young minister, he held out his hand. She gave him hers, and he pressed it gently, saying—

"I trust this is the first of many pleasant evenings which we shall spend together."

"Thank you, sir. I hope so too, for I have not been so happy since I left home."

He smiled, and she walked on.

"Louisa, how came your brother to be a minister?" asked Irene, when they had reached their apartment.

"When he was a boy he said he intended to preach, and father never dissuaded him. Harvey is a singular man—so silent, so equable, so cold in his manner, and yet he has a warm heart. He has declined two calls since his ordination; Dr. Melville's health is very poor, and Harvey frequently fills his pulpit. I know you will like him when you know him well; everybody loves Harvey."

The inclemency of the weather confined the girls to the house the following day. Harvey was absent at breakfast, and at dinner the chair opposite Irene's was still vacant. The afternoon wore away, and at dusk Louisa opened the piano and began to play Thalberg's "Home, Sweet Home."

Somebody took a seat near Irene, and though the room was dim, she knew the tall form and the touch of his hand.

"Good evening, Miss Irene; we have had a gloomy day. How have you and Louisa spent it?"

"Not very profitably, I dare say, though it has not appeared at all gloomy to me. Have you been out in the snow?"

"Yes, my work has been sad. I buried a mother and child this afternoon, and have just come from a house of orphanage and grief. It is a difficult matter to realize how many aching hearts there are in this great city. Our mahogany doors shut out the wail that hourly goes up to God from the thousand sufferers in our midst."

As he talked she lifted her beautiful eyes and looked steadily at him, and he thought that, of all the lovely things he had ever seen, that face was the most peerless. She drew closer to him, and said earnestly—

"You do not seem to me a very happy man."

"There you mistake me. I presume there are few happier persons."

"Countenance is not a faithful index, then; you look so exceedingly grave."

"Do you suppose that gravity of face is incompatible with sunshine in the heart?"

He smiled encouragingly as he spoke, and without a moment's thought she laid her delicate hand in his.

"Mr. Young, I want somebody to advise me. Very often I am at a loss about my duty, and, having no one to consult, either do nothing at all or that which I should not. If it will not trouble you too much, I should like to bring my difficulties to you sometimes, and get you to direct me. If you will only talk frankly to me, as you do to Louisa, oh, I will be very grateful!"

"Have you no brother?"

"I am an only child."

"You would like a brother, however?"

"Yes, sir, above all things."

"Take care; you express yourself strongly. If you can fancy me for a brother, consider me such."

When Monday morning came, and she was obliged to return to school, Irene reluctantly bade farewell to the new friends. She knew that, in conformity to the unalterable regulations of Crim Tartary, she could only leave the institution once a month, and the prospect of this long interval between her visits was by no means cheering. Harvey assisted her into the carriage.

"I shall send some books in a day or two, and, if you are troubled about anything before I see you again write me a note by Louisa. I would call to see you occasionally if you were boarding anywhere else. Good morning, Miss Irene. Do not forget that I am your brother so long as you stay in New York, or need one."

The books were not forgotten; they arrived the ensuing week, and his selection satisfied her that he perfectly understood what kind of aid she required. At the close of the next month, instead of accompanying Louisa home, Irene was suffering with severe cold, and too much indisposed to quit the house. This was a grievous disappointment, but she bore it bravely, and went on with her studies. What a dreary isolation in the midst of numbers of her own age! It was

a thraldom that galled her, and more than once she implored her father's permission to return home. His replies were positive denials, and after a time she ceased to expect release, until the prescribed course should be ended. Thus another month dragged itself away. On Friday morning Louisa was absent. Irene felt anxious and distressed. Perhaps she was ill; something must have happened. As the day pupils were dismissed she started back to her own room, heart-sick because of this second disappointment. A few minutes after a servant knocked at the door and informed her that a gentleman wished to see her in the parlour.

CHAPTER VIII

A DISCOVERY

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Young. Louisa is not sick, I hope?"

"I came for you in Louisa's place; she is not well enough to quit her room. Did you suppose that I intended leaving you here for another month?"

"I was rather afraid you had forgotten me; the prospect was gloomy ten minutes ago. It seems a long time since I was with you."

She stood close to him, looking gladly into his face, unconscious of the effect of her words.

"You sent me no note all this time; why not?"

"I was afraid of troubling you; and, besides, I would rather tell you what I want you to know."

"Miss Irene, the carriage is at the door. I am a patient man, and can wait half an hour if you have any preparation to make."

In much less time she joined him, equipped for the ride, and took her place beside him in the carriage. As they reached his father's door, and he assisted her out, she saw him look at her very searchingly.

"It is time that you had a little fresh air. You are not quite yourself. Louisa is in her room; run up to her."

She found her friend suffering with sore throat, and was startled at the appearance of her flushed cheeks. Mrs. Young sat beside her, and after most cordial greetings the latter resigned her seat and left them, enjoining upon her daughter the necessity of remaining quiet.

"Mother was almost afraid for you to come, but I teased and coaxed for permission; told her that even if I had the scarlet fever you had already had it, and would run no risk. Harvey says it is not scarlet fever at all, and he persuaded mother to let him go after you. He always has things his own way, though he brings it about so quietly that nobody would even suspect him of being self-willed. Harvey is a good friend of yours, Irene."

"I am glad to hear it; he is certainly very kind to me. But recollect you are not to talk much; let me talk to you."

The following morning found Louisa much better, and Irene and the mother spent the day in her room. Late in the afternoon the minister came in and talked to his sister for some moments, then turned to his mother.

"Mother, I am going to take this visitor of yours down to the library; Louisa has monopolized her long enough. Come, Miss Irene, you shall join them again at tea."

He led the way, and she followed very willingly. Placing her in a chair before the fire, he drew another to the rug; and seating himself, said just as if speaking to Louisa—

"What have you been doing these two months? What is it that clouds your face, my little sister?"

"Ah, sir! I am so weary of that school. You don't know what a relief it is to come here."

"It is rather natural that you should feel home-sick. It is a fierce ordeal for a child like you to be thrust so far from home."

"I am not home-sick now, I believe. I have in some degree become accustomed to the separation from my father; but I am growing so different from what I used to be; so different from what I expected. It grieves me to know that I am changing for the worse; but, somehow, I can't help it. I make good resolutions in the morning before I leave my room, and by noon I manage to break all of them. The girls try me and I lose my patience. When I am at home nothing of this kind ever troubles me."

"Miss Irene, yours is not a clinging, dependent disposition; if I have rightly understood your character, you have never been accustomed to lean upon others. After relying on yourself so long, why yield to mistrust now? With years should grow the power, the determination, to do the work you find laid out for you."

"It is precisely because I know how very poorly I have managed myself thus far that I have no confidence in my own powers for future emergencies. Either I have lived alone too long, or else not long enough; I rather think the last. If they had only suffered me to act as I wished, I should have been so much better at home. Oh, sir, I am not the girl I was eight months ago. I knew how it would be when they sent me here."

"Some portentous cloud seems lowering over your future. What is it? You ought to be a gleeful girl, full of happy hopes."

She sank farther back in her chair to escape his searching gaze and drooped her face lower.

"Yes, yes; I know I ought, but people can't always shut their eyes."

"Shut their eyes to what?"

"Various coming troubles, Mr. Young."

His lip curled slightly, and, replacing the book on the table, he said, as if speaking rather to himself than to her—

"The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy."

"You are not a stranger, sir."

"I see you are disposed to consider me such. I thought I was your brother. But no matter; after a time all will be well."

She looked puzzled; and, as the tea-bell summoned them, he merely added—

"I do not wonder. You are a shy child; but you will soon learn to understand me; you will come to me with all your sorrows."

During the remainder of this visit she saw him no more. Louisa recovered rapidly, and when she asked for her brother on Sabbath evening, Mrs. Young said he was to preach twice that day. Monday morning arrived, and Irene returned to school with a heavy heart fearing that she had wounded him; but a few days after, Louisa brought her a book and brief note of kind words. One Saturday morning she sat quite alone in her small room; the week had been specially painful, and, wearied in soul, the girl laid her head down on her folded arms, and thought of her home in the far South. A loud rap startled her from this painful reverie, and ere she could utter the stereotyped "come in," Louisa sprang to her side.

"I have come for you, Irene; have obtained permission from Dr. —— for you to accompany us to the Academy of Design. Put on your bonnet; Harvey is waiting in the reception room. We shall have a charming day."

"Ah, Louisa! you are all very kind to recollect me so constantly. It will give me great pleasure to go."

When they joined the minister, Irene fancied he received her coldly, and as they walked on he took no part in the conversation. The annual exhibition had just opened; the rooms were thronged with visitors, and the hushed tones swelled to a monotonous hum. Some stood in groups, expatiating eagerly on certain pictures; others occupied the seats and leisurely scanned now the paintings, now the crowd. Furnished with a catalogue, the girls moved slowly on, while Mr. Young pointed out the prominent beauties or defects of the works exhibited. They made the circuit of the room, and began a second tour, when their attention was attracted by a girl who stood in one corner, with her hands clasped behind her. She was gazing very intently on an Ecce-Homo, and, though her face was turned toward the wall, the posture bespoke most unusual interest. Irene looked at her an instant, and held her breath; she had seen only one other head which resembled that—she knew the purplish waving hair, and gliding up to her she exclaimed—

"Electra! Electra Grey!"

The orphan turned, and they were locked in a tight embrace.

"Oh, Irie! I am so glad to see you. I have been here so long, and looked for you so often, that I had almost despaired. Whenever I walk down Broadway, whenever I go out anywhere, I look at every face, peep into every bonnet, hoping to find you. Oh! I am so glad. Do come and see me soon—soon. I must go now—I promised."

"Where do you live? I will go home with you now."

"I am not going home immediately. Mr. Clifton's house is No. 85, West —— Street. Come this afternoon."

With a long, warm pressure of hands they parted, and Irene stood looking after the graceful figure till it glided out of sight.

"In the name of wonder, who is that? You two have been the 'observed of all observers,'" ejaculated the impulsive Louisa.

"That is my old schoolmate and friend of whom I once spoke to you. I had no idea that she was in New York. She is a poor orphan."

"Are you ready to return home? This episode has evidently driven pictures out of your head for to-day," said Mr. Young, who had endeavoured to screen her from observation.

"Yes, quite ready to go, though I have enjoyed the morning very much indeed, thanks to your kindness."

Soon after they reached home, Louisa was called into the parlour to see a young friend, and as Mrs. Young was absent, Irene found it rather lonely upstairs. She thought of a new volume of travels which she had noticed on the hall-table as they entered, and started down to get it. About half-way of the flight of steps she caught her foot in the carpeting, where one of the rods chanced to be loose, and despite her efforts to grasp the railing fell to the floor of the hall, crushing one arm under her. The library-door was thrown open instantly, and the minister came out. She lay motionless, and he bent over her.

"Irene! where are you hurt? Speak to me."

He raised her in his arms and placed her on the sofa in the sitting-room. The motion produced great pain, and she groaned and shut her eyes. A crystal vase containing some exquisite perfume stood on his mother's work-table, and, pouring a portion of its contents in his palm, he bathed her forehead. Acute suffering distorted her features, and his face grew pallid as her own while he watched her. Taking her hand, he repeated—

"Irene, my darling! tell me how you are hurt?"

She looked at him, and said with some difficulty—

"My ankle pains me very much, and I believe my arm is broken. I can't move it."

"Thank God you are not killed."

He kissed her, then turned away and despatched a servant for a physician. He summoned Louisa, and inquired fruitlessly for his mother; no one knew whither she had gone; it would not do to wait for her. He stood by the sofa and prepared the necessary bandages, while his sister could only cry over and caress the sufferer. When the physician came the white dimpled arm was bared; and he discovered that the bone was broken. The setting was extremely painful, but she lay with closed eyes and firmly compressed lips, uttering no sound, giving no token of the torture, save in the wrinkling of her forehead. They bound the arm tightly, and then the doctor said the ankle was badly strained and swollen, but there was, luckily, no fracture. He gave minute directions to the minister and withdrew, praising the patient's remarkable fortitude. Louisa would talk, and her brother sent her off to prepare a room for her friend.

"I think I had better go back to the Institution, Mr. Young. It will be a long time before I can walk again, and I wish you would have me carried back. Dr. —— will be uneasy, and will prefer my returning, as father left me in his charge." She tried to rise, but sank back on the pillow.

"Hush! hush! You will stay where you are, little cripple; I am only thankful you happened to be here."

He smoothed the folds of her hair from her temples, and for the first time played with the curls he had so often before been tempted to touch. She looked so slight, so childish, with her head nestled against the pillow, that he forgot she was almost sixteen, forgot everything but the beauty of her pale face, and bent over her with an expression of the tenderest love. She was suffering too much to notice his countenance, and only felt that he was very kind and gentle. Mrs. Young came in very soon, and heard with the deepest solicitude of what had occurred. Irene again requested to be taken to the school, fearing that she would cause too much trouble during her long confinement to the house. But Mrs. Young stopped her arguments with kisses, and would listen to no such arrangements; she would trust to no one but herself to nurse "the bruised Southern lily." Having seen that all was in readiness, she insisted on carrying her guest to the room adjoining Louisa's, and opening into her own. Mr. Young had gone to Boston the day before, and, turning to her son, she said—

"Harvey, as your father is away, you must take Irene upstairs; I am not strong enough. Be careful that you do not hurt her."

She led the way, and, bending down, he whispered—

"My little sister, put this uninjured arm around my neck, there—now I shall carry you as easily as if you were in a cradle."

He held her firmly, and as he bore her up the steps the white face lay on his bosom, and the golden hair floated against his cheek. If she had looked at him then, she would have seen more than he intended that anyone should know: for, young and free from vanity though she was, it was impossible to mistake the expression of the eyes riveted upon her. Mrs. Young wrote immediately to Mr. Huntingdon, and explained the circumstances which had made his daughter her guest for some weeks at least, assuring him that he need indulge no apprehension whatever on her account, as she would nurse her as tenderly as a mother could. Stupefied by the opiate, Irene took little notice of what passed, except when roused by the pain consequent upon dressing the ankle. Louisa went to school as usual, but her mother rarely left their guest; and after Mr. Young's return he treated her with all the affectionate consideration of a parent. Several days after the occurrence of the accident Irene turned toward the minister, who stood talking to his mother.

"Your constant kindness emboldens me to ask a favour of you, which I think you will scarcely deny me. I am very anxious to see the friend whom I so unexpectedly met at the Academy of Design. Here is a card containing her address; will you spare me the time to bring her here to-day? I shall be very much obliged to you."

"Very well. I will go after her as soon as I have fulfilled a previous engagement. What is her name?"

"Electra Grey. Did you notice her face?"

"Yes; but why do you ask?"

"Because I think she resembles your mother."

"She resembles far more an old portrait hanging in my room. I remarked it as soon as I saw her."

He seemed lost in thought, and immediately after left the room. An hour later, Irene's listening ear detected the opening and closing of the hall door.

"There is Electra on the steps; I hear her voice. Will you please open the door?"

Mrs. Young laid down her work and rose to comply, but Harvey ushered the stranger in and then retired.

The lady of the house looked at the new-comer, and a startled expression came instantly into her countenance. She made a step forward and paused irresolute.

"Mrs. Young, allow me to introduce my friend, Miss Electra Grey." Electra bowed, and Mrs. Young exclaimed—

"Grey! Grey! Electra Grey; and so like Robert? Oh! it must be so. Child, who are you? Where are your parents?"

She approached and put her hand on the girl's shoulders, while a hopeful light kindled in her eyes.

"I am an orphan, madam, from the South. My father died before my birth, my mother immediately after."

"Was your father's name Robert? Where was he from?"

"His name was Enoch R. Gray. I don't know what his middle name was. He came originally from Pennsylvania, I believe."

"Oh! I knew that I could not be mistaken! My brother's child! Robert's child!"

She threw her arms around the astonished girl, and strained her to her heart.

"There must be some mistake, madam. I never heard that I had relatives in New York."

"Oh! child! call me aunt! I am your father's sister. We called him by his middle name, Robert, and for eighteen years have heard nothing of him. Sit down here, and let me tell you the circumstances. Your father was the youngest of three children, and in his youth gave us great distress by his wildness; he ran away from college and went to sea. After an absence of three years he returned, almost a wreck of his former self. My mother had died during his long voyage to the South Sea Islands, and father, who believed him to have been the remote cause of her death (for her health failed soon after he left), upbraided him most harshly and unwisely. His reproaches drove poor Robert to desperation, and without giving us any clue, he left home as suddenly as before. Whither he went we never knew. Father was so incensed that he entirely disinherited him; but at his death, when the estate was divided, my brother William and I decided that we would take only what we considered our proportion, and we set apart one-third for Robert. We advertised for several years, and could hear nothing of him; and at the end of the fifth year, William divided that remaining third. Oh, my dear child! I am so glad to find you out. But where have you been all this time? Where did Robert die?"

She held the orphan's hand, and made no attempt to conceal the tears that rolled over her cheeks. Electra gave her a detailed account of her life from the time when she was taken to her uncle, Mr. Aubrey, at the age of four months, till the death of her aunt and her removal to New York.

"And Robert's child has been in want, while we knew not of her existence! Oh, Electra! you shall have no more sorrow that we can shield you from. I loved your father very devotedly, and I shall love his orphan quite as dearly. Come to me, let me be your mother. Let me repair the wrong of bygone years."

She folded her arms around the graceful young form and sobbed aloud, while Irene found it difficult to repress her own tears of sympathy and joy that her friend had found such relatives. Of the three, Electra was calmest. Though glad to meet with her father's family, she knew better than they that this circumstance could make little alteration in her life, and therefore, when Mrs. Young had left the room to acquaint her husband and son with the discovery she had made, Electra sat down beside her friend's sofa just as she would have done two hours before.

"I am so glad for your sake that you are to come and live here. Until you know them all as well as I do, you cannot properly appreciate your good fortune," said Irene, raising herself on her elbow.

"Yes, I am very glad to meet my aunt," returned Electra, evasively, and then she added earnestly—

"I don't know that I ought to talk about things that should have been buried before you were born. But you probably know something of what happened. We found out after you left why you were so suddenly sent off to boarding-school; and you can have no idea how much my poor aunt was distressed at the thought of having caused your banishment. Irene, your father hated her, and of course you know it; but do you know why?"

"No; I never could imagine any adequate cause."

"Well, I can tell you. Before Aunt Amy's marriage your father loved her, and to please her parents she accepted him. She was miserable, because she was very much attached to my uncle, and asked Mr. Huntingdon to release her from the engagement. He declined, and finding that her parents sided with him she left home and married against their wishes. They adopted a distant relative and never gave her a cent. Your father never forgave her. He had great influence with the governor, and she went to him and entreated him to aid her in procuring a pardon for her husband. He repulsed her cruelly, and used his influence against my uncle. She afterwards saw a letter which he wrote to the governor, urging him to withhold a pardon. Now you have the key to his hatred; now you understand why he wrote you nothing concerning us. Not even Aunt Amy's coffin could shut in his hate. Irene, I must go home now, for they will wonder what has become of me. I will see you again soon."

She was detained by her aunt, and presented to the remainder of the family, and it was arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Young should visit her the ensuing day. While they talked over the tea-table of the newly-found, Harvey went slowly upstairs and knocked at Irene's door. Louisa was chattering delightedly about her cousin, and, sending her down to her tea, he took her seat beside the sofa. Irene lay with her fingers over her eyes, and he said gently—

"You see that I am wiser than you, Irene. I knew that it would do you no good to have company. Next time be advised."

"It was not Electra that harmed me."

"Then you admit that you have been harmed?"

"No; I am low-spirited to-night; I believe that is all."

He opened the *Rambler*, of which she was particularly fond, and began to read. For a while she listened, and in her interest forgot her forebodings, but after a time her long silky lashes swept her cheeks, and she slept. The minister laid down the volume and watched the pure girlish face; noted all its witching loveliness, and thought of the homage which it would win her in coming years. He knew as he sat watching her slumber that he loved her above everything on earth; that she wielded a power none had ever possessed before—that his heart was indissolubly linked with hers. He had wrestled with this infatuation, had stationed himself on the platform of common sense, and railed at and ridiculed this piece of folly. His clear, cool reason gave solemn verdict against the fiercely-throbbing heart, but not one pulsation had been restrained. As he sat looking down at her, a mighty barrier rose between them. His future had long been determined—duty called him to the rude huts of the far West; thither pointed the finger of destiny, and thither, at all hazards, he would go. He thought that he had habituated himself to sacrifices, but the spirit of self-abnegation was scarcely equal to this trial. Reason taught him that the tenderly-nurtured child of Southern climes would never suit him for a companion in the pioneer life which he had marked out. He folded his arms tightly over his chest, and resolved to go promptly.

The gaslight flashed on Irene's hair as it hung over the side of the sofa; he stooped, and pressed his lips to the floating curls, and went down to the library, smiling grimly at his own folly. Without delay he wrote two letters, and was dating a third, when his mother came in. Placing a chair for her, he laid down his pen.

"I am glad to see you, mother; I want to have a talk with you."

"About what, Harvey?"—an anxious look settled on her face.

"About my leaving you, and going West. I have decided to start next week."

"Oh, my son! how can you bring such grief upon me? Surely there is work enough for you to do here, without your tearing yourself from us."

"Yes, mother, work enough, but hands enough also, without mine. These are the sunny slopes of the vineyard, and labourers crowd to till them; but there are cold, shadowy, barren nooks and corners, that equally demand cultivation. There the lines have fallen to me, and there I go to my work. I have delayed my departure too long already."

"Oh, Harvey! have you fully determined on this step?"

"Yes, my dear mother, fully determined to go."

"It is very hard for me to give up my only son. I can't say that I will reconcile myself to this separation; but you are old enough to decide your own future; and I suppose I ought not to urge you. For months I have opposed your resolution; now I will not longer remonstrate. Oh, Harvey! it makes my heart ache to part with you. If you were married I should be better satisfied; but to think of you in your loneliness!" She laid her head on his shoulder, and wept.

The minister compressed his lips firmly an instant, then replied—

"I always told you that I should never marry. I shall be too constantly occupied to sit down and feel lonely. Now, mother, I must finish my letters, if you please, for they should go by the earliest mail."

CHAPTER IX

AN ORPHAN'S PROTECTORS

The artist stood at the window watching for his pupil's return; it was the late afternoon hour, which they were wont to spend in reading, and her absence annoyed him. As he rested carelessly against the window, his graceful form was displayed to great advantage, and the long brown hair dropped about a classical face of almost feminine beauty. The delicacy of his features was enhanced by the extreme pallor of his complexion, and it was apparent that close application to his profession had made sad inroads on a constitution never very robust. A certain listlessness of manner, a sort of lazy-grace seemed characteristic; but when his pupil came in and laid aside her bonnet, the expression of *ennui* vanished, and he threw himself on a sofa looking infinitely relieved. She drew near, and without hesitation acquainted him with the discovery of her relatives in New York. He listened in painful surprise, and, ere she had concluded, sprang up. "I understand! they will want to take you; will urge you to share their home of wealth. But, Electra, you won't leave me; surely you won't leave me?"

He put his hands on her shoulders, and she knew from his quick, irregular breathing that the thought of separation greatly distressed him.

"My aunt has not explicitly invited me to reside with her, though I inferred from her manner that she confidently expected me to do so. Irene also spoke of it as a settled matter."

"You will not allow me to persuade you? Oh, child! tell me at once you will never leave me."

"Mr. Clifton, we must part some day; I cannot always live here, you know. Before very long I must go out and earn my bread."

"Never! while I live. When I offered you a home, I expected it to be a permanent one. I intended to adopt you. Here, if you choose, you may work and earn a reputation; but away from me, among strangers, never. Electra, you forget, you gave yourself to me once."

She looked into his eyes, and, with a woman's quick perception, read all the truth.

In an instant her countenance changed painfully; she stooped, touched his hand with her lips, and exclaimed—

"Thank you, a thousand times, my friend, my father! for your interest in, and your unvarying, unparalleled kindness to me. All the gratitude and affection which a child could give to a parent I shall always cherish toward you. Since it annoys you, we will say no more about the future; let the years take care of themselves as they come."

"Will you promise me positively that you will not go to your aunt?"

"Yes; I have never seriously entertained the thought."

She escaped from his hands, and lighting the gas, applied herself to her books for the next hour.

If Irene found the restraint of boarding-school irksome, the separation from Russell was well-nigh intolerable to Electra. At first she had seemed plunged in lethargy; but after a time this mood gave place to restless, unceasing activity. Like one trying to flee from something painful, she rushed daily to her work, and regretted when the hours of darkness consigned her to reflection. Mrs. Clifton was quite aged, and though uniformly gentle and affectionate toward the orphan, there was no common ground of congeniality on which they could meet. To a proud, exacting nature like Electra's, Mr. Clifton's constant manifestations of love and sympathy were very soothing. Writhing under the consciousness of her cousin's indifference, she turned eagerly to receive the tokens of affection showered upon her. She knew that his happiness centred in her, and vainly fancied that she could feed her hungry heart with his adoration. But by degrees she realized that these husks would not satisfy her; and a singular sensation of mingled gratitude and impatience arose whenever he caressed her.

Mrs. Clifton was a rigid Roman Catholic, her son a free-thinker, in the broadest significance of the term, if one might judge from the selections that adorned his library shelves. But deep in his soul was the germination of a mystical creed, which gradually unfolded itself to Electra.

It was late at night when Electra retired to her room, and sat down to collect her thoughts after the unexpected occurrences of the day.

More than one discovery had been made since the sunrise, which she awoke so early to study. She had found relatives, and an opportunity of living luxuriously; but, in the midst of this beautiful *bouquet* of surprises, a serpent's head peered out at her. Mr. Clifton loved her; not as a teacher his pupil, not as guardian loves ward, not as parent loves child. Perhaps he had not intended that she should know it so soon, but his eyes had betrayed the secret. She saw perfectly how matters stood. This, then, had prompted him from the first, to render her assistance; he had resolved to make her his wife; nothing less would content him. She twisted her white fingers in her hair, and gazed vacantly down on the carpet, and gradually the rich crimson blood sank out of her face. She held his life in the hollow of her hand, and this she well knew; death hung over him like the sword of Damocles; she had been told that any violent agitation or grief would bring on the hemorrhage which he so much dreaded, and although he seemed stronger and better than

usual, the insidious nature of his disease gave her little hope that he would ever be robust. To feign ignorance of his real feelings for her, would prove but a temporary stratagem; the time must inevitably come, before long, when he would put aside this veil, and set the truth before her. How should she meet it—how should she evade him? Accept the home which Mrs. Young would offer her, and leave him to suffer briefly, to sink swiftly into the tomb? No; her father's family had cast him most unjustly off, withholding his patrimony; and now she scorned to receive one cent of the money which his father was unwilling that he should enjoy. Beside, who loved her as well as Henry Clifton? She owed more to him than to any living being; it would be the part of an ingrate to leave him; it was cowardly to shrink from repaying the debt. But the thought of being his wife froze her blood, and heavy drops gathered on her brow as she endeavoured to reflect upon this possibility.

A feeling of unconquerable repulsion sprang up in her heart, nerving, steeling her against his affection. With a strange, instantaneous reaction she thought with loathing of his words of endearment. How could she endure them in future, yet how reject without wounding him? One, and only one path of escape presented itself—a path of measureless joy. She lifted her hands, and murmured—

"Russell! Russell! save me from this!"

When Mr. and Mrs. Young visited the studio the following day and urged the orphan's removal to their house, she gently but resolutely declined their generous offer, expressing an affectionate gratitude toward her teacher, and a determination not to leave him, at least for the present. Mrs. Young was much distressed, and adduced every argument of which she was mistress, but her niece remained firm; and finding their entreaties fruitless, Mr. Young said that he would immediately take the necessary steps to secure Robert Grey's portion of the estate to his daughter. Electra sat with her hand nestled in her aunt's, but when this matter was alluded to she rose, and said proudly—

"No, sir; let the estate remain just as it is. I will never accept one cent. My grandfather on his deathbed excluded my father from any portion of it, and since he willed it so, even so it shall be. I have no legal claim to a dollar, and I will never receive one from your generosity. It was the will of the dead that you and my Uncle William should inherit the whole, and as far as I am concerned, have it you shall. I am poor, I know; so were my parents. Poverty they bequeathed as my birthright, and even as they lived without aid from my grandfather, so will I. It is very noble and generous in you, after the expiration of nearly twenty years, to be willing to divide with the orphan of the outcast; but I will not, cannot, allow you to do so. I fully appreciate and most cordially thank you both for your goodness; but I am young and strong, and I expect to earn my living. Mr. Clifton and his mother want me to remain in his house until I finish my studies, and I gratefully accept his kind offer. Nay, aunt! don't let it trouble you so. I shall visit you very frequently."

"She has all of Robert's fierce obstinacy. I see it in her eyes, hear it ringing in the tones of her voice. Take care, child; it ruined your father," said Mrs. Young sorrowfully.

"You should remember, Electra, that an orphan girl needs a protector. Such I would fain prove myself."

As Mr. Young spoke, he took one of her hands and drew her to him. She turned quickly and laid the other on the artist's arm.

"I have one here, sir, a protector as true and kind as my own father could be."

She understood the flash of his eyes and his proud smile as he assured her relatives that he would guard her from harm and want so long as he lived, or as she remained under his care. She knew he regarded this as a tacit sealing of the old compact, and she had no inclination to undeceive him at this juncture.

Urging her to visit them as often as possible, and extending the invitation to Mr. Clifton, the Youngs withdrew, evidently much disappointed, and as the door closed behind them, Electra felt that the circle of doom was narrowing around her. Mr. Clifton approached her, but, averting her head, she lifted the damask curtain that divided the parlour from the studio, and effected her retreat, dreading to meet his glance—putting off the evil day as long as possible—trying to trample the serpent that trailed after her from that hour.

CHAPTER X

IRENE'S COUSIN

"You are better to-day, mother tells me."

"Yes, thank you, my foot is much better. You have not been up to see me for two days."

Irene sat in an easy chair by the open window, and the minister took a seat near her.

"I have not forgotten you in the interim, however."

As he spoke he laid a bouquet of choice flowers in her lap. She bent over them with eager delight, and held out one hand, saying—

"Oh, thank you. How very kind you are! These remind me of the greenhouse at home. They are the most beautiful I have seen in New York."

"Irene, you look sober to-day. Come, cheer up. I don't want to carry that grave expression away with me. I want to remember your face as I first saw it, unshadowed."

"What do you mean? Are you going to leave home?"

"Yes; to-morrow I bid farewell to New York for a long time, I am going to the West to take charge of a church."

"Oh, Mr. Young! surely you are not in earnest? You cannot intend to separate yourself from your family."

She dropped her flowers, and leaned forward.

"Yes, I have had it in contemplation for more than a year, and, recently, I have decided to remove at once."

He saw the great sorrow written in her countenance, the quick flutter of her lip, the large drops that dimmed the violet eyes and gathered on the long golden lashes, and far sweeter than the Eolian harps was the broken voice—

"What shall I do without you? Who will encourage and advise me when you go?"

She leaned her forehead on her hands, and a tear slid down and rested on her chin. The sun was setting, and the crimson light flooding the room, bathed her with glory, spreading a halo around her. He held his breath and gazed upon the drooping figure and bewitching face; and, in after years, when his dark hair had grown silvery grey, he remembered the lovely sun-lit vision that so entranced him, leaving an indelible image on heart and brain. He gently removed the hands, and holding them in his, said, in the measured, low tone so indicative of suppressed emotion—

"Irene, my friend, you attach too much importance to the aid which I might render you. You know your duty, and I feel assured will not require to be reminded of it. Henceforth our paths diverge widely. I go to a distant section of our land, there to do my Father's work; and, ere long, having completed the prescribed course, you will return to your Southern home and take the position assigned you in society. Thus, in all human probability, we shall meet no more, for——"

"Oh, sir! don't say that; you will come back to visit your family, and then I shall see you."

"That is scarcely probable; but we will not discuss it now. There is, however, a channel of communication for separated friends, and of this we must avail ourselves. I shall write to you from Western wilds, and letters from you will most pleasantly ripple the monotonous life I expect to lead."

"Can't you stay longer and talk to me?" said Irene, as he rose.

"No; I promised to address the —— Street Sabbath-school children to-night, and must look over my notes before I go."

There was no unsteadiness in his tone, no trace of emotion, as he stood up before her. Irene was deeply moved, and when she essayed to thank him, found it impossible to pronounce her words. Tears were gliding down her cheeks; he put back the hair, and taking the face softly in his palms, looked long and earnestly at its fascinating beauty. The great, glistening blue eyes gazed into his, and the silky lashes and rich scarlet lips trembled. He felt the hot blood surging like a lava-tide in his veins, and his heart rising in fierce rebellion at the stern interdict which he saw fit to lay upon it; but no token of all this came to the cool, calm surface.

"Good-bye, Irene. May God bless you, my dear little friend!"

He drew the face close to his own as though he would have kissed her, but forbore, and merely raising her hands to his lips turned and left the room. Verily, greater is "he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city." He left before breakfast the ensuing morning, bearing his secret with him, having given no intimation, by word or look, of the struggle which his resolution cost him. Once his mother had fancied that he felt more than a friendly interest in their guest, but the absolute repose of his countenance and grave serenity of his manner during the last week

of his stay dispersed all her suspicions. From a luxurious home, fond friends, and the girlish face he loved better than his life, the minister went forth to his distant post, offering in sacrifice to God, upon the altar of duty, his throbbing heart and hopes of earthly happiness.

A cloud of sadness settled on the household after his departure, and scarcely less than Louisa's was Irene's silent grief. The confinement grew doubly irksome when his voice and step had passed from the threshold, and she looked forward impatiently to her release. The sprain proved more serious than she at first imagined, and the summer vacation set in before she was able to walk with ease. Mr. Huntingdon had been apprised of her long absence from school, and one day, when she was cautiously trying her strength, he arrived, without having given premonition of his visit. As he took her in his arms and marked the alteration in her thin face, the listlessness of her manner, the sorrowful gravity of her countenance, his fears were fully aroused, and, holding her to his heart, he exclaimed—

"My daughter! my beauty! I must take you out of New York."

"Yes, father, take me home; do take me home." She clasped her arms round his neck and nestled her face close to his.

"Not yet, queen. We will go to the Catskill, to Lake George, to Niagara. A few weeks' travel will invigorate you. I have written to Hugh to meet us at Montreal; he is with a gay party, and you shall have a royal time. A pretty piece of business truly, that you can't amuse yourself in any other way than by breaking half the bones in your body."

Thus the summer programme was determined without any reference to the wishes of the one most concerned, and, knowing her father's disposition, she silently acquiesced. After much persuasion, Mr. Huntingdon prevailed on Louisa's parents to allow her to accompany them. The mother consented very reluctantly, and on the appointed day the party set off for Saratoga. The change was eminently beneficial, and before they reached Canada Irene seemed perfectly restored. But her father was not satisfied. Her unwonted taciturnity annoyed and puzzled him; he knew that beneath the calm surface some strong undercurrent rolled swiftly, and he racked his brain to discover what had rendered her so reserved. Louisa's joyous, elastic spirits probably heightened the effect of her companion's gravity, and the contrast daily presented could not fail to arrest Mr. Huntingdon's attention. On arriving at Montreal the girls were left for a few moments in the parlour of the hotel, while Mr. Huntingdon went to register their names. Irene and Louisa stood by the window looking out into the street, when a happy, ringing voice exclaimed—

"Here you are, at last, Irie! I caught a glimpse of your curls as you passed the dining-room door."

She turned to meet her cousin and held out her hand.

"Does your majesty suppose I shall be satisfied with the tip of your fingers? Pshaw, Irie! I will have my kiss."

He threw his arm round her shoulder, drew down the shielding hands, and kissed her twice.

"Oh, Hugh, behave yourself! Miss Louisa Young, my cousin, Hugh Seymour."

He bowed, and shook hands with the stranger, then seized his cousin's fingers and fixed his fine eyes affectionately upon her.

"It seems an age since I saw you, Irie. Come, sit down and let me look at you; how stately you have grown, to be sure! More like a queen than ever; absolutely two inches taller since you entered boarding-school. Irie, I am so glad to see you again!" He snatched up a handful of curls and drew them across his lips, careless of what Louisa might think.

"Thank you, Hugh. I am quite as glad to see you."

"Oh, humbug! I know better. You would rather see Paragon any day, ten to one. I will kill that dog yet, and shoot Erebus, too; see if I don't! then maybe you can think of somebody else. When you are glad you show it in your eyes, and now they are as still as violets under icicles. I think you might love me a little, at least as much as a dog."

"Hush! I do love you, but I don't choose to tell it to everybody in Montreal."

Mr. Huntingdon's entrance diverted the conversation, and Irene was glad to escape to her own room.

"Your cousin seems to be very fond of you," observed Louisa, as she upbraided her hair.

"He is very impulsive and demonstrative, that is all."

"How handsome he is!"

"Do you think so, really? Take care, Louisa! I will tell him, and, by way of crushing his vanity, add '*de gustibus, etc., etc., etc.*'"

"How old is he?"

"In his twentieth year."

From that time the cousins were thrown constantly together; wherever they went Hugh took charge of Irene, while Mr. Huntingdon gave his attention to Louisa. But the eagle eye was upon his daughter's movements; he watched her countenance, weighed her words, tried to probe her heart. Week after week he found nothing tangible. Hugh was gay, careless; Irene, equable, but reserved. Finally they turned their faces homeward, and in October found themselves once more in New York. Mr. Huntingdon prepared to return South and Hugh to sail for Europe, while Irene remained at the hotel until the morning of her cousin's departure.

A private parlour adjoined the room she occupied, and here he came to say farewell. She knew that he had already had a long conversation with her father, and as he threw himself on the sofa and seized one of her hands, she instinctively shrank from him.

"Irene, here is my miniature. I wanted you to ask for it, but I see that you won't do it. I know very well that you will not value it one-thousandth part as much as I do your likeness here on my watch-chain; but perhaps it will remind you of me sometimes. How I shall want to see you before I come home! You know you belong to me. Uncle gave you to me, and when I come back from Europe we will be married. We are both very young, I know; but it has been settled so long. Irie, my beauty, I wish you would love me more; you are so cold. Won't you try?"

He leaned down to kiss her, but she turned her face hastily away and answered resolutely—

"No, I can't love you other than as my cousin; I would not, if I could. I do not think it would be right, and I won't promise to try. Father has no right to give me to you, or to anybody else. I tell you now I belong to myself, and only I can give myself away. Hugh, I don't consider this settled at all. You might as well know the truth at once; I have some voice in the matter."

Mr. Huntingdon had evidently prepared him for something of this kind on her part, and, though his face flushed angrily, he took no notice of the remonstrance.

"I shall write to you frequently, and I hope that you will be punctual in replying. Irie, give me your left hand just a minute; wear this ring till I come back, to remind you that you have a cousin across the ocean."

He tried to force the flashing jewel on her slender finger, but she resisted, and rose, struggling to withdraw her hand.

"No, no, Hugh! I can't; I won't. I know very well what that ring means, and I cannot accept it. Release my hand; I tell you I won't wear it."

"Come, Hugh; you have not a moment to spare; the carriage is waiting." Mr. Huntingdon threw open the door, having heard every word that had passed. Hugh dropped the ring in his vest-pocket and rose.

"Well, Irie, I suppose I must bid you farewell. Two or three years will change you, my dearest little cousin. Good-bye; think of me now and then, and learn to love me by the time I come home."

She suffered him to take both her hands and kiss her tenderly, for her father stood there, and she could not refuse; but the touch of his lips burned her long after he was gone. She put on her bonnet, and, when her father returned from the steamer, they entered the carriage which was to convey her to the dreary, dreaded school. As they rolled along Broadway, Mr. Huntingdon coolly took her hand and placed Hugh's ring upon it, saying authoritatively—

"Hugh told me you refused to accept his parting gift, and seemed much hurt about it. There is no reason why you should not wear it, and in future I do not wish to see you without it. Remember this, my daughter."

"Father, it is wrong for me to wear it, unless I expected to——"

"I understand the whole matter perfectly. Now, Irene, let me hear no more about it. I wish you would learn that it is a child's duty to obey her parent. No more words, if you please, on the subject."

She felt that this was not the hour for resistance, and wisely forbore; but he saw rebellion written in the calm, fixed eye, and read it in the curved lines of the full upper lip. She had entreated him to take her home, and only the night before renewed her pleadings. But his refusal was positive, and now she went back to the hated school without a visible token of regret. She saw her trunks consigned to the porter, listened to a brief conversation between Dr. —— and her father, and after a hasty embrace and half-dozen words, watched the tall, soldierly form re-enter the carriage. Then she went slowly up the broad stairway to her cell-like room, and with dry eyes unpacked her clothes, locked up the ring in her jewellery-box, and prepared to resume her studies.

CHAPTER XI

ANXIETY

It was late October; a feeble flame flickered in the grate; on the rug crouched an English spaniel, creeping closer as the heat died out and the waning light of day gradually receded, leaving the room dusky, save where a slanting line of yellow quivered down from the roof and gilt the folds of black silk. At one of the windows stood Electra, half concealed by the heavy green and gold drapery, one dimpled hand clinging to the curtains, the other pressed against the panes, as she watched the forms hurrying along the street below.

For three weeks she had received no letter from Russell; he was remarkably punctual, and this long, unprecedented interval filled her, at first, with vague uneasiness, which grew finally into horrible foreboding. For ten days she had stood at this hour, at the same window, waiting for Mr. Clifton's return from the post-office. Ten times the words "No letter" had fallen, like the voice of doom, on her throbbing heart. On this eleventh day suspense reached its acme, and time seemed to have locked its wheels to lengthen her torture. At last an omnibus stopped, and Mr. Clifton stepped out, with a bundle of papers under his arm. Closer pressed the pallid face against the glass; firmer grew the grasp of the icy fingers on the brocatel; she had no strength to meet him. He closed the door, hung up his hat, and looked into the studio; no fire in the grate, no light in the gas-globes—everything cold and dark save the reflection on that front window.

"Electra!"

"I am here."

"No letter."

She stood motionless a moment; but the brick walls opposite, the trees, the lamp-posts spun around, like maple leaves in an autumn gale.

"My owlet! why don't you have a light and some fire?"

He stumbled toward her, and put his hand on her shoulder; but she shrank away, and, lighting the gas, rang for coal.

"There is something terrible the matter; Russell is either ill or dead. I must go to him."

Just, then the door-bell rang sharply; she supposed it was some brother-artist coming to spend an hour, and turned to go.

"Wait a minute; I want to——" He paused, for at that instant she heard a voice which, even amid the din of Shinar, would have been unmistakable to her, and breaking from him, she sprang to the threshold and met her cousin.

"Oh, Russell! I thought you had forgotten me."

"What put such a ridiculous thought into your head? My last letter must have prepared you to expect me."

"What letter? I have had none for three weeks."

"One in which I mentioned Mr. Campbell's foreign appointment, and the position of secretary which he tendered me. Electra, let me speak to Mr. Clifton."

As he advanced and greeted the artist, she heard a quick, snapping sound, and saw the beautiful Bohemian glass paper-cutter her guardian had been using lying shivered to atoms on the rug. The fluted handle was crushed in his fingers, and drops of blood oozed over the left hand. Ere she could allude to it, he thrust his hand into his pocket and desired Russell to be seated.

"This is a pleasure totally unexpected. What is the appointment of which you spoke?"

"Mr. Campbell has been appointed Minister to ——, and sails next week. I am surprised that you have not heard of it from the public journals; many of them have spoken of it, and warmly commended the selection. I accompany him in the capacity of secretary and shall, meanwhile, prosecute my studies under his direction."

The grey, glittering eyes of the artist sought those of his pupil, and for an instant hers quailed; but, rallying, she looked fully, steadfastly at him, resolved to play out the game, scorning to bare her heart to his scrutiny. She had fancied that Russell's affection had prompted this visit; now it was apparent that he came to New York to take a steamer—not to see her; to put the stormy Atlantic between them.

"New York certainly agrees with you, Electra; you have grown and improved very much since you came North. I never saw such colour in your cheeks before; I can scarcely believe that you are the same fragile child I put into the stage one year ago. This reconciles me to having given you up to Mr. Clifton; he is a better guardian than I could have been. But tell me something more about these new relatives you spoke of having found here."

Mr. Clifton left the room, and the two sat side by side for an hour talking of the gloomy past, the flitting present the uncertain future. Leaning back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the

grate Russell said gravely—

"There is now nothing to impede my successful career; obstacles are rapidly melting away; every day brings me nearer the goal I long since set before me. In two years at farthest, perhaps earlier, I shall return and begin the practice of law. Once admitted, I ask no more. Then, and not till then, I hope to save you from the necessity of labour; in the interim, Mr. Clifton will prove a noble and generous friend; and believe me, my cousin, the thought of leaving you so long is the only thing which will mar the pleasure of my European sojourn."

The words were kind enough, but the tone was indifferent, and the countenance showed her that their approaching separation disquieted him little. She thought of the sleepless nights and wretched days she had passed waiting for a letter from that tall, reserved, cold cousin, and her features relaxed in a derisive smile at the folly of her all-absorbing love. Raising his eyes accidentally he caught the smile, wondered what there was to call it forth in the plans which he had just laid before her, and, meeting his glance of surprise, she said, carelessly—

"Are you not going to see Irene before you sail?"

His cheek flushed as he rose, straightened himself, and answered—

"A strange question, truly, from one who knows me as well as you do. Call to see a girl whose father sent her from home solely to prevent her from associating with my family! Through what sort of metamorphosis do you suppose that I have passed, that every spark of self-respect has been crushed out of me?"

"Her father's tyranny and selfishness can never nullify her noble and affectionate remembrance of Aunt Amy in the hour of her need."

"And when I am able to repay her every cent we owe her, then, and not till then, I wish to see her. Things shall change: *mens cujusque is est quisque*; and the day will come when Mr. Huntingdon may not think it degrading for his daughter to acknowledge my acquaintance on the street."

A brief silence ensued, Russell drew on his gloves, and finally said, hesitatingly—

"Dr. Arnold told me she had suffered very much from a fall."

"Yes; for a long time she was confined to her room."

"Has she recovered entirely?"

"Entirely. She grows more beautiful day by day."

Perhaps he wished to hear more concerning her, but she would not gratify him, and, soon after, he took up his hat.

"Mr. Clifton has a spare room, Russell; why can't you stay with us while you are in New York?"

"Thank you; but Mr. Campbell will expect me at the hotel. I shall be needed, too, as he has many letters to write. I will see you to-morrow, and indeed every day while I remain in the city."

"Then pay your visits in the morning, for I want to take your portrait with my own hands. Give me a sitting as early as possible."

"Very well; look for me to-morrow. Good night."

The week that followed was one of strangely mingled sorrows and joys; in after years it served as a prominent landmark to which she looked back and dated sad changes in her heart. Irene remained ignorant of Russell's presence in the city, and at last the day dawned on which the vessel was to sail. At the breakfast table Mr. Clifton noticed the colourlessness of his pupil's face, but kindly abstained from any allusion to it. He saw that, contrary to habit, she drank a cup of coffee, and, arresting her arm as she requested his mother to give her a second, he said gently—

"My dear child, where did you suddenly find such Turkish tastes? I thought you disliked coffee?"

"I take it now as medicine. My head aches horribly."

"Then let me prescribe for you. We will go down to the steamer with Russell, and afterward take a long drive to Greenwood, if you like."

"He said he would call here at ten o'clock to bid us farewell."

"*N'importe.* The carriage will be ready, and we will accompany him."

At the appointed hour they repaired to the vessel, and, looking at its huge sides, Electra coveted even a deck passage; envied the meanest who hurried about, making all things ready for departure. The last bell rang; people crowded down on the planks; Russell hastened back to the carriage, and took the nerveless, gloved hand.

"I will write as early as possible. Don't be uneasy about me; no accident has ever happened on this line. I am glad I leave you with such a friend as Mr. Clifton. Good-bye, cousin; it will not be very long before we meet again."

He kissed the passive lips, shook hands with the artist, and sprang on board just as the planks were withdrawn. The vessel moved majestically on its way; friends on shore waved handkerchiefs to friends departing, and hands were kissed and hats lifted, and then the crowd slowly dispersed —for steamers sail every week, and people become accustomed to the spectacle.

"Are you ready to go now?" asked Mr. Clifton.

"Yes, ready, quite ready—for Greenwood."

She spoke in a tone which had lost its liquid music, and with a wintry smile that fled over the ashy face, lending the features no light, no warmth.

He tried to divert her mind by calling attention to various things of interest, but the utter exhaustion of her position and the monosyllabic character of her replies soon discouraged him. Both felt relieved when the carriage stopped before the studio, and as he led her up the steps, he said affectionately—

"I am afraid my prescription has not cured your head."

"No, sir; but I thank you most sincerely for the kind effort you have made to relieve me. I shall be better to-morrow. Good-bye till then."

"Stay, my child. Come into the studio, and let me read something light and pleasant to you."

"Not for the universe! The sight of a book would give me brain fever, I verily believe."

She tried unavailingly to shake off his hand.

"Why do you shrink from me, my pupil?"

"Because I am sick, weary; and you watch me so that I get restless and nervous. Do let me go! I want to sleep."

An impatient stamp emphasized the words, and, as he relaxed his clasp of her fingers, she hastened to her room, and locked the door to prevent all intrusion. Taking off her bonnet, she drew the heavy shawl closely around her shoulders and threw herself across the foot of the bed, burying her face in her hands, lest the bare walls should prove witnesses of her agony. Six hours later she lay there still with pale fingers pressed to burning, dry eyelids.

CHAPTER XII

A SACRIFICE

Once more the labours of a twelvemonth had been exhibited at the Academy of Design—some to be classed among things "that were not born to die;" others to fall into nameless graves. Mr. Clifton was represented by an exquisite Œnone, and on the same wall, in a massive oval frame, hung the first finished production of his pupil. For months after Russell's departure she sat before her easel, slowly filling up the outline sketched while his eyes watched her. Application sometimes trenches so closely upon genius as to be mistaken for it in its results, and where both are happily blended, the bud of Art expands in immortal perfection. Electra spared no toil, and so it came to pass that the faultless head of her idol excited intense and universal admiration. In the catalogue it was briefly mentioned as "No. 17—a portrait; first effort of a young female artist." *Connoisseurs*, who had committed themselves by extravagant praise, sneered at the announcement of the catalogue, and, after a few inquiries, blandly asserted that no tyro could have produced it; that the master had wrought out its perfection, and generously allowed the pupil to monopolize the encomiums. In vain Mr. Clifton disclaimed the merit, and asserted that he had never touched the canvas; that she had jealously refused to let him aid her. Incredulous smiles and unmistakable motions of the head were the sole results of his expostulation. Electra was indignant at the injustice meted out to her, and, as might have been expected, rebelled against the verdict. Some weeks after the close of the exhibition, the Œnone was purchased and the portrait sent home. Electra placed it on the easel once more, and stood before it in rapt contemplation. Coldness, silence, neglect, all were forgotten when she looked into the deep, beautiful eyes, and upon the broad, bold, matchless brow.

She had not the faintest hope that he would ever cherish a tenderer feeling for her; but love is a plant of strange growth. A curious plant, truly, and one which will not bear transplanting, as many a luckless experiment has proved. To-day, as Electra looked upon her labours, the coils of Time seemed to fall away; the vista of Eternity opened before her, peopled with two forms, which on earth walked widely separate paths, and over her features stole a serene, lifted expression, as if, after painful scaling, she had risen above the cloud-region and caught the first rays of perpetual sunshine.

Mr. Clifton had watched her for some moments with lowering brow and jealous hatred of the picture. Approaching, he looked over her shoulder, and said—

"Electra, I must speak to you; hear me. You hug a phantom to your heart; Russell does not and will not love you, other than as his cousin."

The blood deserted her face, leaving a greyish pallor, but the eyes sought his steadily, and the rippling voice lost none of its rich cadence.

"Except as his cousin, I do not expect Russell to love me."

"Oh child! you deceive yourself; this is a hope that you cling to with mad tenacity."

She wrung her hand from his, and drew her figure to its utmost height.

"No; you must hear me now. I have a right to question you—the right of my long, silent, faithful love. You may deny it, but that matters little; be still, and listen. Did you suppose that I was simply a generous man when I offered to guard and aid you—when I took you to my house, placed you in my mother's care, and lavished affection upon you? If so, put away the hallucination. Consider me no longer your friend, look at me as I am, a jealous and selfishly exacting man, who stands before you to-day and tells you he loves you. Oh, Electra! From the morning when you first showed me your sketches, you have been more than my life to me. Every hope I have centred in you. I have not deceived myself; I knew that you loved Russell. When he came here, I saw that the old fascination still kept its hold upon you, but I saw, too, what you saw quite as plainly—that in Russell Aubrey's heart there is room for nothing but ambition. I knew how you suffered, and I believed it was the death-struggle of your love. But, instead, I find you, day by day, before that easel—oblivious of me, of everything but the features you cling to so insanely. Do you wonder that I hate that portrait? Do you wonder that I am growing desperate? If he loved you in return, I could bear it better; but as it is, I am tortured beyond all endurance. I have spent nearly three years in trying to gain your heart; all other aims have faded before this one absorbing love. To-day I lay it at your feet, and ask if I have not earned some reward. Oh, Electra! have you no gratitude?"

A scarlet spot burned on his pale cheeks, and the mild liquid grey eyes sparkled like stars.

He stretched out his hand, but she drew back a step.

"God forgive me! but I have no such love for you."

A ghastly smile broke over his face, and, after a moment, the snowy handkerchief he passed across his lips was stained with ruby streaks.

"I know that, and I know the reason. But, once more, I ask you to give me your hand. Electra, dearest, do not, I pray you, refuse me this. Oh, child! give me your hand, and in time you will learn to love me."

He seized her fingers, and stooped his head till the silky brown beard mingled with her raven

locks.

"Mr. Clifton, to marry without love would be a grievous sin; I dare not. We would hate each other. Life would be a curse to both, and death a welcome release. Could you endure a wife who accepted your hand from gratitude and pity? Oh! such a relationship would be horrible beyond all degree. I shudder at the thought."

"But you would learn to love me."

"But you cannot take Russell's place. None can come between him and my heart."

"Electra Grey, you are unwomanly in your unsought love."

"Unwomanly! If so, made such by your unmanliness. Unwomanly! Were you more manly, I had never shocked your maudlin sentiments of propriety."

"And this is my reward for all the tenderness I have lavished on you. When I stooped to beg your hand, to be repulsed with scorn and loathing. To spend three years in faithful effort to win your heart, and reap —— contempt, hatred."

Staggering back, he sank into his arm-chair and closed his eyes a moment, then continued—

"I would not have troubled you long, Electra. It was because I knew that my life must be short at best, that I urged you to gild the brief period with the light of your love. I would not have bound you always to me; and when I asked your hand a few minutes since, I knew that death would soon sever the tie and set you free. Let this suffice to palliate my 'unmanly' pleading. I have but one request to make of you now, and, weak as it may seem, I beg of you not to deny me. You are preparing to leave my house; this I know; I see it in your face, and the thought is harrowing to me. Electra, remain under my roof while I live; let me see you every day, here, in my house. If not as my wife, stay as my friend, my pupil, my child. I little thought I could ever condescend to ask this of anyone; but the dread of separation bows me down. Oh, child, I will not claim you long."

She stood up before him with the portrait in her arms, resolved then and there to leave him for ever. But the ghastly pallor of his face, the scarlet thread oozing over his lips and saturating the handkerchief with which he strove to staunch it, told her that the request was preferred on no idle pretext. In swift review, his kindness, generosity, and unwavering affection passed before her, and the mingled accents of remorse and compassion whispered: "Pay your debt of gratitude by sacrificing your heart. If you can make him happy, you owe it to him."

Softly she took his hand, and said in a low, thrilling tone—

"Mr. Clifton, I was passionate and hasty, and said some unkind things which I would fain recall, and for which I beg your pardon, I thank you for the honour you would have conferred on me, and for the unmerited love you offered me. Unless it were in my power to return that love, it would be sinful to give you my hand; but, since you desire it so earnestly, I will promise to stay by your side, to do what I can to make you happy; to prove by my devotion that I am not insensible to all your kindness, that I am very grateful for the affection you have given me. I come and offer you this, as a poor return for all that I owe you; it is the most my conscience will permit me to tender. My friend, my master, will you accept it and forgive the pain and sorrow I have caused you?"

He felt her tears falling on his fingers, and, for a moment, neither spoke; then he drew the hands to his lips and kissed them tenderly.

"Thank you, Electra. I know it is a sacrifice on your part, but I am selfish enough to accept it. Heaven bless you, my pupil."

"In future we will not allude to this day of trial—let it be forgotten; 'let the dead past bury its dead.' I will have no resurrected phantoms. And now, sir, you must not allow this slight hemorrhage to depress you. In a few days you will be stronger, quite able to examine and find fault with my work. Shall I send a note to Dr. Le Roy, asking him to call and see you this evening?"

"He has just left me. Say nothing of the hemorrhage to mother; it would only distress her."

He released her hands, and, stooping over his pillow, she smoothed the disordered hair, and for the first time pressed her lips to his forehead.

Thus she bowed her neck to the yoke, and, with a fixed, unalterable will, entered on the long dreary ministry to which she felt that duty called.

CHAPTER XIII

WARNINGS

With the characteristic fitfulness of consumption, Mr. Clifton rallied, and, for a time, seemed almost restored; but at the approach of winter the cough increased, and dangerous symptoms returned. Several months after the rejection of his suit, to which no allusion had ever been made, Electra sat before her easel, absorbed in work, while the master slowly walked up and down the studio, wrapped in a warm plaid shawl. Occasionally he paused and looked over her shoulder, then resumed his pace, offering no comment. It was not an unusual occurrence for them to pass entire mornings together without exchanging a word, and to-day the silence had lasted more than an hour. A prolonged fit of coughing finally arrested her attention, and, glancing up, she met his sad gaze.

"This is unpropitious weather for you, Mr. Clifton."

"Yes, this winter offers a dreary prospect."

Resting her chin in her hands she raised her eyes, and said—

"Why do you not follow the doctor's advice? A winter South might restore you."

He drew near, and, leaning his folded arms on the top of the easel, looked down into her face.

"There is only one condition upon which I could consent to go; that is in your hands. Will you accompany me?"

She understood it all in an instant, saw the new form in which the trial presented itself, and her soul sickened.

"Mr. Clifton, if I were your sister, or your child, I would gladly go; but as your pupil, I cannot."

"As Electra Grey, certainly not; but as Electra Clifton you could go."

"Electra Grey will be carved on my tombstone."

"Then you decide my fate. I remain, and wait the slow approach of death."

"No, before just Heaven! I take no such responsibility, nor shall you thrust it on me. You are a man, and must decide your destiny for yourself; I am a poor girl, having no claim upon, no power over you. It is your duty to preserve the life which God gave you, in the way prescribed by your physician, and I have no voice in the matter. It is your duty to go South, and it will be both weak and wicked to remain here under existing circumstances."

"My life is centred in you; it is worthless, nay, a burden, separated from you."

"Your life should be centred in something nobler, better; in your duty, in your profession. It is suicidal to fold your hands listlessly, and look to me as you do."

"All these things have I tried, and I am weary of the hollowness, weary of life, and the world. So long as I have your face here, I care not to cross my own threshold till friendly hands bear me out to my quiet resting-place under the willows of Greenwood. Electra, my darling, think me weak if you will, but bear with me a little longer, and then this, my shadow, shall flit from your young heart, leaving not even a memory to haunt you. Be patient! I will soon pass away to another, a more peaceful, blessed sphere."

A melancholy smile lighted his fair waxen features, as waning, sickly sunshine in an autumn evening flickers over sculptured marble in a silent churchyard.

How she compassioned his great weakness, as he wiped away the moisture which, even on that cold day, glistened on his forehead.

"Oh! I beseech you to go to Cuba. Go, and get strong once more."

"Nothing will ever help me now. Sunny skies and soft breezes bring no healing for me. I want to die here, in my home, where your hands will be about me; not among strangers in Cuba or Italy."

He turned to the fire, and springing up, she left the room. The solemn silence of the house oppressed her; she put on her thickest wrappings, and took the street leading to the nearest park. A steel-grey sky, with slowly-trailing clouds, looked down on her, and the keen, chilly wind wafted a fine snow-powder in her face as she pressed against it. The trees were bare, and the sere grass grew hoary as the first snow-flakes of the season came down softly and shroud-like. The walks were deserted, save where a hurrying form crossed from street to street, homeward bound; and Electra passed slowly along, absorbed in thoughts colder than the frosting that gathered on shawl and bonnet. The face and figure of the painter glided spectrally before her at every step, and a mighty temptation followed at its heels. Why not strangle her heart? Why not marry him and bear his name, if, thereby, she could make his few remaining months of existence happy, and, by accompanying him South, prolong his life even for a few weeks? She shuddered at the suggestion, it would be such a miserable lot.

Faster fell the snow-flakes, cresting the waves of her hair like foam, and setting her teeth

firmly, as if thereby locking the door against all compassionating compunctions. Electra left the park and turned into a cross-street, on which was situated an establishment where bouquets were kept for sale. The assortment was meagre at that late hour, but she selected a tiny bunch of delicate, fragrant, hot-house blossoms, and, shielding them with her shawl, hastened home. The studio was brilliant with gas-glare and warm with the breath of anthracite, but an aspect of dreariness, silence, and sorrow predominated. On the edge of the low scroll-sculptured mantel, supported at each corner by caryatides, perched a large tame grey owl, with clipped wings folded, and wide, solemn, oracular eyes fastened on the countenance of its beloved master.

With swift, noiseless steps Electra came to the red grate, and, after a moment, drew an ottoman close to the easy chair. Perhaps its occupant slept; perchance he wandered, with closed eyes, far down among the sombre, dank crypts of memory. She laid her cool fingers on his hand, and held the bouquet before him.

"My dear sir, here are your flowers; they are not as pretty as usual, but sweet enough to atone for lack of beauty."

He fingered them caressingly, laid them against his hollow cheeks, and hid his lips among their fragrant petals, but the starry eyes were fixed on the features of the pupil.

"It is bitter weather out; did you brave it for these? Thank you, but don't expose yourself so in future. Two invalids in a house are quite enough. You are snow-crowned, little one; do you know it? The frosting gleams right, royally on that black hair of yours. Nay, child, don't brush it off; like all lovely things it fades rapidly, melts away like the dreams that flutter around a boy in the witchery of a long, still, sunny summer day."

His thin hand nestled in her shining hair, and she submitted to the touch in silence.

He regarded her with an expression of sorrowful tenderness, and his hand trembled as he placed it upon her head. "I know not what is to become of you. Oh, Electra! if you would only be warned in time."

The warmth of the room had vermilioned her cheeks, and the long black lashes failed to veil in any degree the flash of the eyes she raised to his face. Removing the hand from her head, she took it in both hers, and a cold, dauntless smile wreathed her lips.

"Be easy on my account. I am not afraid of my future. Why should I be? God built an arsenal in every soul before he launched it on the stormy sea of Time, and the key to mine is Will! What woman has done, woman may do; a glorious sisterhood of artists beckon me on; what Elizabeth Cheron, Sibylla Merian, Angelica Kauffman, Elizabeth Le Brun, Felicie Fauveau, and Rosa Bonheur have achieved, I also will accomplish, or die in the effort. These travelled no royal road to immortality, but rugged, thorny paths; and who shall stay my feet? Afar off gleams my resting-place, but ambition scourges me unflaggingly on. Do not worry about my future; I will take care of it, and of myself."

"And when, after years of toil, you win fame, even fame enough to satisfy your large expectations, what then? Whither will you look for happiness?"

"I will grapple fame to my empty heart, as women do other idols."

"It will freeze you, my dear child."

"At all events, I will risk it. Thank God! whatever other faults I confess to, there is no taint of cowardice in my soul."

She rose, and stood a moment on the rug, looking into the red network of coals, then turned to leave him, saying—

"I must go to your mother now, and presently I will bring your tea."

"You need not trouble. I can go to the dining-room to-night."

"It is no trouble; it gives me great pleasure to do something for your comfort; and I know you always enjoy your supper more when you have it here."

As she closed the door, he pressed his face against the morocco lining and groaned unconsciously, and large glittering tears, creeping from beneath the trembling lashes, hid themselves in the curling brown beard.

To see that Mrs. Clifton's supper suited her, and then to read aloud to her for half an hour from the worn family Bible, was part of the daily routine which Electra permitted nothing to interrupt. On this occasion she found the old lady seated, as usual, before the fire, her crutches leaning against the chair, and her favourite cat curled on the carpet at her feet. Most tenderly did the aged cripple love her son's protégée, and the wrinkled, sallow face lighted up with a smile of pleasure at her entrance.

"I thought it was about time for you to come to me. Sit down, dear, and touch the bell for Kate. How is Harry?"

"No stronger, I am afraid. You know this is very bad weather for him."

"Yes; when he came up to-day I thought he looked more feeble than I had ever seen him; and

as I sit here and listen to his hollow cough, every sound seems a stab at my heart." She rocked herself to and fro for a moment, and added mournfully—

"Ah, child! it is so hard to see my youngest boy going down to the grave before me. The last of five, I hoped he would survive me; but consumption is a terrible thing; it took my husband first, then, in quick succession, my other children, and now Harry, my darling, my youngest, is the last prey."

Anxious to divert her mind, Electra adroitly changed the conversation, and, when she rose to say good night, some time after, had the satisfaction of knowing that the old lady had fallen asleep. In was in vain that she arranged several tempting dishes on the table beside the painter, and coaxed him to partake of them; he received but a cup of tea from her hand, and motioned the remainder away. As the servant removed the tray, he looked up at his pupil, and said—

"Please wheel the lounge nearer to the grate; I am too tired to sit up to-night."

She complied at once, shook up the pillow, and, as he laid his head upon it, she spread his heavy plaid shawl over him.

"Now, sir, what shall I read this evening?"

"'*Arcana Cœlestia*,' if you please."

She took up the volume, and began at the place he designated; and as she read on and on, her rich flexible voice rose and fell upon the air like waves of melody. One of her hands chanced to hang over the arm of the chair, and as she sat near the lounge, thin hot fingers twined about it, drew it caressingly to the pillow, and held it tightly. Her first impulse was to withdraw it, and an expression of annoyance crossed her features; but, on second thought, she suffered her fingers to rest passively in his. Now and then, as she turned a leaf, she met his luminous eyes fastened upon her; but after a time the quick breathing attracted her attention, and, looking down, she saw that he, too, was sleeping. She closed the book and remained quiet, fearful of disturbing him; and as she studied the weary, fevered face, noting the march of disease, the sorrowful drooping of the mouth, so indicative of grievous disappointment, a new and holy tenderness awoke in her heart. It was a feeling analogous to that of a mother for a suffering child, who can be soothed only by her presence and caresses—an affection not unfrequently kindled in haughty natures by the entire dependence of a weaker one. Blended with this was a remorseful consciousness of the coldness with which she had persistently rejected, repulsed every manifestation of his devoted love; and, winding her fingers through his long hair, she vowed an atonement for the past in increased gentleness for the remainder of his waning life. As she bent over him, wearing her compassion in her face, he opened his eyes and looked at her.

"How long have I slept?"

"Nearly an hour. How do you feel since your nap?"

He made no reply, and she put her hand on his forehead. The countenance lighted, and he said slowly—

"Ah! yes, press your cool soft little palm on my brow. It seems to still the throbbing of my temples."

"It is late, Mr. Clifton, and I must leave you. William looked in, a few minutes since, to say that the fire burned in your room, but I would not wake you. I will send him to you. Good night."

She leaned down voluntarily and kissed him, and, with a quick movement, he folded her to his heart an instant, then released her, murmuring huskily—

"God bless you, Electra, and reward you for your patient endurance. Good night, my precious child."

She went to her room, all unconscious of the burst of emotion which shook the feeble frame of the painter, long after she had laid her head on her pillow in the sound slumber of healthful youth.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CLOSE OF THE VIGIL

The year that ensued proved a valuable school of patience, and taught the young artist a gentleness of tone and quietude of manner at variance with the natural impetuosity of her character. Irksome beyond degree was the discipline to which she subjected herself, but, with a fixedness of purpose that knew no wavering, she walked through the daily dreary routine, keeping her eyes upon the end that slowly but unmistakably approached. In mid-summer Mr. Clifton removed, for a few weeks, to the Catskill, and occasionally he rallied for a few hours, with a tenacity of strength almost miraculous. During the still sunny afternoons hosts of gay visitors, summer tourists, often paused in their excursions to watch the emaciated form of the painter leaning on the arm of his beautiful pupil, or reclining on a lichen-carpeted knoll while she sketched the surrounding scenery. Increased feebleness prevented Mrs. Clifton from joining in these outdoor jaunts, and early in September, when it became apparent that her mind was rapidly sinking into imbecility, they returned to the city. Memory seemed to have deserted its throne; she knew neither her son nor Electra, and the last spark of intelligence manifested itself in a semi-recognition of her favourite cat, which sprang to welcome her back as friendly hands bore her to the chamber she was to quit no more till death released the crushed spirit. A letter was found on the *atelier* mantel, directed to Electra in familiar characters, which she had not seen for months. Very quietly she put it in her pocket, and in the solitude of her room broke the seal; found that Russell had returned during her absence, had spent a morning in the studio looking over her work, and had gone South to establish himself in his native town. Ah! the grievous, grievous disappointment. A bitter cry rolled from her lips, and the hands wrung each other despairingly; but an hour later she stood beside the artist with unruffled brow and a serene mouth, that bore no surface-token of the sorrow gnawing at her heart. Winter came on earlier than usual, with unwonted severity; and, week after week, Electra went continually from one sufferer to another, striving to alleviate pain, and to kindle a stray beam of sunshine in the darkened mansion. Unremitted vigil set its pale, infallible signet on her face, but Mr. Clifton either could not or would not see the painful alteration in her appearance; and when Mrs. Young remonstrated with her niece upon the ruinous effects of this tedious confinement to the house, she only answered steadily: "I will nurse him so long as I have strength left to creep from one room to another."

During Christmas week he grew alarmingly worse, and Dr. Le Roy counted the waning life by hours; but on New Year's eve he declared himself almost well, and insisted on being carried to the studio. The whim was humoured, and wrapped in his silken *robe de chambre*, he was seated in his large cushioned chair, smiling to find himself once more in the midst of his treasures. Turning back the velvet cuff from his attenuated wrist, he lifted his flushed face toward the nurse, and said eagerly: "Uncover my easel; make William draw it close to me; I have been idle long enough. Give me my palette; I want to retouch the forehead of my hero. It needs a high light."

"You are not strong enough to work. Wait till to-morrow."

"To-morrow! to-morrow! You have told me that fifty times. Wheel up the easel, I say. The spell is upon me, and work I will."

It was the "ruling passion strong in death," and Electra acquiesced, arranging the colours on the palette as he directed, and selecting the brushes he required. Resting his feet upon the cross-beam, he leaned forward and gazed earnestly upon his masterpiece, the darling design which had haunted his brain for years. "Theta" he called this piece of canvas, which was a large square painting representing, in the foreground, the death of Socrates. The details of the picture were finished with pre-Raphaelite precision and minuteness—the sweep and folds of drapery about the couch, the emptied hemlock cup—but the central figure of the Martyr lacked something, and to these last touches Mr. Clifton essayed to address himself. Slowly, feebly, the transparent hand wandered over the canvas, and Electra heard with alarm the laboured breath that came panting from his parted lips. She saw the unnatural sparkle in his sunken eyes almost die out, then leap up again, like smouldering embers swept by a sudden gust, and in the clear strong voice of other years, he repeated to himself the very words of Plato's Phædo: "For I have heard that it is right to die with good omens. Be quiet, therefore, and bear up."

Leaning back to note the effect of his touches, a shiver ran through his frame, the brush fell from his tremulous fingers, and he lay motionless and exhausted.

Folding his hands like a helpless, tired child, he raised his eyes to hers and said brokenly—

"I bequeath it to you; finish my work. You understand me—you know what is lacking; finish my 'Theta' and tell the world I died at work upon it. Oh! for a fraction of my old strength! One hour more to complete my Socrates! Just one hour! I would ask no more."

She gave him a powerful cordial which the physician had left, and having arranged the pillows on the lounge, drew it close to the easel, and prevailed on him to lie down.

A servant was dispatched for Dr. Le Roy, but returned to say that a dangerous case detained him elsewhere.

"Mr. Clifton, would you like to have your mother brought downstairs and placed beside you for

a while?"

"No; I want nobody but you. Sit down here close to me, and keep quiet."

She lowered the heavy curtains, shaded the gas-globe, and, placing a bunch of sweet violets on his pillow, sat down at his side. His favourite spaniel nestled at her feet, and occasionally threw up his head and gazed wistfully at his master. Thus two hours passed, and as she rose to administer the medicine he waved it off, saying—

"Give me no more of it. I won't be drugged in my last hours. I won't have my intellect clouded by opiates. Throw it into the fire, and let me rest."

"Oh, sir! can I do nothing for you?"

"Sit still. Do not leave me, I beg of you." He drew her back to the seat, and after a short silence said slowly—

"Electra, are you afraid of death?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know that I am dying?"

"I have seen you as ill several times before."

"You are a brave, strong-hearted child; glazed eyes and stiffened limbs will not frighten you. I have but few hours to live; put your hand in mine, and promise me that you will sit here till my soul quits its clay prison. Will you watch with me the death of the year? Are you afraid to stay with me, and see me die?"

She would not trust herself to speak, but laid her hand in his and clasped it firmly. He smiled, and added—

"Will you promise to call no one? I want no eyes but yours to watch me as I die. Let there be only you and me."

"I promise."

For some moments he lay motionless, but the intensity of his gaze made her restless, and she shaded her face.

"Electra, my darling, your martyrdom draws to a close. I have been merciless in my exactions, I know; you are worn to a shadow, and your face is sharp and haggard; but you will forgive me all, when the willows of Greenwood trail their boughs across my headstone. You have been faithful and uncomplaining; you have been to me a light, a joy, and a glory! God bless you, my pupil. In my vest-pocket is the key of my writing-desk. There you will find my will; take charge of it, and put it in Le Roy's hands as soon as possible. Give me some water."

She held the glass to his lips, and, as he sank back, a bright smile played over his face.

"Ah, child! it is such a comfort to have you here—you are so inexpressibly dear to me."

She took his thin hands in hers, and hot tears fell upon them. An intolerable weight crushed her heart, a half-defined, horrible dread, and she asked, falteringly—

"Are you willing to die? Is your soul at peace with God? Have you any fear of Eternity?"

"None, my child, none."

"Would you like to have Mr. Bailey come and pray for you?"

"I want no one now but you."

A long silence ensued, broken only by the heavily drawn breath of the sufferer. Two hours elapsed and there by the couch sat the motionless watcher, noting the indescribable but unmistakable change creeping on. The feeble, threadlike pulse fluttered irregularly, but the breathing became easy and low as a babe's, and occasionally a gentle sigh heaved the chest. She knew that the end was at hand, and a strained, frightened expression came into her large eyes as she glanced nervously round the room, and met the solemn, fascinating eyes of Munin the owl, staring at her from the low mantel. She caught her breath, and the deep silence was broken by the metallic tongue that dirged out "twelve." The last stroke of the bronze hammer echoed drearily; the old year lay stark and cold on its bier; Munin flapped his dusky wings with a long, sepulchral, blood-curdling hoot, and the dying man opened his dim, failing eyes, and fixed them for the last time on his pupil.

"Electra, my darling."

"My dear master, I am here."

She lifted his head to her bosom, nestled her fingers into his cold palm, and leaned her cheek against his brow. Pressing his face close to hers, the grey eyes closed, and a smile throned itself on the parted lips. A slight tremor shook the limbs, a soft shuddering breath swept across the watcher's face, and the "golden bowl" was shivered, the "silver cord" was loosed.

The vigil was over, the burden was lifted from her shoulders, the weary ministry here ended;

and shrouding her face in her arms, the lonely woman wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XV

AT HOME AGAIN

Four years had wrought material changes in the town of W——; new streets had been opened, new buildings erected, new forms trod the side-walks, new faces looked out of shop-windows, and flashing equipages, and new shafts of granite and marble stood in the cemetery to tell of many who had been gathered to their forefathers. If important revolutions had been effected in her early home, not less decided and apparent was the change which had taken place in the heiress of Huntingdon Hill; and having been eyed, questioned, scrutinized by the best families, and laid in the social scale, it was found a difficult matter to determine her weight as accurately as seemed desirable. In common parlance, "her education was finished,"—she was regularly and unmistakably "out." Having lost her aunt two years before her return, the duties of hostess devolved upon her, and she dispensed the hospitalities of her home with an easy, though stately elegance, surprising in one so inexperienced.

It chanced that Dr. Arnold was absent for some weeks after her arrival, and no sooner had he returned than he sought his quondam protégé. Entering unannounced, he paused suddenly as he caught sight of her standing before the fire, with Paragon at her feet. She lifted her head and came to meet him, holding out both hands, with a warm, bright smile.

"Oh, Dr. Arnold! I am so glad to see you once more. It was neither friendly nor hospitable to go off just as I came home, after long years of absence. I am very glad to see you."

He held her hands and gazed at her like one in a dream of mingled pain and pleasure, and when he spoke his voice was unsteady.

"You cannot possibly be as glad to see me as I am to have you back. But I can't realize that this is, indeed, you, my pet—the Irene I parted with rather more than four years ago. Oh, child! what a marvellous, what a glorious beauty you have grown to be!"

"Take care; you will spoil her, Arnold. Don't you know, you old cynic, that women can't stand such flattery as yours?" laughed Mr. Huntingdon.

"I am glad you like me, Doctor; I am glad you think I have improved; and since you think so, I am obliged to you for expressing your opinion of me so kindly. I wish I could return your compliments, but my conscience vetoes any such proceeding. You look jaded—overworked. What is the reason that you have grown so grey and haggard? We will enter into a compact to renew the old life; you shall treat me exactly as you used to do, and I shall come to you as formerly, and interrupt labours that seem too heavy. Sit down and talk to me. I want to hear your voice; it is pleasant to my ears, makes music in my heart, calls up the bygone. You have adopted a stick in my absence; I don't like the innovation; it hurts me to think that you need it. I must take care of you, I see, and persuade you to relinquish it entirely."

"Arnold, I verily believe she was more anxious to see you than everybody else in W—— except old Nellie, her nurse."

She did not contradict him, and the three sat conversing for more than an hour; then other visitors came in, and she withdrew to the parlour. The doctor had examined her closely all the while; had noted every word, action, expression; and a troubled, abstracted look came into his face when she left them.

"Huntingdon, what is it? What is it?"

"What is what? I don't understand you."

"What has so changed that child? I want to know what ails her?"

"Nothing, that I know of. You know that she was always rather singular."

"Yes, but it was a different sort of singularity. She is too still, and white, and cold, and stately. I told you it was a wretched piece of business to send a nature like hers, so different from everybody else's, off among utter strangers; to shut up that queer, free untamed thing in a boarding-school for four years, with hundreds of miles between her and the few things she loved. She required very peculiar and skilful treatment, and, instead, you put her off where she petrified! I knew it would never answer, and I told you so. You wanted to break her obstinacy, did you? She comes back marble. I tell you now I know her better than you do, though you are her father, and you may as well give up at once that chronic hallucination of 'ruling, conquering her.' She is like steel—cold, firm, brittle; she will break; snap asunder; but bend!—never! never! Huntingdon, I love that child; I have a right to love her; she has been very dear to me from her babyhood, and it would go hard with me to know that any sorrow darkened her life. Don't allow your old plans and views to influence you now. Let Irene be happy in her own way. Did you ever see a contented-looking eagle in a gilt cage? Did you ever know a leopardess kept in a paddock, and taught to forget her native jungles?"

Mr. Huntingdon moved uneasily, pondering the unpalatable advice.

"You certainly don't mean to say that she has inherited——?" He crushed back the words; could he crush the apprehension, too?

"I mean to say that, if she were my child, I would be guided by her, instead of striving to cut her character to fit the totally different pattern of my own."

He put on his hat, thrust his hands into his pockets, stood for some seconds frowning so heavily that the shaggy eyebrows met and partially concealed the cavernous eyes, then nodded to the master of the house, and sought his buggy. From that day Irene was conscious of a keener and more constant scrutiny on her father's part—a ceaseless *surveillance*, silent, but rigid—that soon grew intolerable. No matter how she employed her time, or whither she went, he seemed thoroughly cognizant of the details of her life; and where she least expected interruption or dictation, his hand, firm though gentle, pointed the way, and his voice calmly but inflexibly directed. Her affection had been in no degree alienated by their long separation, and, through its sway, she submitted for a time; but Huntingdon blood ill-brooked restraint, and, ere long, hers became feverish, necessitating release. As in all tyrannical natures, his exactions grew upon her compliance. She was allowed no margin for the exercise of judgment or inclination; her associates were selected, thrust upon her; her occupations decided without reference to her wishes. From the heartless, frivolous routine marked out, she shrank in disgust; and, painful as was the alternative, she prepared for the clash which soon became inevitable.

From verbal differences she habitually abstained; opinions which she knew to be disagreeable to him she carefully avoided giving expression to in his presence; and while always studiously thoughtful of his comfort, she preserved a respectful deportment, allowing herself no hasty or defiant words. Fond of pomp and ceremony, and imbued with certain aristocratic notions, which an ample fortune had always permitted him to indulge, Mr. Huntingdon entertained company in princely style, and whenever an opportunity offered. His dinners, suppers, and card-parties were known far and wide, and Huntingdon Hall became proverbial for hospitality throughout the State. Strangers were fêted, and it was a rare occurrence for father and daughter to dine quietly together. Fortunately for Irene, the servants were admirably trained; and though this round of company imposed a weight of responsibilities oppressive to one so inexperienced, she applied herself diligently to domestic economy, and soon became familiarized with its details. Her father had been very anxious to provide her with a skilful housekeeper, to relieve her of the care and tedious minutiæ of such matters; but she refused to accept one, avowing her belief that it was the imperative duty of every woman to superintend and inspect the management of her domestic affairs. Consequently, from the first week of her return, she made it a rule to spend an hour after breakfast in her dining-room pantry, determining and arranging the details of the day.

The situation of the house commanded an extensive and beautiful prospect, and the ancient trees that overshadowed it imparted a venerable and imposing aspect. The building was of brick, overcast to represent granite, and along three sides ran a wide gallery, supported by lofty circular pillars, crowned with unusually heavy capitals. The main body consisted of two stories, with a hall in the centre, and three rooms on either side; while two long single-storied wings stretched out right and left, one a billiard-room, the other a greenhouse.

A broad easy flight of white marble steps led up to the richly-carved front door, with its massive silver knocker bearing the name of Huntingdon in old-fashioned Italian characters; and in the arched niches, on either side of this door, stood two statues, brought from Europe by Mr. Huntingdon's father, and supposed to represent certain Roman penates.

The grounds in front, embracing several acres, were enclosed by a brick wall, and at the foot of the hill, at the entrance of the long avenue of elms, stood a tall, arched iron gate. A smoothly-shaven terrace of Bermuda grass ran round the house, and the broad carriage-way swept up to a mound opposite the door, surmounted by the bronze figure of a crouching dog. Such was Irene's home—stately and elegant—kept so thoroughly repaired that, in its cheerfulness, its age was forgotten.

The society of W—— was considered remarkably fine. There was quite an aggregation of wealth and refinement; gentlemen, whose plantations were situated in adjacent counties, resided here, with their families; some, who spent their winters on the seaboard, resorted here for the summer; its bar was said to possess more talent than any other in the State; its schools claimed to be unsurpassed; it boasted of a concert-hall, a lyceum, a handsome court-house, a commodious well-built jail, and half a dozen as fine churches as any country town could desire. I would fain avoid the term, if possible, but no synonym exists—W—— was, indisputably, an "aristocratic" place.

Thus, after more than four years' absence, the summers of which had been spent in travel among the beautiful mountain scenery of the North, the young heiress returned to the home of her childhood.

For several months after her return she patiently, hopefully, faithfully studied the dispositions of the members of various families with whom she foresaw that she would be thrown, by her father's wishes, into intimate relationship, and satisfied herself that, among all these, there was not one, save Dr. Arnold, whose counsel, assistance, or sympathy she felt any inclination to claim. In fine, W—— was not in any respect peculiar, or, as a community, specially afflicted with heartlessness, frivolity, brainlessness, or mammonism; the average was fair, reputable, in all respects. But, incontrovertibly, the girl who came to spend her life among these people was totally dissimilar in criteria of action, thought, and feeling. To the stereotyped conventional standard of fashionable life she had never yielded allegiance; and now stood a social free-thinker. For a season she allowed herself to be whirled on by the current of dinners, parties, and picnics; but soon her sedate, contemplative temperament revolted from the irksome round, and gradually

she outlined and pursued a different course, giving to her gay companions just what courtesy required, no more.

Hugh had prolonged his stay in Europe beyond the period originally designated, and, instead of arriving in time to accompany his uncle and cousin home, he did not sail for some months after their return. At length, however, letters were received announcing his presence in New York, and fixing the day when his relatives might expect him.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LOAN REPAID

The carriage had been dispatched to the depôt, a servant stood at the end of the avenue waiting to throw open the gate, Mr. Huntingdon walked up and down the wide colonnade, and Irene sat before the fire in her own room, holding in one palm the flashing betrothal ring which she had been forced to wear since her return from New York. The few years of partial peace had passed; she knew that the hour drew near when the long-dreaded struggle must begin, and, hopeless of averting it, quietly waited for the storm to break. Dropping the ring in her jewellery-box, she turned the key, and just then her father's voice rang through the house.

"Irene! the carriage is coming up the avenue."

She went slowly downstairs, followed by Paragon, and joined her father at the door. His searching look discovered nothing in the serene face; the carriage stopped, and he hastened to meet his nephew.

"Come at last, eh! Welcome home, my dear boy."

The young man turned from his uncle, sprang up the steps, then paused, and the cousins looked at each other.

"Well, Hugh! I am very glad to see you once more."

She held out her hands, and he saw at a glance that her fingers were unfettered. Seizing them warmly, he bent forward; but she drew back coldly, and he exclaimed—

"Irene! I claim a warmer welcome."

She made a haughty, repellent gesture, and moved forward a few steps, to greet the stranger who accompanied him.

"My daughter, this is your uncle, Eric Mitchell, who has not seen you since you were a baby."

The party entered the house, and, seated beside him, Irene gazed with mingled emotions of pain and pleasure upon her mother's only brother. He was about thirty, but looked older from life-long suffering; had used crutches from the time he was five years of age, having been hopelessly crippled by a fall during his infancy. His features were sharp, his cheeks wore the sallow hue of habitual ill-health, and his fine grey eyes were somewhat sunken. Resting his crutches against the sofa, he leaned back, and looked long and earnestly at his niece. Very dimly he remembered a fair, flaxen-haired baby whom the nurse had held out to be kissed when he was sent to Philadelphia to be treated for his lameness; soon after he heard of his sister's death, and then his tutor took him to Europe, to command the best medical advice of the old world.

"From the faint recollection which I have of your mother, I think you strongly resemble her," he said at last in a fond, gentle tone.

"I don't know about that, Eric. She is far more of a Huntingdon than a Mitchell. She has many of the traits of your family, but in appearance she certainly belongs to my side of the house. She very often reminds me of Hugh's mother."

Conversation turned upon the misfortune of the cripple; he spoke freely of the unsuccessful experiments made by eminent physicians, of the hopelessness of his case; and Irene was particularly impressed by the calmness and patience with which he seemed to have resigned himself to this great affliction. She felt irresistibly drawn toward him, careless of passing hours and of Hugh's ill-concealed impatience of manner. As they rose from the tea-table her cousin said laughingly—

"I protest against monopoly. I have not been able to say three words to my lady-cousin."

"I yield the floor from necessity. My long journey has unfitted me for this evening, and I must bid you all an early good night."

"Can I do anything for you, uncle?"

"No, thank you, Irene; I have a servant who thoroughly understands taking care of me. Go talk to Hugh, who has been wishing me among the antipodes."

He shook hands with her, smiled kindly, and Mr. Huntingdon assisted him to his room.

"Irene, come into the library and let me have a cigar."

"How tenacious your bad habits are, Hugh."

"Smoking belongs to no such category. My habits are certainly quite as tenacious as my cousin's antipathies."

He selected a cigar, lighted it, and drawing a chair near hers, threw himself into it with an expression of great satisfaction. "It is delightful to get back home, and see you again, Irene. I felt some regret at quitting Paris, but the sight of your face more than compensates me."

She was looking very earnestly at him, noting the alteration in his appearance, and for a

moment his eyes drooped before hers. She saw that the years had been spent, not in study, but in a giddy round of pleasure and dissipation; yet the bright, frank, genial expression of boyhood still lingered, and she could not deny that he had grown up a very handsome man.

"Irene, I had a right to expect a warmer welcome than you deigned to give me."

"Hugh, remember that we have ceased to be children. When you learn to regard me simply as your cousin, and are satisfied with a cousin's welcome, then, and not until then, shall you receive it. Let childish whims pass with the years that have separated us; rake up no germs of contention to mar this first evening of your return. Be reasonable, and now tell me how you have employed yourself since we parted; what have you seen? what have you gleaned?"

Insensibly he found himself drawn into a narration of his course of life. She listened with apparent interest, making occasional good-humoured comments, and bringing him back to the subject whenever he attempted a detour toward the topic so extremely distasteful to her.

The clock struck eleven; she rose and said—

"I beg your pardon, Hugh, for keeping you up so late. I ought to have known that you were fatigued by railroad travel, and required sleep. You know the way to your room; it is the same you occupied before you went to college. Good night; I hope you will rest well."

She held out her hand carelessly; he took it eagerly, and holding it up to the light said, in a disappointed tone—

"Irene, where is my ring? Why are you not wearing it?"

"It is in my jewellery-box. As I gave you my reasons for not wearing it, when you offered it to me, it is not necessary to repeat them now. Good night, Hugh; go dream of something more agreeable than our old childish quarrels." She withdrew her fingers and left him.

A week passed, varied by few incidents of interest; the new-comers became thoroughly domesticated—the old routine was re-established. Hugh seemed gay and careless—hunting, visiting, renewing boyish acquaintances, and whiling away the time as inclination prompted. He had had a long conversation with his uncle, and the result was that, for the present, no allusion was made to the future. In Irene's presence the subject was temporarily tabooed. She knew that the project was not relinquished, was only veiled till a convenient season, and, giving to the momentary lull its full value, she acquiesced, finding in Eric's society enjoyment and resources altogether unexpected. Instinctively they seemed to comprehend each other's character, and while both were taciturn and undemonstrative, a warm affection sprang up between them.

On Sunday morning, as the family group sat around the breakfast-table waiting for Hugh, who lingered, as usual, over his second cup of chocolate, Mr. Mitchell suddenly laid down the fork with which he had been describing a series of geometrical figures on the fine damask, and said, "I met a young man in Brussels who interested me extremely, and in connexion with whom I venture the prediction that, if he lives, he will occupy a conspicuous position in the affairs of his country. He is, or was, secretary of Mr. Campbell, our minister to ——, and they were both on a visit to Brussels when I met them. His name is Aubrey, and he told me that he lived here. His talents are of the first order; his ambition unbounded, I should judge; and his patient, laborious application certainly surpasses anything I have ever seen. It happened that a friend of mine, from London, was prosecuting certain researches among the MS. archives at Brussels, and here, immersed in study, he says he found the secretary, who completely distanced him in his investigations, and then, with unexpected generosity, placed his notes at my friend's disposal. His industry is almost incredible. Conversing with Campbell concerning him, I learned that he was a protégé of the minister, who spoke of his future in singularly sanguine terms. He left him some time since to embark in the practice of law. Do you know him, Huntingdon?"

"No, sir! but I know that his father was sentenced to the gallows, and only saved himself from it by cutting his miserable throat, and cheating the law."

The master of the house thrust back his chair violently, crushing one of Paragon's innocent paws as he crouched on the carpet, and overturning a glass which shivered into a dozen fragments at his feet.

Looking at his watch, he said, as if wishing to cut the conversation short: "Irene, if you intend to go to church to-day, it is time that you had your bonnet on. Hugh, what will you do with yourself? Go with Eric and your cousin!"

"No, I rather think I shall stay at home with you. After European cathedrals, our American churches seem excessively plain." Irene went to her room, pondering the conversation. She thought it remarkable that, as long as she had been at home, she had never seen Russell, even on the street.

Unlocking her writing-desk, she took out a tiny note which had accompanied a check for two hundred dollars, and had reached her a few months before she left boarding school. The firm, round, manly hand ran as follows—

"With gratitude beyond all expression for the favour conferred on my mother and myself, some years since, I now return to Miss Huntingdon the money which I have ever regarded as a friendly

loan. Hoping that the future will afford me some opportunity of proving my appreciation of her great kindness,

"I remain, most respectfully,
"Her obliged friend,
"RUSSELL AUBREY.
"NEW YORK, *September 5th.*"

She was conscious of a feeling of regret that the money had been returned; it was pleasant to reflect on the fact that she had laid him under obligation; now it all seemed cancelled. She relocked the desk, and, drawing on her gloves, joined her uncle at the carriage. Arriving at church later than was her wont, she found the family pew occupied by strangers, and crossed the aisle to share a friend's, but at that instant a tall form rose in Mr. Campbell's long-vacant pew, stepped into the aisle, and held open the door. She drew back to suffer her uncle to limp in and lay aside his crutches, saw him give his hand to the stranger, and, sweeping her veil aside as she entered, she saw Russell quietly resume his seat at the end of the pew.

Startled beyond measure, she looked at him intently, and almost wondered that she recognized him, he had changed so materially since the day on which she stood with him before his mother's gate. Meantime the service commenced, she gave her hymn-book to her uncle, and at the same moment Russell found the place, and handed her one of two which lay near him. As she received it their eyes met, and she held out her hand. He took it, she felt, his fingers tremble as they dropped hers, and then both faces bent over the books. When they knelt side by side, and the heavy folds of her elegant dress swept against him, it seemed a feverish dream to her; she could not realize that, at last, they had met again, and her heart beat so fiercely that she pressed her hand upon it, dreading lest he should hear its loud pulsations.

The discourse was ended, the diapason of the organ swelled through the lofty church, priestly hands hovered like white doves over the congregation, dismissing all with blessing. Once more Irene swept back the rich lace veil, fully exposing her face; once more her eyes looked into those of the man who politely held the pew door open; both bowed with stately grace, and she walked down the aisle. She heard Russell talking to her uncle just behind her, heard the inquiries concerning his health, the expression of pleasure at meeting again, the hope which Eric uttered that he should see him frequently during his stay in W——. Without even a glance over her shoulder, she proceeded to the carriage, where her uncle soon joined her.

She met his searching gaze calmly, and as they now neared the house he forbore any further allusion to the subject which he shrewdly suspected engaged her thoughts quite as fully as his own.

CHAPTER XVII

IRENE MEETS RUSSELL

"Surely, Uncle Eric, there is room enough in this large, airy house of ours to accommodate my mother's brother! I thought it was fully settled that you were to reside with us. There is no good reason why you should not. Obviously, we have a better claim upon you than anybody else; why doom yourself to the loneliness of a separate household? Reconsider the matter."

"Irene, I want a house of my own, to which I can feel privileged to invite such guests, such companions as I deem congenial, irrespective of the fiats of would-be social autocrats, and the social ostracism of certain cliques."

She was silent a moment, but met his keen look without the slightest embarrassment, and yet when she spoke he knew, from her eyes and voice, that she fully comprehended his meaning.

"Of course, it is a matter which you must determine for yourself. You are the best judge of what conduces to your happiness; but I am sorry, very sorry, Uncle Eric, that, in order to promote it, you feel it necessary to remove from our domestic circle. I shall miss you painfully."

He looked pained, puzzled, and irresolute; but she smiled, and swept her fingers over the bars of her bird-cage, toying with its golden-throated inmate.

"Have you any engagement for this morning?"

"None, sir. What can I do for you?"

"If you feel disposed, I shall be glad to have you accompany me to town; I want your assistance in selecting a set of china for my new home. Will you go?"

A shadow drifted over the colourless tranquil face, as she said sadly—

"Uncle Eric, is it utterly useless for me to attempt to persuade you to relinquish this project, and remain with us?"

"Utterly useless, my dear child."

"I will get my bonnet, and join you at the carriage."

Very near the cottage formerly occupied by Mrs. Aubrey stood a small brick house, partially concealed by poplar and sycamore trees, and surrounded by a neat, well-arranged flower-garden. This was the place selected and purchased by the cripple for his future home. Mr. Huntingdon had opposed the whole proceeding, and invited his brother-in-law to reside with him; but beneath the cordial surface the guest felt that other sentiments rolled deep and strong. He had little in common with his sister's husband, and only a warm and increasing affection for his niece now induced him to settle in W——. Some necessary repairs had been made, some requisite arrangements completed regarding servants, and to-day the finishing touches were given to the snug little bachelor establishment. When it was apparent that no arguments would avail to alter the decision, Irene ceased to speak of it, and busied herself in various undertakings to promote her uncle's comfort. She made pretty white curtains for his library windows, knitted bright-coloured worsted lamp-mats, and hemmed and marked the contents of the linen-closet. The dining-room pantry she took under her special charge, and at the expiration of ten days, when the master took formal possession, she accompanied him, and enjoyed the pleased surprise with which he received her donation of cakes, preserves, ketchups, pickles, etc., etc., neatly stowed away on the spotless shelves.

"What do those large square boxes in the hall contain?"

"Books which I gathered in Europe and selected in New York; among them many rare old volumes, which you have never seen. Come down next Monday, and help me to number and shelve them; afterward, we will read them together. Lay aside your bonnet, and spend the evening with me."

"No, I must go back; Hugh sent me word that he would bring company to tea."

He took her hand, and drew her close to his chair, saying gently—

"Ah, Irene! I wish I could keep you always. You would be happier here, in this little unpretending home of mine, than presiding as mistress over that great palatial house on the hill yonder."

He kissed her fingers tenderly, and, taking her basket she left him alone in his new home.

A few weeks passed without incident; Hugh went to New Orleans to visit friends, and Mr. Huntingdon was frequently absent at the plantation.

One day he expressed the desire that Judge Harris's family should dine with him, and added several gentlemen, "to make the party merry." Irene promptly issued the invitations, suppressing the reluctance which filled her heart; for the young people were not favourites, and she dreaded Charlie's set speeches and admiring glances, not less than his mother's endless disquisitions on fashion and the pedigree of all the best families of W——and its vicinage. Grace had grown up very pretty, highly accomplished, even-tempered, gentle-hearted, but full of her mother's

fashionable notions, and, withal, rather weak and frivolous. She and Irene were constantly thrown into each other's society, but no warmth of feeling existed on either side. Grace could not comprehend her companion's character, and Irene wearied of her gay, heedless chit-chat. As the latter anticipated, the day proved very tiresome; the usual complement of music was contributed by Grace, the expected quantity of flattering nothings gracefully uttered by her brother, the customary amount of execrable puns handed around the circle for patronage and Irene gave the signal for dinner. Mr. Huntingdon prided himself on his fine wines, and, after the decanters had circulated freely, the gentlemen grew garrulous as market-women.

Irene was gravely discussing the tariff question with Mr. Herbert Blackwell (whom Mrs. Harris pronounced the most promising young lawyer of her acquaintance), and politely listening to his stereotyped reasoning, when a scrap of conversation at the opposite end of the table, attracted her attention.

"Huntingdon, my dear fellow, I tell you I never made a mistake in my life, when reading people's minds; and if Aubrey has not the finest legal intellect in W——, I will throw up my judgeship. You have seen Campbell, I suppose? He returned last week, and, by the way, I half-expected to meet him to-day; well, I was talking to him about Aubrey, and he laughed his droll, chuckling laugh, snapped his bony fingers in my face; and said—

"'Aye! aye, Harris, let him alone; hands off! and I will wager my new office against your old one that he steps into your honour's shoes.' Now you know perfectly well that Campbell has no more enthusiasm than a brick wall, or a roll of red tape; but he is as proud of the young man as if he were his son. Do you know that he has taken him into partnership?"

"Pshaw! he will never commit such a *faux pas*."

"But he has; I read the notice in this morning's paper. Pass the Madeira. The fact is, we must not allow our old prejudices to make us unjust. I know Aubrey has struggled hard; he had much to contend——"

With head slightly inclined, and eyes fixed on Mr. Blackwell's face, Irene had heard all that passed, and as the gentleman paused in his harangue to drain his glass, she rose and led the way to the parlours. The gentlemen adjourned to the smoking-room, and in a short time Mrs. Harris ordered her carriage, pleading an engagement with Grace's mantua-maker as an excuse for leaving so early. With a feeling of infinite relief the hostess accompanied them to the door, saw the carriage descend the avenue, and, desiring one of the servants to have Erebus saddled at once, she went to her room and changed the rich dinner-dress for her riding-habit. As she sprang into the saddle, and gathered up the reins, her father called from the open window, whence issued curling wreaths of blue smoke—

"Where now, Irene?"

"I am going to ride; it threatened rain this morning, and I was afraid to venture."

He said something, but without hearing she rode off, and was soon out of sight, leaving the town to the left, and taking the rocky road leading up the hill-side to the cemetery gate. Dismounting she fastened the reins to one of the iron spikes, and, gathering the folds of her habit over her arm, carried her flowers to the family burying-ground. It was a large square lot, enclosed by a handsome railing and tall gate, bearing the name of "Huntingdon" in silver letters. As she approached, she was surprised to find a low brick wall and beautiful new marble monument close to her father's lot, and occupying a space which had been filled with grass and weeds a few weeks previous.

As she passed the new lot the gate swung open, and Russell stood before her.

"Good evening, Miss Huntingdon."

"Good evening, Mr. Aubrey."

The name sounded strange and harsh as she uttered it, and involuntarily she paused and held out her hand. He accepted it; for an instant the cold fingers lay in his warm palm, and as she withdrew them he said, in the rich mellow voice which she had heard in the church—

"Allow me to show you my mother's monument."

He held the gate open, and she entered and stood at his side. The monument was beautiful in its severe simplicity—a pure faultless shaft, crowned with a delicately chiselled wreath of poppy leaves, and bearing these words in gilt letters: "Sacred to the memory of my mother, Amy Aubrey." Just below, in black characters, "*Resurgam*"; and underneath the whole, on a finely fluted scroll, the inscription of St. Gilgen. After a silence of some moments Russell pointed to the singular and solemn words, and said, as if speaking rather to himself than to her—

"I want to say always, with Paul Flemming, 'I will be strong,' and therefore I placed here the inscription which proved an evangel to him, that when I come to my mother's grave I may be strengthened, not melted, by the thronging of bitter memories."

She looked up as he spoke, and the melancholy splendour of the deep eyes stirred her heart as nothing had ever done before.

"I have a few flowers left; let me lay them as an affectionate tribute, an '*in memoriam*' on your

mother's tomb—for the olden time, the cottage days, are as fresh in my recollection as in yours."

She held out a woodland bouquet which she had previously gathered; he took it, and strewed the blossoms along the broad base of the shaft, reserving only a small cluster of the rosy china cups. Both were silent; but as she turned to go, a sudden gust blew her hat from her head, the loosened comb fell upon the grass, and down came the heavy masses of hair. She twisted them hastily into a coil, fastened them securely, and received her hat from him, with a cool—

"Thank you, sir. When did you hear from Electra?"

They walked on to the cemetery gate, and he answered—

"I have heard nothing for some weeks. Have you any message? I am going to New York in a few days to try to persuade her to return to W—— with me."

"I doubt the success of your mission; W—— has little to tempt an artist like your cousin. Be kind enough to tender her my love, and best wishes for the realization of her artistic dreams."

They had reached the gate where Erebus waited, when Russell took off his hat.

"You have a long walk to town," said Irene, as Russell arranged her horse's reins.

"I shall not find it long. It is a fine piece of road, and the stars will be up to light it."

He held out his hand to assist her; she sprang easily to the saddle, then leaned toward him, every statue-like curve and moulding of her proud ivory face stamping themselves on his recollection as she spoke.

"Be so good as to hand me my glove; I dropped it at your feet as I mounted. Thank you. Good evening, Mr. Aubrey; take my best wishes on your journey and its mission."

"Good-bye, Miss Huntingdon." He raised his hat, and, as she wheeled off, the magnetic handsome face followed, haunted her. Erebus was impatient, out of humour, and flew up the next steep hill as if he, too, were haunted.

On through gathering gloom dashed horse and rider, over the little gurgling stream, through the gate, up the dark, rayless avenue to the doorstep. The billiard-room was a blaze of light, and the cheerful sound of mingled voices came out at the open window, to tell that the gentlemen had not yet finished their game. Pausing in the hall, Irene listened an instant to distinguish the voices, then ascended the long easy staircase. The lamp threw a mellow radiance on the steps, and as she reached the landing Hugh caught her in his arms, and kissed her warmly. Startled by his unexpected appearance, she recoiled a step or two and asked, rather haughtily—

"When did you get home?"

"Only a few moments after you left the house. Do change your dress quickly, and come down. I have a thousand things to say."

She waited to hear no more, but disengaged herself and went to her room.

When she went down she met her father at the dining room door.

"Come, Queen; we are waiting for you."

He looked at her fondly, took her hand, and drew her to the table; and, in after years, she recalled this occasion with mournful pleasure as the last on which he had ever given her his pet name.

CHAPTER XVIII

A REFUSAL

"Come out on the colonnade; the air is delicious." As he spoke, Hugh drew his cousin's arm through his, and led the way from the tea-table.

"Irene, how long do you intend to keep me in painful suspense?"

"I am not aware that I have in any degree kept you in suspense."

"You shall not evade me; I have been patient, and the time has come when we must talk of our future. Irene, dearest, be generous, and tell me when will you give me, irrevocably, this hand which has been promised to me from your infancy?"

He took the hand and carried it to his lips, but she forcibly withdrew it, and, disengaging her arm, said emphatically—

"Never, Hugh. Never."

"How can you trifle with me, Irene? If you could realize how impatient I am for the happy day when I shall call you my wife, you would be serious, and fix an early period for our marriage."

"Hugh, why will you affect to misconceive my meaning? I am serious; I have pondered, long and well, a matter involving your life-long happiness and mine, and I tell you, most solemnly, that I will never be your wife."

"Oh, Irene! your promise! your sacred promise!"

"I never gave it! On the contrary, I have never failed to show you that my whole nature rebelled against the most unnatural relation forced upon me."

"My dear Irene, have you, then, no love for me? I have hoped and believed that you hid your love behind your cold mask of proud silence. You must, you do love me, my beautiful cousin!"

"You do not believe your own words; you are obliged to know better. I love you as my cousin, love you somewhat as I love Uncle Eric, love you as the sole young relative left to me, as the only companion of my lonely childhood; but other love than this I never had, never can have for you. Hugh, my cousin, look fearlessly at the unvarnished truth; neither you nor I have one spark of that affection which alone can sanction marriage."

"Indeed, you wrong me, my worshipped cousin. You are dearer to me than anything else on earth. I have loved you, and you only, from my boyhood; you have been a lovely idol from earliest recollection."

"You are mistaken, most entirely mistaken; I am not to be deceived, neither can you hoodwink yourself. You like me, you love me, in the same quiet way that I love you; you admire me, perhaps, more than anyone you chance to know just now; you are partial to my beauty, and, from long habit, have come to regard me as your property, much in the same light as that in which you look upon your costly diamond buttons, or your high-spirited horses, or rare imported pointers. Hugh, I abhor sham! and I tell you now that I never will be a party to that which others have arranged without my consent."

"Ah! I see how matters stand. Having disposed of your heart, and lavished your love elsewhere, you shrink from fulfilling the sacred obligations that make you mine. I little dreamed that you were so susceptible, else I had not left you feeling so secure. My uncle has not proved the faithful guardian I believed him when I entrusted my treasure, my affianced bride to his care."

Bitter disappointment flashed in his face and quivered in his voice, rendering him reckless of consequences. But though he gazed fiercely at her as he uttered the taunt, it produced not the faintest visible effect.

"Confess who stands between your heart and mine. I have a right to ask; I will know."

"You forget yourself, my cousin. Your right is obviously a debatable question; we will waive it, if you please. I have told you already, and now I repeat it for the last time, I will not go with you to the altar, because neither of us has proper affection for the other to warrant such a union; because it would be an infamous pecuniary contract, revolting to every true soul. Hugh, cherish no animosity against me; I merit none. Because we cannot be more, shall we be less than friends?"

She turned to leave him, but he caught her dress, and exclaimed, with more tenderness than he had ever manifested before—

"Oh, Irene! do not reject me utterly! I cannot relinquish you. Give me one more year to prove my love—to win yours. If your proud heart is still your own, may I not hope to obtain it by——"

"No, Hugh! no. As well hope to inspire affection in yonder mute marble guardians. Forgive me if I pain you, but I must be candid at every hazard." She pointed to the statues near the door, and went through the greenhouse to the library, thence to the observatory, expecting, ere long, to be joined by her father. Gradually the house became quiet, and, oppressed with the painful sense of

coming trouble, she sought her own room just as the clock struck twelve. Pausing to count the strokes, she saw a light gleaming through the keyhole of her father's door, opposite her own, and heard the sound of low but earnest conversation mingled with the restless tramp of pacing feet. She was powerfully tempted to cross the passage, knock, and have the ordeal ended then and there; but second thought whispered, "To-morrow will soon be here; be patient." She entered her room, and, wearied by the events of the day, fell asleep, dreaming of the new lot in the cemetery, and the lonely, joyless man who haunted it.

As she adjusted her riding-habit the following morning, and suffered Andrew to arrange her stirrup, the latter said good-humouredly—

"So, Mas' Hugh got the start of you? It isn't often he beats you."

"What do you mean?"

"He started a while ago, and, if he drives as he generally does, he will get to his plantation in time for dinner."

"Did father go, too?"

"No, ma'am; only Mas' Hugh in his own buggy."

Returning from her ride, she stood a moment on the front step, looking down the avenue. The Bermuda terrace blazed in the sunlight like a jewelled coronal, the billowy sea of foliage, crested by dewy drops, flashed and dripped as the soft air stirred the ancient trees, the hedges were all alive with birds and butterflies, the rich aroma of brilliant and countless flowers, the graceful curl of smoke wreathing up from the valley beyond, the measured musical tinkle of bells as the cows slowly descended the distant hills, and, over all, like God's mantling mercy, a summer sky.

Involuntarily she stretched out her arms to the bending heavens and her lips moved, but no sound escaped to tell what petition went forth to the All-Father. She went to her room, changed her dress, and joined her father at the breakfast-table. Half-concealed behind his paper, he took no notice of her quiet "good morning," seeming absorbed in an editorial. The silent meal ended, he said, as they left the table—

"I want to see you in the library."

She followed him without comment; he locked the door, threw open the blinds, and drew two chairs to the window, seating himself immediately in front of her. For a moment he eyed her earnestly, as if measuring her strength; and she saw the peculiar sparkle in his falcon eye, which, like the first lurid flash in a darkened sky, betokened tempests.

"Irene, I was very much astonished to learn the result of an interview between Hugh and yourself; I can scarcely believe that you were in earnest, and feel disposed to attribute your foolish words to some trifling motive of girlish coquetry or momentary pique. You have long been perfectly well aware that you and your cousin were destined for each other; that I solemnly promised the marriage should take place as soon as you were of age; that all my plans and hopes for you centred in this one engagement. I have not pressed the matter on your attention of late, because I knew you had sense enough to appreciate your position, and because I believed you would be guided by my wishes in this important affair. You are no longer a child; I treat you as a reasonable woman, and now I tell you candidly it is the one wish of my heart to see you Hugh's wife."

"Father, my happiness will not be promoted by this marriage, and if you are actuated solely by this motive, allow me to remain just as I am. I should be most miserable as Hugh's wife; most utterly miserable."

"Why so?"

"Father, my own feelings stand an everlasting barrier to our union. I do not love Hugh, and—I must tell you, sir, that I think it wrong for cousins to marry."

"You talk like a silly child; I thought you had more sense. Your objections I have listened to; they are imaginary and trifling; and I ask you, as a father has a right to ask his child, to waive these ridiculous notions, and grant the only request I have ever made of you. Tell me, my daughter, that you will consent to accept your cousin, and thereby make me happy."

He stooped and kissed her forehead, watching her countenance eagerly.

"Oh, father! do not ask this of me! Anything else! anything else."

"Answer me, my darling child; give me your promise."

His hold was painful, and an angry pant mingled with the pleading tones. She raised her head and said slowly—

"My father, I cannot."

He threw her hand from him, and sprang up.

"Ingrate! do you mean to say that you will not fulfil a sacred engagement?—that you will break an oath given to the dead."

"I do not hold myself bound by the oaths of another, though he were twice my father. I am responsible for no acts but my own. I, only, can give myself away. Why should you wish to force this marriage on me? Father, do you think that a woman has no voice in a matter involving her happiness for life?"

"Oh! I suspected that your cursed obstinacy would meet me here, as well as elsewhere in your life. You have been a source of trouble and sorrow from your birth; but the time has come to end all this. You know that I never menace idly, and if you refuse to hear reason, I will utterly disinherit you, though you are my only child. Ponder it well. You have been raised in luxury, and taught to believe yourself one of the wealthiest heiresses in the state; contrast your present position, your elegant home, your fastidious tastes gratified to the utmost; contrast all this, I say, with poverty—imagine yourself left in the world without one cent! Think of it! think of it! My wealth is my own, mark you, and I will give it to whom I please, irrespective of all claims of custom. Now the alternative is fully before you, and on your own head be the consequences. Will you accede to my wishes, as any dutiful child should, or will you deliberately incur my everlasting displeasure? Will you marry Hugh?"

"Father, I will not marry Hugh, so help me, God!".

Silence fell between them for several moments; something in that fixed, calm face of his child awed him, but it was temporary and, with a bitter laugh, he exclaimed—

"Oh, very well! Your poverty be upon your own head in coming years, when the grave closes over me. At my death every cent of my property passes to Hugh, and with it my name, and between you and me, as an impassable gulf, lies my everlasting displeasure. Understand that, though we live here in one house, as father and child, I do not, and will not, forgive you. You have defied me; now eat the bitter fruit of your disobedience."

"I have no desire to question the disposition of your wealth; if you prefer to give it to my cousin, I am willing, perfectly willing. I enjoy wealth as well as most people do, I suppose; but poverty does not frighten me half so much as a loveless marriage. Give Hugh your fortune, if you wish, but, father! father! let there be no estrangement between you and me. I can bear everything but your displeasure; I dread nothing so much as the loss of your love. Oh, father! forgive a disappointment which my conscience would not permit me to avert. Forgive the pain which, God knows, I would not have caused you if I could have avoided it without compromising principle. Oh, my father! my father! let not dollars and cents stand between you and your only child. I ask nothing now but your love."

She drew nearer, but he waved her off, and said with a sneering laugh—

"Away with all such cant! I gave you the choice, and you made your selection with your eyes fully open. Accept poverty as your doom, and with it my eternal displeasure. I intend to make you suffer for your obstinacy. You shall find, to your sorrow, that I am not to be trifled with, or my name is not Leonard Huntingdon. Now go your own way, and find what a thorny path you have made for yourself."

He pointed to the door as he had done years before, when the boarding-school decree went forth, and without remonstrance she left him, and sat down on the steps of the greenhouse. Soon after, the sound of his buggy wheels told her that he had gone to town, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, she recalled the painful conversation from first to last. That he meant all he had threatened, and more, she did not question for an instant, and, thinking of her future, she felt sick at heart. But with the shame and sorrow came also a thrill of joy; she had burst the fetters: she was free. Wounded affection bled freely, but brain and conscience exulted in the result.

CHAPTER XIX

RUSSELL VISITS ELECTRA

The patient work of twelve months drew to a close; the study of years bore its first fruit; the last delicate yet quivering touch was given; Electra threw down palette and brush, and, stepping back, surveyed the canvas. The Exhibition would open within two days, and this was to be her contribution. A sad-eyed Cassandra, with pallid, prescient, woe-struck features—an over-mastering face, wherein the flickering light of divination struggled feebly with the human horror of the To-Come, whose hideous mysteries were known only to the royal prophetess. In mute and stern despair it looked out from the canvas, a curious anomalous thing—cut adrift from human help, bereft of aid from heaven—yet, in its doomed isolation, scorning to ask the sympathy which its extraordinary loveliness extorted from all who saw it. The artist's pride in this, her first finished creation, might well be pardoned, for she was fully conscious that the cloud-region of a painful novitiate lay far beneath her; that henceforth she would never miss the pressure of long-coveted chaplets from her brow; that she should bask in the warm, fructifying rays of public favour; and measureless exultation flashed in her beautiful eyes.

The door opened, and Russell came into the studio. She was not expecting him; his sudden appearance gave her no time to adjust the chilling mask of pride, and all her uncontrolled affection found eloquent language in the joyful face.

"Russell! my own dear Russell!"

He drew his arm around her and kissed her flushed cheek, and each looked at the other, wondering at the changes which years had wrought.

"Electra, you have certainly improved more than anyone I ever knew. You look the impersonation of perfect health; it is needless to ask how you are." And again his lips touched the beaming face pressed against his shoulder. Her arms stole tremblingly around his neck, past indifference was forgotten in the joy of his presence.

"Sit down, and let me look at you. You have grown so tall and commanding that I am half afraid of my own cousin. You are less like Aunt Amy than formerly."

"Allow me to look at your painting first, for it will soon be too dark to examine it. This is the Cassandra of which you wrote me."

He stood before it for some moments in silence, and she watched him with breathless eagerness—for his opinion was of more value to her than that of all the *dilettanti* and *connoisseurs* who would soon inspect it. Gradually his dark cold face kindled, and she had her reward.

"It is a masterly creation; a thing of wonderful and imperishable beauty; it is a great success—as such the world will receive it—and hundreds will proclaim your triumph. I am proud of it, and doubly proud of you."

He held out his hand, and, as she put her fingers in his, her head drooped, and hot tears blinded her. Praise from the lips she loved best stirred her womanly heart as the applause of the public could never do.

"Come, sit down, Electra, and tell me something of your life, since the death of your friend, Mr. Clifton."

"Did you receive my last letter, giving an account of Mrs. Clifton's death?"

"Yes; just as I stepped upon the platform of the cars it was handed to me. I had heard nothing from you for so long, that I thought it was time to look after you."

"You had started, then, before you knew that I was going to Europe?"

"Yes."

He could not understand the instantaneous change which came over her countenance—the illumination, followed as suddenly by a smile, half compassionate, half bitter. She pressed one hand to her heart, and said—

"Mrs. Clifton never seemed to realize her son's death, though, after paralysis took place, and she became speechless, I thought she recovered her memory in some degree. She survived him just four months, and, doubtless, was saved much grief by her unconsciousness of what had occurred. Poor old lady! she suffered little for a year past, and died, I hope, without pain. I have the consolation of knowing that I did all that could be done to promote her comfort. Russell, I would not live here for any consideration; nothing but a sense of duty has detained me this long. I promised him that I would not forsake his mother. But you can have no adequate conception of the feeling of desolation which comes over me when I sit here during the long evenings. He seems watching me from picture-frames and pedestals; his face, his pleading, patient, wan face, haunts me perpetually. And yet I tried to make him happy; God knows I did my duty."

She sprang up and paced the room for some moments, with her hands behind her, and tears glittering on her cheeks. Pausing at last on the rug, she pointed to a large square object, closely shrouded and added—

"Yonder stands his last picture, unfinished. The day he died he put a few feeble strokes upon it, and bequeathed the completion of the task to me. For several years he worked occasionally on it, but much remains to be done. It is the 'Death of Socrates.' I have not even looked at it since that night; I do not intend to touch it until after I visit Italy; I doubt whether my hand will ever be steady enough to give the last strokes. Oh, Russell! the olden time, the cottage days, seem far, far off to me now!"

Leaning against the mantelpiece, she dropped her head on her hand, but when he approached and stood at the opposite corner, he saw that the tears had dried.

"Neither of us has had a sunny life, Electra; both have had numerous obstacles to contend with; both have very bitter memories. Originally there was a certain parallelism in our characters, but with our growth grew the divergence. You have preserved the nobler part of your nature better than I; for my years I am far older than you; none of the brightness of my boyhood seems to linger about me. Contact with the world is an indurating process; I really did not know how hard I had grown, until I felt my heart soften at sight of you. I need you to keep the kindly charities and gentle amenities of life before me, and, therefore, I have come for you. But for my poverty I never would have given you up so long; I felt that it would be for your advantage, in more than one respect to remain with Mr. Clifton until I had acquired my profession. I knew that you would enjoy privileges here which I could not give you in my straitened circumstances. Things have changed; Mr. Campbell has admitted me to partnership; my success I consider an established fact. Give up, for a season, this projected tour of Europe; wait till I can go with you—till I can take you; go back to W—— with me. You can continue your art studies, if you wish it; you can prosecute them there as well as here. You are ambitious, Electra; so am I; let us work together."

She raised her head and looked up at the powerful, nobly-proportioned form, the grand, kingly face, calm and colourless, the large, searching black eyes, within whose baffling depths lay all the mysteries of mesmerism, and a spasm of pain seized her own features. She shaded her brow, and answered—

"No, Russell; I could not entertain that thought an instant."

"Are you too proud to accept a home from me?"

"Not too proud, exactly; but, as long as I have health, I mean to make a support. I will not burden you."

"Full value received for benefit rendered is not charity; come to W——, share my future, and what fortune I may find assigned me. I have bought the cottage, and intend to build a handsome house there some day, where you and Mr. Campbell and I can live peacefully. You shall twine your æsthetic fancies all about it, to make it picturesque enough to suit your fastidious artistic taste. Come and save me from what you consider my worse than vandalian proclivities. I came here simply and solely in the hope of prevailing on you to return with me. I make this request, not because I think it will be expected of me, but for more selfish reasons—because it is a matter resting very near my heart."

"Oh, Russell! you tempt me."

"I wish to do so. My blood beats in your veins; you are the only relative I value, and were you indeed my sister, I should scarcely love you more. With all a brother's interest, why should I not claim a brother's right to keep you with me, at least until you find your Pylades, and give him a higher claim before God and man? Electra, were I your brother, you would require no persuasion; why hesitate now?"

She clasped her hands behind her, as if for support in some fiery ordeal, and, gathering up her strength, spoke rapidly, like one who fears that resolution will fail before some necessary sentence is pronounced.

"You are very kind and generous, Russell, and for all that you have offered me I thank you from the depth of a full heart. The consciousness of your continued interest and affection is inexpressibly precious; but my disposition is too much like your own to suffer me to sit down in idleness, while there is so much to be done in the world. I, too, want to earn a noble reputation, which will survive long after I have been gathered to my fathers; I want to accomplish some work, looking upon which, my fellow-creatures will proclaim: 'That woman has not lived in vain; the world is better and happier because she came and laboured in it.' I want my name carved, not on monumental marble only, but upon the living, throbbing heart of my age!—stamped indelibly on the generation in which my lot is cast. Perhaps I am too sanguine of success; a grievous disappointment may await all my ambitious hopes, but failure will come from want of genius, not lack of persevering patient toil. Upon the threshold of my career, facing the loneliness of coming years, I resign that hope with which, like a golden thread, most women embroider their future. I dedicate myself, my life, unreservedly to Art."

"You believe that you will be happier among the marble and canvas of Italy than in W—— with me?"

"Yes; I shall be better satisfied there. All my life it has gleamed afar off, a glorious land of promise to my eager, longing spirit. From childhood I have cherished the hope of reaching it, and the fruition is near at hand. Italy! bright Alma Mater of the art to which I consecrate my years.

Do you wonder that, like a lonely child, I stretch, out my arms toward it? Yet my stay there will be but for a season. I go to complete my studies, to make myself a more perfect instrument for my noble work, and then I shall come home—come, not to New York, but to my own dear native South, to W——, that I may labour under the shadow of its lofty pines, and within hearing of its murmuring river—dearer to me than classic Arno, or immortal Tiber. I wrote you that Mr. Clifton had left me a legacy, which, judiciously invested, will defray my expenses in Europe, where living is cheaper than in this country. Mr. Young has taken charge of the money for me, and has kindly offered to attend to my remittances. Aunt Ruth's friends, the Richardsons, consented to wait for me until after the opening of the Exhibition of the Academy of Design, and one week from to-morrow we expect to sail."

"What do you know of the family?"

"Nothing, except that the lady, who is an old friend of my aunt, is threatened with consumption, and has been advised to spend a year or two in Florence. Aunt Ruth took me to see her the other day; she seems intelligent and agreeable, and I daresay I shall find her kind and pleasant enough."

"Since such is the programme you have marked out, I trust that no disappointments await you, and that all your bright dreams may be realized. But if it should prove otherwise, and you grow weary of your art, sick of isolation, and satiated with Italy, remember that I shall welcome you home and gladly share with you all that I possess. You are embarking in an experiment which thousands have tried before you, and wrecked happiness upon; but I have no right to control your future, and certainly no desire to discourage you. At all events, I hope our separation will be brief."

A short silence followed, broken at last by Electra, who watched him keenly as she spoke—

"Tell me something about Irene. Of course, in a small town like W——, you must see her frequently."

"By no means. I think I have seen her but three times since her childhood—once riding with her father, then accidentally at church, and again a few evenings before I left, at the graveyard, where she was dressing a tombstone with flowers. There we exchanged a few words for the first time, and this reminds me that I am bearer of a message yet undelivered. She inquired after you, and desired me to tender you her love and best wishes."

"I have her here in crayons; tell me what you think of the likeness."

She took down a portfolio and selected the head of her quondam playmate, holding it under the gaslight, and still scrutinizing her cousin's countenance. He took it, and looked gravely, earnestly, at the lovely features.

"It scarcely does her justice; I doubt whether any portrait ever will. Beside, the expression of her face has changed materially since this was sketched. There is a harder outline now about her mouth, less of dreaminess in the eyes, more of cold *hauteur* in the whole face. If you desire it, I can in one line of Tennyson photograph her proud beauty, as I saw her mounted on her favourite horse, the week that I left home—

"'Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null!'"

He laid the drawing back in the open portfolio, crossed the room, and took up his hat.

"Where are you going, Russell? Can't you spend the evening with me at Aunt Ruth's?"

"No, thank you; I must go. There is to be a great political meeting at Tammany Hall to-night, and I am particularly anxious to attend."

"What! are you, too, engaged in watching the fermentation of the political vat?"

"Yes, I am most deeply interested; no true lover of his country can fail to be so at this juncture."

"How long will you be in New York?"

"Since I cannot persuade you to return with me, my stay here will be shortened. One of our courts meets soon, and though Mr. Campbell will be there to attend to the cases, I want, if possible, to be present. I shall return day after to-morrow. And now good night; I will see you early in the morning."

The door closed behind him, and she remained standing for some time just as he left her. Slowly the folded hands shrank from each other, and dropped nerveless to her side; the bright glow in her cheeks, the dash of crimson on her lips, faded from both; the whole face relaxed into an expression of hopeless agony.

CHAPTER XX

A CANDIDATE FOR THE LEGISLATURE

"Don't you know that even granite millstones finally grind themselves into impalpable powder? You give yourself no rest, Aubrey, and human machinery wears rapidly. Simply for this reason, I sent for you to come and take a cup of tea with me."

"I have been too much engaged of late to spare an evening to merely social claims. A man whose life rests at his feet to be lifted to some fitting pedestal, has little leisure for the luxury of friendly visiting."

The two were in Eric Mitchell's pleasant library. Russell sat in an arm-chair, and the master of the house reclined on a lounge drawn near the hearth. The mellow glow of the lamp, the flash and crackle of the fire, the careless, lazy posture of the invalid, all betokened quiet comfort, save the dark fixed face, and erect, restless figure of the guest.

"But, Aubrey, you have not asked my opinion of your speech."

"I was not aware that you heard it."

"Of course not, but I read it; and let me tell you, it was a great speech, a masterly argument, that will make a lasting impression upon the people. It has greatly changed the vote of this county already."

"You mistake appearances; the seed fell in good soil, but party spirit came, as fowls of the air, and devoured it."

"At any rate, it produced a profound impression on public opinion, and startled some of our political patriarchs."

"No, a mere transitory effect; they have folded their arms and gone to sleep again. I am, of course, gratified by your favourable appreciation of my effort, but I differ with you as to its result. The surging waves of Northern faction and fanaticism already break ominously against our time-honoured constitutional dykes, and if the South would strengthen her bulwarks, there is no time to be slept or wrangled away."

As he spoke, Russell's eye fell upon a large oval vase on the mantelpiece filled with rare exotics, whose graceful tendrils were tastefully disposed into a perfumed fringe. Rising, he looked carefully at the brilliant hues, and said, as he bent to inhale their fragrance—

"Where did you grow such flowers at this season?"

"Irene brings them almost every day from the greenhouse on the hill. She takes a peculiar pleasure in arranging them in my vases. I think she stood a half-hour yesterday twining and bending those stems the way she wanted them to hang. They are so brittle that I snap the blossoms off, but in her hands they seem pliable enough."

Russell withdrew the fingers which had wandered caressingly amid the delicate leaves, and, reseating himself, took a book from his pocket.

He drew his chair nearer the lamp and began to read aloud. Nearly a half-hour passed thus, when the library door was opened hastily, and Irene came in, dressed magnificently in party costume. She stood a moment, irresolute and surprised, with her eyes fixed on Russell's, then both bowed silently, and she came to the fire.

"How are you, Uncle Eric? You look flushed, feverish." She laid her cold, pearly hand on his forehead, and stood at his side.

"Tolerably comfortable, thanks to Mr. Aubrey, who has made me almost forget my headache. You will be fashionably late at the party to-night."

"Yes! as usual; but for a better reason than because I wish to be fashionable. I wanted to know how you were, and as father was not quite ready, I came in advance, and sent the carriage back for him and Hugh. I was not aware that you were in Mr. Aubrey's hands for the evening. You were reading, I believe. Pardon my intrusion, and do not let me interrupt you."

She stood still a moment, listening.

"Good night, Uncle Eric; the carriage is coming. I believe I should know the tramp of those horses amid a regiment of cavalry."

"Why need you hurry off? Let your father come in."

"I will spare him that trouble. Good night, Mr. Aubrey."

She turned to leave the room, but, in gathering her cloak around her, dropped her fan. Russell stooped to pick it up, and, as he restored it, their hands met. His brow flushed, but not even the pale pearly glow of a sea-shell crept to her cheek. Again she raised her eyes to his, and a haughty, dazzling smile flashed over her face as she inclined her head.

"Thank you, sir."

There was a brief silence, broken by Eric, when the sound of the carriage had died away.

"Irene is the only perfectly beautiful woman I ever saw; and yet, Aubrey, it makes me sad to watch her countenance."

"Whenever I see her I cannot avoid recalling an old Scandinavian myth; she realizes so fully my ideal Iduna, standing at the portals of Valhalla, offering apples of immortality."

He returned at once to his book and read several pages, occasionally pausing to call attention to some special passage; finally he rose, and took his hat.

"It is early yet, Aubrey; don't go."

"Thank you; I must fulfil another engagement."

"A word before you leave; will you be a candidate for the legislature?"

"Yes; I was waited upon by a committee to-day, and my name will be announced to-morrow. Good night."

Slowly he walked back to town, and once upon the main street, took a new pair of gloves from his pocket, fitted them carefully, and directed his steps to the elegant residence, whose approach was well-nigh blocked up with carriages. This was the second time that he had been invited by the Hendersons, and he had almost determined to decline as formerly, but something in Irene's chill manner changed his resolution. He knew, from various circumstances, that the social edict against him was being revoked in fashionable circles; that because he had risen without its permission, aid, or countenance, and in defiance of its sneers, the world was beginning to court him. A gloomy scowl sat on his stern lips as he mounted the steps of the mansion from which his meek and suffering mother had borne bundles of plain work, or delicate masses of embroidery, for the mother and daughter who passed her in the street with a supercilious stare. *Beau-monde* suddenly awoke to the recollection that, "after all, Mrs. Aubrey belonged to one of the wealthiest and first families in the state." At first Russell had proudly repelled all overtures, but gradually he was possessed by a desire to rule in the very circle which had so long excluded his family. Most fully he appreciated his position and the motives which actuated the social autocrats of W——; he was no longer the poor disgraced clerk, but the talented young lawyer, and prospective heir of Mr. Campbell's wealth. Bitterly, bitterly came memories of early trial, and now the haughtiness of Irene's manner stung him as nothing else could possibly have done. He was at a loss to comprehend this change in one who had dared so much in order to assist his family, and proud defiance arose in his heart. It was ten o'clock, the fête was at its height; the sound of music, the shimmer of jewels and rustle of costly silks mingled with the hum of conversation, and the tread of dancing feet as Russell deposited hat and overcoat in the dressing-room and entered the blazing parlours. The quadrille had just ended, and gay groups chattered in the centre of the room; among these, Maria Henderson, leaning on Hugh's arm, and Grace Harris, who had been dancing with Louis Henderson. As Russell crossed the floor to speak to the host and hostess, all eyes turned upon him, and a sudden hush fell on the merry dancers.

"Coaxed at last within the pale of civilization! how did you contrive it, Louis?" asked Maria.

"Oh! he declined when I invited him; but I believe father saw him afterward and renewed the request. Do observe him talking to mother; he is as polished as if he had spent his life at court."

"He is a man whom I never fancied; but that two hours' speech of his was certainly the finest effort I ever listened to. Cæsar's ambition was moderate in comparison with Aubrey's; and, somehow, even against my will, I can't help admiring him, he is so coolly independent," said Hugh, eyeing him curiously.

"I heard father say that the Democrats intend to send him to the legislature next term, and the opposition are bothered to match him fully. By the way, they speak of Mr. Huntingdon for their candidate. But here comes your hero, Miss Maria." As he spoke, Charlie Harris drew back a few steps, and suffered Russell to speak to the young lady of the house. Irene stood not far off, talking to the Governor of the state, who chanced to be on a brief visit to W——, and quite near her, Judge Harris and her father were in earnest conversation. Astonished at the sudden apparition, her eyes followed him as he bowed to the member of the central group; and as she heard the deep, rich voice above the buzz of small talk she waited to see if he would notice her. Soon Governor G—— gave her his arm for a promenade, and she found herself, ere long, very near Maria, who was approaching with Russell. He was saying something, at which she laughed delightedly; just then his eye fell on Irene; there was no token of recognition on the part of either; but the Governor, in passing, put out his hand to shake Russell's, and asked for Mr. Campbell. Again and again they met during the ensuing hour, but no greeting was exchanged; then he disappeared. As Irene leaned against the window-frame in the crowded supper-room, she heard Charlie Harris gaily bantering Maria on the events of the evening.

"What have you done with Aubrey? I will challenge him before to-morrow morning, for cutting me out of my schottische with his prosy chat."

"Oh! he left a half-hour ago; excused himself to mother, on the plea of starting off to court at daybreak. He is perfectly fascinating; don't you think so, Grace? Such eyes and lips; and such a forehead!"

Once more in his own room at the quiet boarding-house, Russell lighted the gas-burner over a

small desk, and sat down to a mass of papers. The apartment was cold; the fire had long since died out; the hearth looked ashy and desolate. The measured tones of the watchman on the town-tower recalled him, finally, from his work; he took off his watch and wound it up. It wanted but three hours to dawn, but he heeded it not; the sight of the massive old watch brought vividly back the boyish days of sorrow, and he sat thinking of that morning of shame, when Irene came close to him, nestling her soft little hand in his, and from some long-silent, dark, chill chamber of memory leaped sweet, silvery, childish echoes—

"Oh, Russell! if I could only help you!"

Since his return from Europe he had accustomed himself to think of her as Hugh's wife; but he found it daily more difficult to realize that she could willingly give her hand to her heedless, self-indulgent cousin; and now the alteration in her manner toward him perplexed and grieved him. Did she suspect the truth, and fear that he might presume on her charity in bygone years? To his proud spirit this was a suggestion singularly insulting, and he had resolved to show her in future that he claimed not even a nod of recognition. Instead of avoiding her, as formerly, he would seek occasions to exhibit an indifference which he little thought that her womanly heart would rightly interpret. He had found it more difficult than he supposed to keep his attention chained to Maria's and Grace's gay nonsense; to prevent his eyes from wandering to the face whose image was enshrined in his lonely heart, and now, with complex feelings of tenderness and angry defiance, he sought his pillow for a short respite before the journey that waited but for daylight.

For a few weeks all W—— was astir with interest in the impending election: newspaper columns teemed with caustic articles, and Huntingdon and Aubrey clubs vilified each other with the usual acrimony of such occasions. Mr. Campbell's influence was extensive, but the Huntingdon supporters were powerful, and the result seemed doubtful until the week previous to the election, when Russell, who had as yet taken no active part, accepted the challenge of his opponent to a public discussion. The meeting was held in front of the court-house, the massive stone steps serving as a temporary rostrum. The night was dark and cloudy, but huge bonfires, blazing barrels of pitch, threw a lurid glare over the broad street, now converted into a surging sea of human heads.

Surrounded by a committee of select friends, Mr. Huntingdon sat, confident of success; and when the hiss of rockets ceased, he came forward, and addressed the assembly in an hour's speech. As a warm and rather prominent politician, he was habituated to the task, and bursts of applause from his own party frequently attested the effect of his easy, graceful style, and pungent irony. Blinded by personal hate, and hurried on by the excitement of the hour, he neglected the cautious policy which had hitherto been observed, and finally launched into a fierce philippic against his antagonist—holding up for derision the melancholy fate of his father, and sneeringly denouncing the "audacious pretensions of a political neophyte."

Groans and hisses greeted this unexpected peroration, and many of his own friends bit their lips, and bent their brows in angry surprise, as he took his seat amid an uproar which would have been respectable even in the days of the builders of Babel. Russell was sitting on the upper step, with his head leaning on his hand, and his eyes fixed on the mass of upturned, eager faces, listening patiently to the lengthy address, expecting just what he was destined to hear. At the mention of his family misfortunes he lifted his head, rose, and advancing a few steps, took off his hat, and stood confronting the speaker in full view of the excited crowd. And there the red light, flaring over his features, showed a calm, stern, self-reliant man, who felt that he had nothing to blush for in the past or to dread in future. When the tirade ended, when the tumult ceased and silence fell upon the audience, he turned and fixed his deep, glowing eyes full on the face of his opponent for one moment, smiling haughtily; then, as Mr. Huntingdon quailed before his withering gaze, he crossed his arms over his chest, and addressed the meeting.

He came, he said, to discuss questions of grave import to the State, not the pedigree or antecedents of his antagonist, with which, he supposed, the public had no concern. Briefly he stated the issues dividing the people of the State; warned the opposition of the probable results of their policy, if triumphant; and, with resistless eloquence, pleaded for a firm maintenance of the principles of his own party. He was, he averred, no alarmist, but he proclaimed that the people slept upon the thin heaving crust of a volcano, which would inevitably soon burst forth; and the period was rapidly approaching when the Southern States, unless united and on the alert, would lie bound at the feet of an insolent and rapacious Northern faction. He demanded that, through the legislatures, the States should appeal to Congress for certain restrictions and guarantees, which, if denied, would justify extreme measures on the part of the people. The man's marvellous magnetism was never more triumphantly attested; the mass, who had listened in profound silence to every syllable which had passed his lips, now vented their enthusiasm in prolonged and vociferous applause.

As he descended the steps and disappeared amid the shouts of the crowd, Judge Harris turned to Mr. Huntingdon and said, with ill-concealed annoyance—

"You have lost your election by your confounded imprudence."

The judge walked off, pondering a heavy bet which he had relative to the result.

By sunrise on the day of the election the roads leading to town were crowded with voters making their way to the polls. The drinking-saloons were full to overflowing; the side-walks thronged with reeling groups as the day advanced. Because the Huntingdon side bribed freely,

the Aubrey partisans felt that they must, from necessity, follow the disgraceful precedent. Not a lady showed her face upon the street; drinking, wrangling, fighting was the order of the day. Windows were smashed, buggies overturned, and the police exercised to the utmost. Accompanied by a few friends, Mr. Huntingdon rode from poll to poll, encouraging his supporters, and drawing heavily upon his purse, while Russell remained quietly in his office, well assured of the result. At five o'clock, when the town polls closed, Russell's votes showed a majority of two hundred and forty-four. Couriers came in constantly from country precincts, with equally favourable accounts, and at ten o'clock it was ascertained, beyond doubt, that he was elected. Irene and her uncle rode down to learn the truth, and, not knowing where to find Mr. Huntingdon, stopped the carriage at the corner of the main street, and waited a few moments. Very soon a rocket whizzed through the air, a band of music struck up before Russell's office, and a number of his adherents insisted that he should show himself on the balcony. A crowd immediately collected opposite, cheering the successful candidate, and calling for a speech. He came out, and, in a few happy, dignified words, thanked them for the honour conferred, and pledged himself to guard most faithfully the interests committed to his keeping. After the noisy constituents had retired, he stood talking to some friends, when he chanced to recognize the fiery horses across the street. The carriage-top was thrown back, and by the neighbouring gaslight he saw Irene's white face turned toward him, then the horses sprang off. Mr. Campbell noticed, without understanding, the sudden start, and bitter though triumphant smile that crossed his face in the midst of pleasant gratulations.

"Go home, Andrew. I know now what I came to learn."

Irene sank back and folded her mantle closer around her.

"Don't you think, Irene, that Aubrey deserves to succeed?"

"Yes."

Her dreary tone disconcerted him, and he offered no further comment, little suspecting that her hands were pressed hard against her heart, and that her voiceless sorrow, was: "Henceforth we must be still more estranged; a wider gulf, from this night, divides us."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MINISTER'S LOVE

Two years rolled on, stained with the tears of many, ringing with the songs and laughter of a fortunate few. The witchery of Southern spring again enveloped W——, and Irene stood on the lawn surveying the "greenery of the outdoor world" that surrounded her.

In this woman's sad but intensely calm countenance, a joyless life found silent history. She felt that her life was passing rapidly, unimproved, and aimless; she knew that her years, instead of being fragrant with the mellow fruitage of good deeds, were tedious and joyless, and that the gaunt, numbing hand of ennui was closing upon her. The elasticity of spirits, the buoyancy of youth had given place to a species of stoical mute apathy; a mental and moral paralysis was stealing over her.

The slamming of the ponderous iron gate attracted her attention, and she saw a carriage ascending the avenue. As it reached a point opposite to the spot where she stood it halted, the door was thrown open, and a gentleman stepped out and approached her. The form was not familiar, and the straw hat partially veiled the features, but he paused before her, and said, with a genial smile—

"Don't you know me?"

"Oh, Harvey! My brother! My great guardian angel!"

A glad light kindled in her face, and she stretched out her hands with the eagerness of a delighted child. Time had pressed heavily upon him; wrinkles were conspicuous about the corners of his eyes and mouth, and the black hair had become a steely grey.

Holding her hands, he drew her nearer to him, scrutinized her features, and a look of keen sorrow crossed his own as he said, almost inaudibly—

"I feared as much! I feared as much! The shadow has spread."

"You kept Punic faith with me, sir; you promised to write and failed. I sent you one letter, but it was never answered."

"Through no fault of mine, Irene; I never received it, believe me. True, I expected to write to you frequently when I parted with you, but subsequently determined that it would be best not to do so. Attribute my silence, however, to every other cause than want of remembrance."

"God only knows how I have wanted, how I have needed you, to guide and strengthen me."

She raised the two hands that still held hers, and bowed her forehead upon them.

For some moments silence reigned; then, standing before him, Irene said, with touching pathos—

"My friend, I am so desolate! so lonely! I am drifting down the current of life aimless, hopeless, useless! What shall I do with my future? I believe I am slowly petrifying; I neither suffer nor enjoy as formerly; my feelings are deadened; I am growing callous, indifferent to everything. I am fast losing sympathy for the sorrows of others, swallowed up in self, oblivious of the noble aspirations of promise. Once more I ask you, what shall I do with my life?"

"Give it to God."

"Ah! there is neither grace nor virtue in necessity. He will not accept the worthless thing thrown at His feet, as a *dernier ressort*. Once it was my choice, but the pure, clear-eyed faith of my childhood shook hands with me when you left me in New York."

For a short while he struggled with himself, striving to overcome the unconquerable impulse which suddenly prompted him, and his face grew pallid as hers as he walked hastily across the smooth grass and came back to her. Her countenance was lifted toward the neighbouring hill, her thoughts evidently far away, when he paused before her, and said unsteadily—

"Irene, my beloved! give yourself to me. Go with me into God's vineyard; let us work together, and consecrate our lives to His service."

The mesmeric eyes gazed into his, full of wonder, and the rich ruby tint fled from her lips as she pondered his words in unfeigned astonishment, and shaking her regal head; answered slowly —

"Harvey, I am not worthy. I want your counsel, not your pity."

"Pity! you mistake me. If you have been ignorant so long, know now that I have loved you from the evening you first sat in my study looking over my foreign sketches. You were then a child, but I was a man, and I knew all that you had so suddenly become to me. Because of this great disparity in years, and because I dared not hope that one so tenderly nurtured could ever brave the hardships of my projected life, I determined to quit New York earlier than I had anticipated, and to bury a foolish memory in the trackless forests of the far West. I ought to have known the fallacy of my expectation; I have proved it since. Your face followed me; your eyes met mine at every turn; your glittering hair swept on every breeze that touched my cheek. Irene, you are

young, and singularly beautiful, and I am a grey-haired man, much, much older than yourself; but, if you live a thousand years, you will never find such affection as I offer you now. There is nothing on earth which would make me so happy as the possession of your love. You are the only woman I have ever seen whom I even wish to call my wife—the only woman who, I felt, could lend new charm to life, and make my quiet hearth happier by her presence. Irene, will you share my future? Can you give me what I ask?"

The temptation was powerful—the future he held out enticing indeed. The strong, holy, manly love, the noble heart and head to guide her, the firm, tender hand to support her, the constant, congenial, and delightful companionship—all this passed swiftly through her mind; but, crushing all in its grasp, came the memory of one whom she rarely met, but who held undisputed sway over her proud heart.

Drawing close to the minister, she laid her hands on his shoulder, and, looking reverently up into his fine face, said, in her peculiarly sweet, clear voice—

"The knowledge of your priceless, unmerited love makes me proud beyond degree; but I would not mock you by the miserable and only return I could make you—the affection of a devoted sister. That I do not love you as you wish is my great misfortune; for I appreciate most fully the noble privilege you have tendered me. I trust that the pain I may give you now will soon pass away, and that, in time, you will forget one who is utterly undeserving of the honour you have conferred on her to-day. Oh, Harvey! do not, I beg of you, let one thought of me ever disquiet your noble, generous heart."

A shiver crept over her still face, and she dropped her pale forehead. She felt two tears fall upon her hair, and in silence he bent down and kissed her softly, tenderly, as one kisses a sleeping babe.

"Oh, Harvey! do not let it grieve you, dear friend!"

He smiled sadly, as if not daring to trust himself in words; then, after a moment, laying his hands upon her head, in the baptism of a deathless love, he gently and solemnly blessed her. When his fingers were removed she raised her eyes, but he had gone; she saw only the retreating form through the green arches of the grand old avenue.

CHAPTER XXII

"COUSINLY—NO MORE"

Says D'Alembert: "The industry of men is now so far exhausted in canvassing for places, that none is left for fulfilling the duties of them;" and the history of our government furnishes a melancholy parallel. The regular quadrennial storm had swept over the nation; caucuses had been held and platforms fiercely fought for, to be kicked away, plank by plank, when they no longer served as scaffolding by which to climb to office. Buchanan was elected, but destined to exemplify, during his administration, the truth of Tacitus' words: "He was regarded as greater than a private man whilst he remained in privacy, and would have been deemed worthy of governing if he had never governed." The heat of the canvass cooled, people settled down once more to a condition of lethargic indifference—bought and sold, sowed and reaped, as usual—little realizing that the temporary lull, the perfect calm, was treacherous as the glassy green expanse of waters which, it is said, sometimes covers the location of the all-destroying maelstrom of Moskoe. Having taken an active and prominent part in the presidential campaign, and made frequent speeches, Russell found himself again opposed by Mr. Huntingdon, who was equally indefatigable during the exciting contest. The old feud received, if possible, additional acrimony, and there were no bounds to the maledictions heaped upon the young and imperturbable legislator by his virulent antagonist. Many predicted a duel or a street encounter; but weeks passed, and though, in casual meetings, Mr. Huntingdon's glare of hate was always answered by a mocking smile of cold disdain, the cloud floated off without breaking into bloody showers.

Mr. Mitchell's health had failed so rapidly as winter approached, that Dr. Arnold persuaded him to try the efficacy of a sea-voyage, and he had accordingly sailed from New Orleans in a vessel bound for Genoa. Irene begged the privilege of accompanying him, but her father peremptorily refused; and she saw her uncle depart, and superintended the closing of his house, with silent sorrow, and the feeling of one who knows that the night is deepening around her.

Late in the afternoon of Christmas Day Irene went into the greenhouse to gather a bouquet for an invalid friend in town, and had almost accomplished her errand when the crash and whir of wheels drew her to the window that looked out on the lawn. Her father had gone to the plantation early that morning, and she had scarcely time to conjecture whom the visitor would prove, when Hugh's loud voice rang through the house, and, soon after, he came clattering in, with the end of his pantaloons tucked into his boots, and his whip trailing along in true boyish fashion. As he threw down his hat, scattering the petals of a snowy camellia, and drew near his cousin, she saw that his face was deeply flushed, and his eyes somewhat bloodshot.

"Hugh! what are you doing here? Father expected you to overtake him at Crescent Bend; you said last night that you would start by five o'clock."

"Merry Christmas, my beauty! I have come for my Christmas gift. Give it to me, like the queen you are."

He stooped as if to kiss her, but she shrank back instantly, and said gravely—

"You ought not to make promises which you have no idea of keeping; father will be annoyed, and wonder very much what has happened. He was anxious that you should go with him."

"Oh! confound the plantation! I wish it would sink! Of all other days none but Christmas will suit him to tramp down there through mud and mire. The fact is, I did not go to sleep till four o'clock, and nobody ought to be unchristian enough to expect me to wake up in an hour. You may be quiet, though, for I am on my way now to that paradise of black mud. I only stopped to get a glimpse of you, my Sappho! my Corinna! so don't homilize, I pray you."

"Better wait till daylight, Hugh; you know the state of the roads and condition of the bridges. It will be safer, and an economy of time, to defer it till morning, since you have made it so late."

"No; I must go to-night, for I have an engagement to ride with Maria Henderson, and I can't get back in time if I wait till to-morrow morning. I want to start back day after to-morrow. As for time, Wildfire will make it the better for the darkness, he is as much afraid of night and shadows as if he had a conscience, and had maltreated it, master-like. I shall convince him that all Tam O'Shanter's witches are in full pursuit, and his matchless heels his only salvation."

A shade of apprehension settled on her face, and, placing the bouquet in a basket, she turned to her cousin, saying—

"Indeed, you cannot be insane enough to drive that horse such a night as this weather threatens. If go you will, in the face of a coming rain, leave Wildfire here, and drive one of the carriage-horses instead. I shall be uneasy if you start with that vicious, unmanageable incarnation of lightning. Let me ring the bell and direct Andrew to make the change."

She stepped into the parlour adjoining, and laid her fingers on the bell-cord, but he snatched up the hand and kissed it several times.

"No! I'll be hanged if I don't drive my own pearl of Arabia! I can manage him well enough; and, beside, what do you care whether he breaks my neck or not? Without compunction you broke my heart, which is much the greater catastrophe."

"Come into the library; you don't know what you are saying."

She drew him into the room, where a warm fire burned cheerfully, and made him sit down.

"Where did you go last night when you left here? Tell me."

"To Harry Neal's; a party of us were invited there to drink egg-nog, and, of course, found something stronger afterward. Then we had a game or so of poker, and ——, the grand finale is that I have had a deuced headache all day. Ah, my sweet saint! how shocked you are, to be sure! Now, don't lecture, or I shall be off like a flash."

Without answering, she rang the bell and quietly looped back the heavy crimson curtains.

"What is that for? Have you sent for John or old Nellie to carry me upstairs, like other bad boys sent to bed in disgrace without even the cold comfort of supper?"

"Hush, Hugh! hush."

Turning to John, who opened the door and looked in, she said—

"Tell William to make some strong coffee as soon as possible. Mas' Hugh has a headache, and wants some before he leaves."

"Thank you, my angel! my unapproachable Peri! Ugh! how cold it is. Pardon me, but I really must warm my feet."

He threw them carelessly on the fender of the grate.

"Shall I get you a pair of slippers?"

"Could not afford the luxury; positively have not the time to indulge myself."

With a prolonged yawn he laid his head back and closed his eyes. An expression of disgust was discernible in his companion's countenance, but it passed like the shadow of a summer cloud, and she sat down at the opposite side of the fireplace, with her eyes bent upon the hearth, and the long silky lashes sweeping her cheeks. A silence of some minutes ensued; finally she exclaimed—

"Here comes your coffee. Put the waiter on the table, John, and tell Andrew to take Mas' Hugh's buggy."

"Do nothing of the kind! but send somebody to open that everlasting gate, which would not have disgraced ancient Thebes. Are you classical, John? Be off, and see about it; I must start in five minutes."

"Hugh, be reasonable for once in your life; you are not in a proper condition to drive that horse. For my sake, at least, be persuaded to wait till morning. Will you not remain, to oblige me?"

"Oh, hang my condition! I tell you I must and I will go, if all the stars fall and judgment day overtakes me on the road. What splendid coffee you always have! The most fastidious of bashaws could not find it in his Moorish heart to complain."

He put on his hat, buttoned his costly fur coat, and, flourishing his whip, came close to his cousin.

"Good-bye, beauty. I hate to leave you; upon my word I do; but duty before pleasure, my heavenly-eyed monitress. I have not had my Christmas present yet, and have it I will."

"On one condition, Hugh; that you drive cautiously and moderately, instead of thundering down hills and over bridges like some express train behind time. Will you promise?"

"To be sure I will! everything in the world; and am ready to swear it, if you are sceptical."

"Well, then, good-bye, Hugh, and take care of yourself."

She allowed him to press his hot lips to hers, and, accompanying him to the door, saw him jump into the frail open-topped buggy. Wildfire plunged and sprang off in his usual style, and, with a crack of the whip and wave of his hat, Hugh was fairly started.

Seven hours later Irene sat alone at the library table, absorbed in writing an article on Laplace's Nebular Theory for the scientific journal to which she occasionally contributed over the signature of "Sabæan." Gradually her thoughts wandered from the completed task to other themes of scarcely less interest. The week previous she had accompanied Hugh to an operatic concert given by the Parodi troupe, and had been astonished to find Russell seated on the bench in front of her. He so rarely showed himself on such occasions that his appearance elicited some comment. They had met frequently since the evening at Mr. Mitchell's, but he pertinaciously avoided recognizing her; and, on this particular night, though he came during an interlude to speak to Grace Harris, who sat on the same row of seats with Irene, he never once directed his eyes toward the latter. This studied neglect, she felt assured, was not the result of the bitter animosity existing between her father and himself; and though it puzzled her for a while, she began finally to suspect the true nature of his feelings, and, with woman's rarely erring instincts, laid her finger on the real motive which prompted him. The report of his engagement to Grace had reached her some days before, and now it recurred to her mind like a haunting spectre. She did not believe for an instant that he was attached to the pretty, joyous girl whom rumour gave him; but she was well aware that he was ambitious of high social position, and feared that he

might possibly, from selfish, ignoble reasons, seek an alliance with Judge Harris' only daughter, knowing that the family was one of the wealthiest and most aristocratic in the State. Life had seemed dreary enough before; but, with this apprehension added, it appeared insupportable, and she was conscious of a degree of wretchedness never dreamed of or realized heretofore. Not even a sigh escaped her; she was one of a few women who permit no external evidences of suffering, but lock it securely in their own proud hearts. The painful reverie might, perhaps, have lasted till the pallid dawn looked in with tearful eyes at the window, but Paragon, who was sleeping on the rug at her feet, started up and growled. She raised her head and listened, but only the ticking of the clock was audible, and the wailing of the wind through the leafless poplars.

"Down, Paragon! hush, sir!"

She patted his head soothingly, and he sank back a few seconds in quiet, then sprang up with a loud bark. This time she heard an indistinct sound of steps in the hall, and thought: "Nellie sees my light through the window, and is coming to coax me upstairs." Something stumbled near the threshold, a hand struck the knob as if in hunting for it, the door opened softly, and, muffled in his heavy cloak, holding his hat in one hand, Russell Aubrey stood in the room. Neither spoke, but he looked at her with such mournful earnestness, such eager yet grieved compassion, that she read some terrible disaster in his eyes. The years of estrangement, all that had passed since their childhood, was forgotten; studied conventionalities fell away at the sight of him standing there, for the first time, in her home. She crossed the room with a quick, uncertain step, and put out her hands toward him—vague, horrible apprehension blanching the beautiful lips, which asked shiveringly—

"What is it, Russell? What is it?"

He took the cold little hands tremblingly in his, and endeavoured to draw her back to the hearth, but she repeated—

"What has happened? Is it father, or Hugh?"

"Your father is well, I believe; I passed him on the road yesterday. Sit down, Miss Huntingdon; you look pale and faint."

Her fingers closed tightly over his; he saw an ashen hue settle on her face, and in an unnaturally calm low tone, she asked—

"Is Hugh dead? Oh, my God! why don't you speak, Russell?"

"He did not suffer much; his death was too sudden."

Her face had such a stony look that he would have passed his arm around her, but could not disengage his hand; she seemed to cling to it as if for strength.

"Won't you let me carry you to your room, or call a servant? You are not able to stand."

She neither heeded nor heard him.

"Was it that horse; or how was it?"

"One of the bridges had been swept away by the freshet, and, in trying to cross, he missed the ford. The horse must have been frightened and unmanageable, the buggy was overturned in the creek, and your cousin, stunned by the fall, drowned instantly; life was just extinct when I reached him."

Something like a moan escaped her as she listened.

"Was anything done?"

"We tried every means of resuscitation, but they were entirely ineffectual."

She relaxed her clasp of his fingers, and moved toward the door.

"Where are you going, Miss Huntingdon? Indeed, you must sit down."

"Russell, you have brought him home; where is he?"

Without waiting for an answer, she walked down the hall, and paused suddenly at the sight of the still form resting on a grey travelling-blanket, with a lantern at its head, and an elderly man, a stranger, sitting near, keeping watch. Russell came to her side, and, drawing his arm around her, made her lean upon him. He felt the long, long lingering shudder which shook the elegant, queenly figure; then she slipped down beside the rigid sleeper, and smoothed back from the fair brow the dripping, curling, auburn hair.

"Hugh, my cousin! my playmate! Snatched away in an hour from the life you loved so well. Ah! the curse of our house has fallen upon you. It is but the beginning of the end. Only two of us are left, and we, too, shall soon be caught up to join you."

She kissed the icy lips which a few hours ago had pressed hers so warmly, and, rising, walked up and down the long hall. Russell once more approached her.

"Are you entirely alone?"

"Yes, except the servants. Oh, Russell! how am I to break this to my father? He loves that boy

better than everything else; infinitely better than he ever loved me. How shall I tell him that Hugh is dead—dead?"

"A messenger has already gone to inform him of what has happened, and this distressing task will not be yours. Herbert Blackwell and I were riding together, on our return from T——, when we reached the ford where the disaster occurred. Finding that all our efforts to resuscitate were useless, he turned back, and went to your father's plantation to break the sad intelligence to him."

His soothing, tender tone touched some chord deep in her strange nature, and unshed tears gathered for the first time in her eyes.

"As you have no friend near enough to call upon at present, I will, if you desire it, wake the servants, remain, and do all that is necessary until morning."

"If you please, Russell; I shall thank you very much."

As her glance fell upon her cousin's gleaming face, her lip fluttered, and she turned away and sat down on one of the sofas in the parlour, dropping her face in her hands. A little while after, the light of a candle streamed in, and Russell came with a cushion from the library lounge, and his warm cloak. He wrapped the latter carefully about the drooping form, and would have placed her head on the silken pillow; but she silently resisted without looking up, and he left her. It was a vigil which she never forgot.

The fire had died out entirely, the curtains were drawn back to let in the day; on the library table the startling glare of white linen showed the outlines of the cold young sleeper, and Russell slowly paced the floor, his arms crossed, as was their habit, and his powerful form unweariedly erect. She stood by the table half-irresolute, then folded down the sheet, and exposed the handsome, untroubled face. She studied it long and quietly, and with no burst of emotion laid her flowers against his cheek and mouth, and scattered the geraniums over his pulseless heart.

"I begged him not to start yesterday, and he answered that he would go, if the stars fell and judgment day overtook him. Sometimes we are prophets unawares. His star has set—his day has risen! Have mercy on his soul! oh, my God!"

The voice was low and even, but wonderfully sweet, and in the solemn morning light her face showed itself grey and bloodless; no stain of colour on the still lips, only the blue cord standing out between the brow, sure signs of a deep distress which found no vent. Russell felt a crushing weight lifted from his heart; he saw that she had "loved her cousin cousinly—no more"; and his face flushed when she looked across the table at him, with grateful but indescribably melancholy eyes, which had never been closed during that night of horror.

"I must now relieve you, Russell, from your friendly watch. Few would have acted as you have done, and for all your generous kindness to poor Hugh I thank you most earnestly as well for my father as myself. The day may come, perhaps, when I shall be able to prove my gratitude, and the sincerity of my friendship, which has never wavered since we were children together. Until that day, farewell Russell; but believe that I rejoice to hear of your successes."

She held out her hand, and as he took it in his, which trembled violently, he felt, even then, that there was no quiver in the icy-white fingers, and that his name rippled over her lips as calmly as that of the dead had done just before. She endured his long, searching gaze, like any other Niobe, and he dropped the little pearly hand and quitted the room. At ten o'clock Mr. Huntingdon returned, and, with his hat drawn over his eyes, went straight to the library. He kissed the face of the dead passionately and his sob and violent burst of sorrow told his child of his arrival. She lifted her rigid face, and extended her arms pleadingly.

"Father! father! here, at least, you will forgive me!"

He turned from her sternly, and answered, with bitter emphasis—

"I will not! But for *you*, he would have been different, and this would never have happened."

"Father, I have asked for love and pardon for the last time."

She bent down and kissed her cousin, and, with a hard, bitter expression in her countenance, went up to her own room, locking out Paragon and old Nellie, who followed cautiously at her heels.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FEVER

It was a cold afternoon in November—

> "And Autumn, laying here and there
> A fiery finger on the leaves,"

had kindled her forest conflagration. Golden maples and amber-hued cherries, crimson dog-woods and scarlet oaks shook out their flame-foliage and waved their glowing boughs, all dashed and speckled, flecked and rimmed with orange and blood, ghastly green, and tawny brown. The smoky atmosphere, which had hung all day in purple folds around the distant hills, took a golden haze as the sun sank rapidly; and to Irene's gaze river and woodland, hill-side and valley, were brimmed with that weird "light which never was on sea or land." Her almost "Brahminical" love of nature had grown with her years, but a holier element mingled with her adoration now; she looked beyond the material veil of beauty, and bowed reverently before the indwelling Spiritual Presence. Since Hugh's death, nearly a year before, she had become a recluse, availing herself of her mourning dress to decline all social engagements, and during these months a narrow path opened before her feet, she became a member of the church which she had attended from infancy, and her hands closed firmly over her life-work.

Sorrow and want hung out their signs among the poor of W——, and here, silently, but methodically, she had become, not a ministering angel certainly, but a generous benefactress, a noble, sympathetic friend—a counsellor whose strong good sense rendered her advice and guidance valuable indeed. By a system of rigid economy she was enabled to set apart a small portion of money, which she gave judiciously, superintending its investment; kind, hopeful words she scattered like sunshine over every threshold; and here and there, where she detected smouldering aspiration, or incipient appreciation of learning, she fanned the spark with some suitable volume from her own library, which, in more than one instance, became the germ, the spring of "joy for ever." Frequently her father threw obstacles in her way, sneering all the while at her "sanctimonious freaks." Sometimes she affected not to notice the impediments, sometimes frankly acknowledged their magnitude and climbed right over them, on to her work. Among the factory operatives she found the greatest need of ameliorating touches of every kind. Improvident, illiterate, in some cases, almost brutalized, she occasionally found herself puzzled as to the proper plan to pursue; but her womanly heart, like the hidden jewelled levers of a watch, guided the womanly hands unerringly.

This evening, as she approached the row of low white-washed houses, a crowd of children swarmed out, as usual, to stare at her. She rode up to a doorstep where a boy of some fourteen years sat sunning himself, with an open book on his knee and a pair of crutches beside him. At sight of her a bright smile broke over his sickly face and he tried to rise.

"Good evening, Philip; don't get up. How are you to-day?"

"Better, I thank you, ma'am; but very stiff yet."

"The stiffness will pass off gradually, I hope. I see you have not finished your book yet; how do you like it?"

"Oh! I could bear to be a cripple always, if I had plenty like it to read."

"You need not be a cripple; but there are plenty more, just as good and better, which you shall have in time. Do you think you could hold my horse for me a little while? I can't find a suitable place to tie him. He is gentle enough if you will only hold the reins."

"Certainly, ma'am; I shall be glad to hold him as long as you like."

She dismounted, and passed into the adjoining house. Sick-rooms, where poverty stands grim and gaunt on the hearth, are rarely enticing, and to this dreary class belonged the room where Bessie Davis had suffered for months, watching the sands of life run low, and the shadow of death growing longer across the threshold day by day. The dust and lint of the cotton-room had choked the springs of life, and on her hollow cheeks glowed the autograph of consumption. She stretched out her wasted hand, and said—

"Ah, Miss Irene! I heard your voice outside, and it was pleasant to my ears as the sound of the bell when work-hours are over. I am always glad to see your face, but this evening I was longing for you, hoping and praying that you would come. I am in trouble."

"About what, Mrs. Davis? Nothing serious, I hope; tell me."

"I don't know how serious it is going to be. Johnnie is sick in the next room, taken yesterday; and about noon to-day Susan had to knock off work and come home. Hester is the only one left, and you know she is but a baby to work. I don't like to complain of my lot, God knows, but it seems hard if we are all to be taken down."

"I hope they will not be sick long. What is the matter with Johnnie?"

"Dear knows! I am sure I don't; he complains of the headache and has fever, and Susan here

seems ailing the same way. She is as stupid as can be—sleeps all the time. My children have had measles and whooping-cough, and chicken-pox and scarlet fever, and I can't imagine what they are trying to catch now. I hear that there is a deal of sickness showing itself in the Row."

"Have you sent for the doctor?" asked Irene, walking around to the other side of the bed, and examining Susan's pulse.

"Yes, I sent Hester; but she said he told her he was too busy to come."

"Why did you not apply to some other physician?"

"Because Dr. Brandon has always attended me, and, as I sent for him first, I didn't know whether any other doctor would like to come. You know some of them have very curious notions about their dignity."

"And sometimes, while they pause to discuss etiquette, humanity suffers. Susan, let me see your tongue. Who else is sick in the Row, Mrs. Davis?"

"Three of Tom Brown's children, two of Dick Spencer's, and Lucy Hall, and Mary Moorhead. Miss Irene, will you be good enough to give me a drink of water. Hester has gone to try to find some wood, and I can't reach the pitcher."

"I brought you some jelly; would you like a little now, or shall I put it away in the closet?"

"Thank you; I will save it for my Johnnie, he is so fond of sweet things; and, poor child! he sees 'em so seldom nowadays."

"There is enough for you and Johnnie too. Eat this, while I look after him, and see whether he ought to have any this evening."

She placed a saucer filled with the tempting amber-hued delicacy on the little pine table beside the bed, and went into the next room. The boy, who looked about seven or eight years old, lay on a pallet in one corner, restless and fretful, his cheeks burning, and his large brown eyes sparkling with fever.

"Johnnie, boy! what is the matter? Tell me what hurts you."

"My head aches so badly," and tears came to the beautiful childish eyes.

"It feels hot. Would you like to have it bathed in cold water?"

"If you please, ma'am. I have been calling Hettie, and she won't hear."

"Because she has gone out. Let me see if I can't do it just as well as Hettie."

She hunted about the room for a cloth, but, finding nothing suitable, took her cambric handkerchief, and, after laving his forehead gently for ten or fifteen minutes, laid the wet folds upon it, and asked smilingly—

"Doesn't that feel pleasant?"

"Ever so nice, ma'am—if I had some to drink."

She put the dripping gourd to his parched lips, and, after shaking up his pillow and straightening the covering of his pallet, she promised to see him again soon, and returned to his mother.

"How does he appear to be, Miss Irene? I had him moved out of this room because he said my coughing hurt his head, and his continual fretting worried me. I am so weak now, God help me!" and she covered her eyes with one hand.

"He has some fever, Mrs. Davis, but not more than Susan. I will ask Dr. Arnold to come and see them this evening. This change in the weather is very well calculated to make sickness. Are you entirely out of wood?"

"Very nearly, ma'am; a few sticks left."

"When Hester comes, keep her at home. I will send you some wood. And now, how are you?"

"My cough is not quite so bad; the pectoral holds it a little in check; but I had another hemorrhage last night, and I am growing weaker every day. Oh, Miss Irene! what will become of my poor little children when I am gone? That is such an agonizing thought." She sobbed as she spoke.

"Do not let that grieve you now. I promise you that your children shall be taken care of. I will send a servant down to stay here to-night, and perhaps some of the women in the Row will be willing to come in occasionally and help Hester till Susan gets able to cook. I left two loaves of bread in the closet, and will send more in the morning, which Hester can toast. I shall go by town, and send Dr. Arnold out."

"I would rather have Dr. Brandon, if you please."

"Why?"

"I have always heard that Dr. Arnold was so gruff and unfeeling, that I am afraid of him. I hate

to be snapped up when I ask a question."

"That is a great mistake, Mrs. Davis. People do him injustice. He has one of the kindest, warmest hearts I ever knew, though sometimes he is rather abrupt in his manner. If you prefer it, however, I will see your doctor. Good-bye; I will come again to-morrow."

As she took her bridle from Philip's hand, the boy looked up at her with an expression bordering on adoration.

"Thank you, Philip; how did he behave?"

"Not very well; but he is beautiful enough to make up for his wildness."

"That is bad doctrine; beauty never should excuse bad behaviour. Is your mother at home?"

"No, ma'am."

"When she comes, ask her I say please to step in now and then, and overlook things for Mrs. Davis; Susan is sick. Philip, if it is not asking too much of you, Johnnie would like to have you sit by him till his little sister comes home, and wet that cloth which I left on his head. Will you?"

"Indeed, I will; I am very glad you told me. Certainly I will."

"I thought so. Don't talk to him; let him sleep if he will. Good-bye."

She went first to a woodyard on the river, and left an order for a cord of wood to be sent immediately to No. 13, Factory Row; then took the street leading to Doctor Brandon's office. A servant sat on the step whistling merrily; and, in answer to her questions, he informed her that his master had just left town, to be absent two days. She rode on for a few squares, doubling her veil in the hope of shrouding her features, and stopped once more in front of the door where stood Dr. Arnold's buggy.

"Cyrus, is the doctor in his office?"

"Yes, Miss Irene."

"Hold my horse for me."

She gathered the folds of her riding-habit over her arm, and went upstairs. Leaning far back in his chair, with his feet on the fender of the grate, sat Dr. Arnold, watching the blue smoke of his meerschaum curl lazily in faint wreaths over his head; and as she entered, a look of pleasant surprise came instantly into his cold, clear eyes.

"Bless me! Irene; I am glad to see you. It is many a day since you have shown your face here; sit down. Now, then, what is to pay? You are in trouble, of course; you never think of me except when you are. Has old Nellie treated herself to another spell of rheumatism, or Paragon broke his leg, or smallpox broke out anywhere; or, worse than all, have the hawks taken to catching your pigeons?"

"None of these catastrophes has overtaken me; but I come, as usual, to ask a favour. If you please, I want you to go up to the Factory Row this evening. Mrs. Davis, No. 13, has two children very sick, I am afraid. I don't like the appearance of their tongues."

"Humph! what do you know about tongues, I should like to be informed?"

"How to use my own, sir, at least, when there is a necessity for it. They are what you medical *savans* call typhoid tongues; and from what I heard to-day, I am afraid there will be a distressing amount of sickness among the operatives. Of course you will go, sir?"

"How do you know that so well? Perhaps I will and perhaps I won't. Nobody ever looks after me, or cares about the condition of my health; I don't see why I must adopt the whole human race. See here, my child! do not let me hear of you at the Row again soon; it is no place for you, my lily. Ten to one it is some low, miserable typhus fever showing itself, and I will take care of your precious pets only on condition that you keep away, so that I shall not be haunted with the dread of having you, also, on my hands. If I lay eyes on you at the Row, I swear I will write to Leonard to chain you up at home. Do you hear?"

"I shall come every day; I promise you that."

"Oh! you are ambitious of martyrdom? But typhus fever is not the style, Queen. There is neither *éclat* nor glory in such a death."

A sad smile curved her mouth, as she answered slowly—

"That is problematical, Doctor. But it is getting late, and I wish, if you please, you would go at once to the Row."

"Stop! if any good is accomplished among those semi-savages up yonder, who is to have the credit? Tell me that."

"God shall have the thanks; you all the credit as the worthy instrument, and I as much of the gratification as I can steal from you. Are you satisfied with your wages, my honoured Shylock? Good night."

"Humph! it is strange what a hold that queer motherless child took upon my heart in her babyhood, and it tightens as she grows older."

He shook the ashes from his pipe, put it away behind the clock, and went down to his buggy. Before breakfast the following morning, while Irene was in the poultry-yard feeding her chickens and pigeons, pheasants and peafowls, she received a note from Dr. Arnold containing these few scrawling words:—

"If you do not feel quite ready for the day of judgment, avoid the Row as you would the plagues of Egypt. I found no less than six developed cases of rank typhus.

"Yours,

"HIRAM ARNOLD."

She put the note in her pocket, and, while the pigeons fluttered and perched on her shoulders and arms, cooing and pecking at her fingers, she stood musing—calculating the chances of contagion and death if she persisted. Raising her eyes to the calm blue sky, the perplexed look passed from her countenance, and, fully decided regarding her course, she went in to breakfast. Mr. Huntingdon was going to a neighbouring county with Judge Peterson, to transact some business connected with Hugh's estate, and, as the buggy came to the door, he asked, carelessly —

"What did Cyrus want?"

"He came to bring me a note from the doctor, concerning some sick people whom I asked him to see."

"Oh! John, put my overcoat in the buggy. Come, Judge; I am ready."

As he made no inquiry about the sick, she volunteered no explanation, and he bade her good-bye with manifest cold indifference. She could not avoid congratulating herself that, since he must take this journey soon, he had selected the present occasion to be absent, for she was well aware that he would violently oppose her wishes in the matter of the Row. When Dr. Arnold met her late in the afternoon of the same day, at little Johnnie's side, his surprise and chagrin found vent, first in a series of oaths, then, scowling at her like some thunder-cloud with the electricity expended, he said—

"Do you consider me a stark idiot, or a shallow quack?"

"Neither, sir, I assure you."

"Then, if I know anything about my business, I wrote you the truth this morning, and you treat my advice with cool contempt. You vex me beyond all endurance! Do you want to throw yourself into the jaws of death?"

"You forget, Doctor: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'"

She slipped her hand into his, and looked up, smiling and calm, into his harsh, swarthy face.

"My child, you made a mistake; your life belongs to me, for I saved it in your infancy. I cradled you in my arms, lest death should snatch you. I have a better right to you than anybody else in this world. I don't want to see you die; I wish to go first."

"I know what I owe you, Doctor; but I am not going to die, and you have scolded me enough for one time. Do make peace."

"Remember, I warned you, and you would not heed."

From that hour she kept faithful vigil in No. 13, passing continually from one bedside to another. Susan's attack proved comparatively light, and she was soon pronounced convalescent; but little Johnnie was desperately ill, and for several nights Irene sat at his pillow, fearing that every hour would be his last. While his delirium was at its height, Hester was taken violently, and on the morning when Irene felt that her labour was not in vain, and that the boy would get well, his little sister, whom she had nursed quite as assiduously, grew rapidly worse, and died at noon. As is frequently observed in such diseases, this increased in virulence with every new case. It spread with astonishing celerity through the Row, baffling the efforts of the best physicians in W ——; and finally, the day after Hester's death, as Irene sat trying to comfort the poor mother, a neighbour came in exclaiming—

"Oh, Miss Irene! Philip Martin is down too. He caught the fever from his mother, and his father says won't you please come over?"

She went promptly, though so wearied she could scarcely stand, and took a seat by the bed where tossed the poor boy in whom she had taken such an interest.

"You must go home, Miss Huntingdon; you are worn out. His father can watch him till his mother gets stronger," said Dr. Brandon, who was fully acquainted with the unremitting attendance at the next house.

"No, I must stay with Philip; perhaps he will know me when he wakes."

A hope doomed to disappointment, for he raved for four days and nights, calling frantically for the serene, sad woman who sat at his pillow, bending over him and laying her cold hand on his scorched brow. On the fifth day, being free from fever and utterly prostrated, he seemed sinking rapidly; but she kept her fingers on his pulse, and, without waiting for the doctor's advice, administered powerful stimulants. So passed two hours of painful anxiety; then Philip opened his eyes languidly, and looked at her.

"Philip, do you know me?"

"Yes—Miss Irene."

She sank back as if some strong supporting hand had suddenly been withdrawn from her; and observing that she looked ghastly, Mr. Martin hastily brought her a glass of water. Just then Dr. Brandon entered, and examined his patient with evident surprise.

"What have you done to him, Miss Huntingdon?"

"Since daylight I have been giving him ammonia and brandy; his pulse was so feeble and thready, I thought he needed it, and was afraid to wait for you."

"Right! and you saved his life by it. I could not get here any earlier, and if you had delayed it until I came, it would probably have been too late. You may call him your patient after this."

She waited no longer, but staggered to the door; and Andrew, seeing how faint she was, came to meet her, and led her to the carriage. The ten days of watching had told upon her; and when she reached home, and Nellie brought her wrapper and unlaced her shoes, she fell back on her lounge in a heavy, deathlike sleep. Mr. Huntingdon had been expected two days before, but failed to arrive at the time designated; and having her fears fully aroused, Nellie despatched a messenger for Dr. Arnold.

CHAPTER XXIV

IRENE'S ILLNESS

"Do you see any change, Hiram?"

"None for the better."

Mr. Huntingdon dropped his head upon his hand again, and Dr. Arnold resumed his slow walk up and down the carpet. The blue damask curtains had been looped back from the western window, and the broad band of yellow belting in the sky threw a mellow light over the bed where lay the unconscious heiress of the grand old Hill. Fever rouged the polished cheeks usually pure as alabaster, and touched the parted lips with deeper scarlet, lending a brilliant and almost unearthly beauty to the sculptured features. Her hair, partially escaping from confinement, straggled in crumpled rings and folds across the pillow, a mass of golden netting; and the sparkling eyes wandered from one object to another, as if in anxious search. The disease had assumed a different type, and instead of raving paroxysms, her illness was characterized by a silent, wakeful unconsciousness, while opiates produced only the effect of increasing her restlessness. A week had passed thus, during which time she had recognized no one; and though numerous lady friends came to offer assistance, all were refused permission to see her. Mr. Huntingdon was utterly ignorant of the duties of a nurse; and though he haunted the room like an unlifting shadow, Dr. Arnold and Nellie took entire charge of the patient. The former was unremitting in his care, sitting beside the pillow through the long winter nights, and snatching a few hours' sleep during the day. Watching her now, as he walked to and fro, he noticed that her eyes followed him earnestly, and he paused at the bedside and leaned over her.

"Irene, what do you want? Does my walking annoy you?"

No answer.

"Won't you shut your eyes, my darling, and try to sleep?"

The deep, brilliant eyes only looked into his with mocking intentness. He put his fingers on the lids and pressed them gently down, but she struggled, and turned away her face. Her hands crept constantly along the snowy quilt as if seeking for something, and taking them both, he folded them in his and pressed them to his lips, while tears, which he did not attempt to restrain, fell over them.

"You don't think she is any worse, do you?" asked the father, huskily.

"I don't know anything, except that she can't lie this way much longer."

His harsh voice faltered and his stern mouth trembled. He laid the hands back, went to the window and stood there till the room grew dusky and the lamp was brought in. As Nellie closed the door after her, the doctor came to the hearth, and said sharply—

"I would not be in your place for John Jacob Astor's fortune."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that, if you have any conscience left, you must suffer the pains of purgatory for the manner in which you have persecuted that child."

"In all that I have ever done I have looked only to her good, to her ultimate happiness. I know that she——"

"Hush, Leonard! hush! You are no more fit to be a father than I am to be a saint! You have tyrannized and fretted her poor innocent soul nearly out of her ever since she was big enough to crawl. Why the d—l could not you let the child have a little peace? There are ninety-nine chances to one that she has come to her rest at last. You will feel pleasantly when you see her in her shroud."

His hard face worked painfully, and tears glided down the wrinkled cheek and hid themselves in his grey beard. Mr. Huntingdon was much agitated, but an angry flush crossed his brow as he answered hastily,—

"I am the best judge of my family matters. You are unjust and severe. Of course I love my child better than anybody else."

"Heaven preserve her from such love as you have lavished on her! She is very dear to me. I understand her character; you either cannot or will not. She is the only thing in this world that I do really love. My pet, my violet-eyed darling!"

He shaded his face and swallowed a sob, and for some moments neither spoke. After a while the doctor buttoned up his coat and took his hat.

"I am going down to my office to get a different prescription. I will be back soon."

Contrary to his phlegmatic habit, the doctor had taken counsel of his fears until he was completely unnerved, and he went home more than usually surly and snappish. As he entered his office, Russell advanced to meet him from the window whence, for nearly an hour, he had been watching for his arrival.

"Good evening, doctor."

"What do you want?"

"How is Miss Huntingdon?"

"What is Miss Huntingdon to you?"

"She was one of my mother's best friends, though only a little girl at the time."

"And you love her for your mother's sake, I suppose? Truly filial."

"How is she to-night? Rumours are so unreliable, that I came to you to find out the truth."

"She is going to die, I am afraid."

A sudden pallor overspread Russell's face, but he sat erect and motionless, and, fastening his keen eyes upon him, the doctor added—

"She is about to be transplanted to a better world, if there is such a place. She is too good and pure for this cursed, pestiferous earth."

"Is the case so utterly hopeless? I cannot, I will not, believe it!" came indistinctly from the young man's bloodless lips.

"I tell you I know better! She stands on a hair stretched across her grave. If I don't succeed to-night in making her sleep (which I have been trying to accomplish for two days), she can't possibly live. And what is that whole confounded crew of factory savages in comparison with her precious life?"

"Is it true that her illness is attributable to nursing those people?"

"Yes. D—l take the Row! I wish the river would swallow it up."

"If I could only see her!" exclaimed Russell, and an expression of such intense agony settled on his features, usually so inflexible, that his companion was startled and astonished. The doctor regarded him a moment with perplexity and compassion mingled in his own face; then light broke upon him, and, rising, he laid his hand heavily on Russell's shoulder.

"Where are you going, Aubrey?"

"Back to my office."

"Is there any message which you would like for me to deliver to her, if she should recover consciousness? You may trust me, young man."

"Thank you; I have no message to send. I merely called to ask after her. I trust she will yet recover. Good night."

He walked on rapidly till he reached the door of his office. The gas was burning brightly over his desk, and red tape and legal-cap beckoned him in; but fathomless blue eyes, calm as mid-ocean, looked up at him, and, without entering, he turned, and went through the cold and darkness to the cemetery, to his mother's tomb. She had been his comfort in boyish sorrows, and habit was strong; he went to her grave for it still.

When Russell left him, Dr. Arnold carefully weighed out the powder and rode back to the Hill. He could perceive no change, unless it were a heightening of the carmine on cheeks and lips, and an increased twitching of the fingers, which hunted so pertinaciously about the bed-clothes.

"That everlasting picking, picking at everything is such an awful bad sign!" said poor Nellie, who was crying bitterly at the foot of the bed; and she covered her face with her apron to shut out the sight.

"You 'pick' yourself off to bed, Nellie! I don't want you snubbing and groaning around day and night."

"I am afraid to leave her a minute. I am afraid when my poor baby shuts her eyes she will never open 'em again till she opens 'em in heaven."

"Oh, go along to sleep! you eternal old stupid. I will wake you up, I tell you, if she gets worse."

He mixed one of the powders and stooped down.

"Irene—Irene, take this for me, won't you, dear?"

She gave no intimation of having heard him till he placed the wineglass to her mouth and raised her head tenderly; then she swallowed the contents mechanically. At the expiration of an hour he repeated the dose, and at ten o'clock, while he sat watching her intently, he saw the eyelids begin to droop, the long, silky lashes quivered and touched her cheeks. When he listened to her breathing, and knew that at last she slept, his grey head sank on his chest, and he murmured, inaudibly, "Thank God!" Patient as a woman, he kept his place at her side, fearing to move lest he should wake her; the dreary hours of night wore away; morning came, gloriously bright, and still she slept. The flush had faded, leaving her wan as death, and the little hands were now at rest. She looked like the figures which all have seen on cenotaphs, and anxiously and often the doctor felt the slow pulse, that seemed weary of its mission. He kept the room

quiet, and maintained his faithful watch, refusing to leave her for a moment. Twelve o'clock rolled round, and it appeared, indeed, as if Nellie's prognostication would prove true, the sleeper was so motionless. At three o'clock the doctor counted the pulse, and, reassured, threw his head back against the velvet lining of the chair, and shut his aching eyes. Before five minutes had elapsed, he heard a faint, sweet voice say, "Paragon." Springing to his feet, he saw her put out her hand to pat the head of her favourite, who could not be kept out of the room, and howled so intolerably when they chained him, that they were forced to set him free. Now he stood with his paws on the pillow and his face close to hers whining with delight. Tears of joy almost blinded the doctor as he pushed Paragon aside, and said eagerly—

"Irene, one dog is as good as another! You know Paragon, do you know me, Queen?"

"Certainly—I know you, Doctor."

"God bless you, beauty! You haven't known me for a week."

"I am so thirsty—please give me some water."

He lifted her head, and she drank eagerly, till he checked her.

"There—we haven't all turned hydropathists since you were taken sick. Nellie! I say, Nellie! you witch of Endor! bring some wine-whey here. Irene, how do you feel, child?"

"Very tired and feeble, sir. My head is confused. Where is father?"

"Here I am, my daughter."

He bent down with trembling lips and kissed her, for the first time since the day of their estrangement, nearly three years before. She put her arms feebly around his neck, and as he held her to his heart, she felt a tear drop on her forehead.

"Father, have you forgiven me?"

He either could not or would not answer, but kissed her again warmly; and, as he disengaged her arms and left the room, she felt assured that at last she had been forgiven. She took the whey silently, and, after some moments, said—

"Doctor, have you been sitting by me a long time?"

"I rather think I have!—losing my sleep for nearly ten days, you unconscionable young heathen."

"Have I been so ill as to require that? I have a dim recollection of going on a long journey, and of your being by my side all the way."

"Well, I hope you travelled to your entire satisfaction, and found what, you wanted—for you were feeling about as if hunting for something, the whole time. Oh! I am so thankful that you know me once more. Child, you have cost me a deal of sorrow. Now be quiet, and go to sleep again; at least, don't talk to Nellie or Paragon. I shall take a nap on the sofa in the library."

She regained her strength very slowly, and many days elapsed before she was able to leave her room. One bright sunny morning she sat before the open window, looking down on the lawn where the pigeons flashed in and out of the hedges, and now and then glancing at the bouquet of choice hot-house flowers in the vase beside her. In her lap lay a letter just received from Harvey Young—a letter full of fond remembrance, grave counsel, and gentle encouragement—and the unbent lines about her mouth showed that her mind was troubled.

The doctor came in and drew up a chair.

"I should like to know who gave you leave to ride yesterday?"

"Father thought that I was well enough, and the carriage was close and warm. I hope, sir, that I shall not be on your hands much longer."

"What did I tell you? Next time don't be so hard-headed when you are advised by older and wiser persons. I trust you are quite satisfied with the result of your eleemosynary performances at the Row."

"Far from it, Doctor. I am fully acclimated now, and have nothing to fear in future. I am very sorry, sir, that I caused you all so much trouble and anxiety; I did not believe that I should take the fever. If Philip had not been so ill, I should have come out safely; but I suppose my uneasiness about him unnerved me in some way—for, when I saw that he would get well, all my strength left me in an instant. How is he, sir?"

"Oh! the young dog is as well as ever. Comes to my office every day to ask after his blessed Lady Bountiful."

Leaning forward carelessly, but so as to command a full view of her face, he added,—

"You stirred up quite an excitement in town, and introduced me generally to society. People who never inflicted themselves on me before thought it was incumbent on them to hang around my door to make inquiries concerning my fair patient. One night I found even that statue of bronze and steel, Russell Aubrey, waiting at my office to find out whether you really intended

translation."

A change certainly passed swiftly over her countenance; but it was inexplicable, indescribable —an anomalous lightening of the eye and darkening of the brow. Before he could analyse it, her features resumed their wonted serenity, and he found her voice unfluttered.

"I was not aware that I had so many friends; it is a pleasant discovery, and almost compensates for the pain of illness. Take care, Doctor! You are tilting my flowers out of their vase."

"Confound the flowers, Queen! They are always in the way. It is a great pity there is such Theban-brother affection between your father and Aubrey. He has an amount of fine feeling hid away under that dark, Jesuitical, non-committal face of his. He has not forgotten your interest in his mother, and when I told him that I thought you had determined to take your departure from this world, he seemed really hurt about it. I always liked the boy, but I think he is a heretic in politics."

The doctor had scarcely taken his departure when Nellie's turbaned head showed itself at the door.

"That factory-boy, Philip, is downstairs; he brought back a book, and wants to see you. He seems in trouble; but you don't feel like being bothered to-day, do you?"

"Did he ask to see me?"

"Not exactly; but showed very plainly he wanted to see you."

"Let him come up."

As, he entered, she rose and held out her hand.

"Good morning, Philip; I am glad you are well enough to be out again."

He looked at her reverently, and, as he noticed the change her illness had wrought, his lips quivered and his eyes filled.

"Oh, Miss Irene! I am so glad you are better. I prayed for you all the time while you were so very ill."

"Thank you. Sit down, and tell me about the sick."

"They are all better, I believe, ma'am, except Mrs. Davis. She was wishing yesterday that she could see you again."

"I shall go there in a day or two. You are walking pretty well without your crutches. Have you resumed your work."

"I shall begin again to-morrow."

"It need not interfere with your studies. The nights are very long now, and you can accomplish a great deal if you feel disposed to do so. I think it possible I can obtain a situation for your father as carpenter on a plantation in the country, if he will promise to abstain from drinking. I have heard that he was a very good mechanic, and in the country he would not meet with such constant temptation. Do you suppose that he will be willing to leave town?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am! I think so. If you please, Miss Irene, I should be so glad if you would talk to him, and persuade him to take the pledge before he starts. I believe he would join the Temperance society if you asked him to do it. Oh! then I should have some heart to work."

"You and your mother must try to influence him and in a few days I will talk to him. In the meantime I will see about the situation, which is a very desirable one. Brighter days will soon come, I trust."

He took his cap from the carpet, rose, and looked at her with swimming eyes.

"Oh, Miss Irene! I wish I could tell you all I feel. I thank you more than I can ever express, and so does mother."

"You have finished your book, I see; don't you want another? Nellie will show you the library, and on the lower book-shelf, on the right-hand side of the door, you will find a large volume in leather binding—'Plutarch.' Take it with you, and read it carefully. Good-bye. I shall come down to the Row to-morrow or next day."

CHAPTER XXV

RECONCILED

"Well, Irene, what is your decision about the party at Mrs. Churchill's to-night?"

"I will go with you, father, if it is a matter of so much interest to you, though, as I told you yesterday, I should prefer declining the invitation as far as I am concerned."

"It is full time for you to go into society again. You have moped at home long enough."

"'Moped' is scarcely the right word, father."

"It matters little what you call it, the fact is the same. You have shut yourself in till you have grown to look like a totally different woman. Indeed, Irene, I won't permit it any longer; you must come out into the world once more. I am, sick of your black looks; let me see you in colours to-night."

"Will not pure white content you, father?"

"No, I am tired of it. Wear something bright."

"I have a favour to ask at your hands, father, will you give me that large beautiful vacant lot with the old willow tree, on the corner of Pine Street and Huntingdon Avenue, opposite the court-house?"

"Upon my word! I must say you are very modest in your request! What the deuce do you want with it?"

"I know that I am asking a good deal, sir; but I want it as a site for an orphan asylum. Will you give it to me?"

"No! I'll be hanged if I do! Are you going entirely deranged? What business have you with asylums, I should like to know? Put all of that ridiculous stuff out of your head. Here is something for which I sent to Europe. Eric selected it in Paris, and it arrived yesterday. Wear it to-night."

He drew a velvet case from his pocket and laid it before her. Touching the spring, the lid flew open, and on the blue satin lining lay the blazing coils of a magnificent diamond necklace and bracelets.

"How beautiful! how splendidly beautiful!"

She bent over the flashing mass in silent admiration for some time, examining the delicate setting, then looked up at her father.

"What did they cost?"

"Why do you want to know that?"

"I am pardonably curious on the subject."

"Well, then, I was silly enough to give seven thousand dollars for them."

"And what was the value of that lot I asked for?"

"Five thousand dollars."

"Father, these diamonds are the finest I ever saw. They are superbly beautiful; a queen might be proud of them, and I thank you most earnestly for such a gorgeous present; but if you will not be offended, I will be candid with you—I would a thousand times rather have the lot than the jewels."

The expression of blank astonishment with which these words were received would have been ludicrous but for the ominous thickening of his brows.

She laid her fingers on his arm, but he shook off the touch, and, scowling sullenly, snatched the velvet case from her hand.

He went to town, and she met him no more till she was attired for the party. Standing before the mirror in her own room she arranged the flowers in her hair, and, when the leaves were disposed to suit her fastidious taste, she took up a pearl set which he had given her years before, intending to wear it. But just then raising her eyes, she saw her father's image reflected in the glass. Without turning she put up her arms, and, laying her head back on his shoulder, said eagerly—

"My dear, dear father, do let us be reconciled."

Clouds and moodiness melted from his handsome features as he bent over her an instant, kissing her fondly; then his hands passed swiftly over her neck, an icy shower fell upon it, and she was clothed with light.

"My beautiful child, wear your diamonds as a seal of peace. I can't let you have the Pine Street lot—I want it for a different purpose; but I will give you three acres on the edge of town, near the depôt, for your asylum whim. It is a better location every way for your project."

"Thank you, father. Oh! thank you more than words can express."

She turned her lips to one of the hands still lingering on her shoulder.

"Irene, look at yourself. Diana of Ephesus! what a blaze of glory!"

Two days before the marriage of Charles Harris and Maria Henderson had been celebrated with considerable pomp, and the party to-night was given in honour of the event by Mrs. Churchill, a widowed sister of Judge Harris. She had spent several years in Paris superintending the education of a daughter, whom she had recently brought home to reside near her uncle, and dazzle all W—— with her accomplishments.

At ten o'clock there stood beneath the gas-lights in her elegant parlour a human fleshy antithesis, upon which all eyes were riveted—Salome Churchill—a dark imperious beauty, of the Cleopatra type, with very full crimson lips, passionate or pouting as occasion demanded; brilliant black eyes that, like August days, burned dewless and unclouded, a steady blaze; thick, shining, black hair elaborately curled, and a rich tropical complexion, clear and glowing as the warm blood that pulsed through her rounded graceful form. She wore a fleecy fabric, topaz-coloured, with black lace trimmings; yellow roses gemmed her hair, and topaz and ruby ornaments clasped her throat and arms. An Eastern queen she looked, exacting universal homage, and full of fiery jealousy whenever her eyes fell upon one who stood just opposite. Irene's dress was an airy blue *tulle*, flounced to the waist, and without trimming, save the violet and clematis clusters. Never had her rare beauty been more resplendent—more dazzlingly chilly; it seemed the glitter of an arctic ice-berg lit by some low midnight sun, and turn whither she would fascinated groups followed her steps. Salome's reputation as a brilliant *belle* had become extended since Irene's long seclusion, yet to-night, on the reappearance of the latter, it was apparent to even the most obtuse that she had resumed her sway—the matchless cynosure of that social system. Fully conscious of the intense admiration she excited, she moved slowly from room to room, smiling once or twice when she met her father's proud look of fond triumph fixed upon her.

Leaning against the window to rest, while Charles Harris went in search of a glass of water, she heard Aubrey's name pronounced by some one on the gallery.

"Well, the very latest report is that, after all, Aubrey never fancied Grace Harris, as the quidnuncs asserted—never addressed her, or anybody else—but is now, sure enough, about to bear off *belle* Salome, the new prize, right in the face of twenty rivals. I should really like to hear of something which that man could not do, if he set himself to work in earnest. I wonder whether it ever occurs to him that he once stood behind Jacob Watson's counter?"

"But Aubrey is not here to-night. Does not affect parties, I believe?"

"Rarely shows himself. But you mistake: he came in not twenty minutes ago; and you should have seen what I saw—the rare-ripe red deepen on Salome's cheeks when he spoke to her."

Irene moved away from the window, and soon after was about to accompany Charlie to the hall, when a Mr. Bainbridge came up and claimed her hand for the cotillion forming in the next room. As they took their places on the floor, she saw that Salome and Russell would be *vis-à-vis*.

Irene moved mechanically through the airy mazes of the dance, straining her ear to catch the mellow voice which uttered such graceful, fascinating nothings to Salome. Several times in the course of the cotillion Russell's hand clasped her, but even then he avoided looking at her, and seemed engrossed in conversation with his gay partner. Once Irene looked up steadily, and as she noted the expression with which he regarded his companion she wondered no longer at the rumour she had heard, and acknowledged to herself that they were, indeed, a handsome couple.

The dance ended; Irene declined to dance again. She looked about for Dr. Arnold, but he had disappeared; her father was deep in a game of euchre; and as she crossed the hall she was surprised to see Philip leaning against the door-facing, and peering curiously into the parlours.

"Philip, what are you doing here?"

"Oh, Miss Irene! I have been hunting for you ever so long. Mrs. Davis is dying, and Susan sent me after you. I went to your house two hours ago, and they said you were here. Will you come, ma'am!"

"Of course. Philip, find Andrew and the carriage, and I will meet you at the side door in five minutes."

She went to the dressing-room, asked for pencil and paper, and wrote a few lines, which she directed the servant to hand immediately to her father—found her shawl, and stole down to the side door. She saw the dim outline of a form sitting on the step, in the shadow of clustering vines, and asked—

"Is that you, Philip? I am ready."

The figure rose, came forward into the light, hat in hand, and both started visibly.

"Pardon me, Mr. Aubrey. I mistook you in the darkness for another."

Here Philip ran up the steps.

"Miss Irene, Andrew says he can't get to the side gate for the carriages. He is at the front

entrance."

"Can I assist you, Miss Huntingdon?"

"I thank you; no."

"May I ask if you are ill?"

"Not in the least—but I am suddenly called away."

She passed him, and accompanied Philip to the carriage. A few minutes' rapid driving brought them to the Row, and, directing Andrew to return and wait for her father, Irene entered the low small chamber, where a human soul was pluming itself for its final flight home. The dying woman knew her even then in the fierce throes of dissolution, and the sunken eyes beamed as she bent over the pillow.

"God bless you! I knew you would come. My children—what will become of them? Will you take care of them? Tell me quick."

"Put your mind at rest, Mrs. Davis. I will see that your children are well cared for in every respect."

"Promise me!" gasped the poor sufferer, clutching the jewelled arm.

"I do promise you most solemnly that I will watch over them constantly. They shall never want so long as I live. Will you not believe me, and calm yourself?"

A ghastly smile trembled over the distorted features, and she bowed her head in assent.

"Mrs. Davis, don't you feel that you will soon be at rest with God?"

"Yes—I am going home happy—happy."

She closed her eyes and whispered—

"Sing my—hymn—once—more."

Making a great effort to crush her own feelings, Irene sang the simple but touching words of "Home Again," and though her voice faltered now and then, she sang it through—knowing, from the expression of the sufferer's face, that the spirit was passing to its endless rest.

A passionate burst of sorrow from Johnnie followed the discovery of the melancholy truth, and rising from the floor Irene seated herself on a chair, taking the child on her lap, and soothing his violent grief. Too young to realize his loss, he was easily comforted, and after a time grew quiet. She directed Susan to take him into the next room and put him on his pallet; and when she had exchanged a few words with Philip's mother about the disposition of the rigid sleeper, she turned to quit the apartment, and saw Russell standing on the threshold. Had the dead mother suddenly stepped before her she would scarcely have been more astonished and startled.

He extended one hand, and hastily taking hers, drew her to the door of the narrow, dark hall, where the newly-risen moon shone in.

"Come out of this charnel-house into the pure air once more. Do not shrink back—trust yourself with me this once at least." The brick walls of the factory rose a hundred yards off, in full view of the Row, and leading her along the river bank he placed her on one of the massive stone steps of the building.

"What brought you here to-night, Mr. Aubrey?"

"An unpardonable curiosity concerning your sudden departure—an unconquerable desire to speak to you once more. I came here overmastered by an irresistible desire to see you alone, to look at you, to tell you what I have almost sworn should never pass my lips—what you may consider unmanly weakness—nay, insanity, on my part. We are face to face at last, man and woman, with the golden bars of conventionality and worldly distinction snapped asunder. I am no longer the man whom society would fain flatter, in atonement for past injustice; and I choose to forget for the time, that you are the daughter of my bitterest deadly foe—my persistent persecutor. I remember nothing now but the crowned days of our childhood, the rosy dawn of my manhood, where your golden head shone my Morning Star. I hurl away all barriers and remember only the one dream of my life—my deathless, unwavering love for you. Oh, Irene! Irene! why have you locked that rigid cold face of yours against me? In the hallowed days of old you nestled your dear hands into mine, and pressed your curls against my cheek, and gave me comfort in your pure, warm, girlish affection; how can you snatch your frozen fingers from mine now, as though my touch were contamination? Be yourself once more—give me one drop from the old overflowing fountain. I am a lonely man; and my proud, bitter heart hungers for one of your gentle words, one of your sweet, priceless smiles. Irene, look at me! Give it to me?"

He sat down on the step at her feet, and raised his dark magnetic face, glowing with the love which had so long burned undimmed, his lofty full forehead wearing a strange flush.

She dared not meet his eye, and drooped her head on her palms, shrinking from the scorching furnace of trial, whose red jaws yawned to receive her. He waited a moment, and his low mellow voice rose to a stormy key.

"Irene, you are kind and merciful to the poor wretches in the Row. Poverty—nay, crime, does not frighten away your compassion for them! Why are you hard and cruelly haughty only to me?"

"You do not need my sympathy, Mr. Aubrey, and congratulations on your great success would not come gracefully from my lips. Most unfortunate obstacles long since rendered all intercourse between us impossible still; my feeling for you has undergone no change. I am, I assure you, still your friend."

It cost her a powerful effort to utter these words, and her voice took a metallic tone utterly foreign to it. Her heart writhed, bled and moaned in the grip of her steely purpose, but she endured all calmly—relaxing not one jot of her bitter resolution.

"My friend? Mockery! God defend me from such henceforth. Irene, you loved me once—nay, don't deny it! You need not blush for the early folly, which, it seems, you have interred so deeply; and though you scorn to meet me even as an equal, I know, I feel, that I am worthy of your love—that I comprehend your strange nature as no one else ever will—that, had such a privilege been accorded me, I could have kindled your heart, and made you supremely happy. Cursed barriers have divided us always; fate denied me my right. I have suffered many things; but does it not argue, at least, in favour of my love, that it has survived all the trials to which your father's hate had subjected me? To-night I could forgive him all! all! if I knew that he had not so successfully hardened, closed your heart against me. My soul is full of bitterness which would move you, if one trait of your girlish nature remained. But you are not my Irene! The world's queen, the dazzling idol of the ball-room, is not my blue-eyed, angelic Irene of old! I will intrude upon you no longer. Try at least not to despise me for my folly; I will crush it; and if you deign to remember me at all in future, think of a man who laughs at his own idiocy, and strives to forget that he ever believed there lived one woman who would be true to her own heart, even though the heavens fell and the world passed away!"

He rose partially, but her hand fell quickly upon his shoulder, and the bowed face lifted itself, stainless as starry jasmines bathed in equatorial dews.

"Mr. Aubrey, you are too severe upon yourself, and very unjust to me. The circumstances which conspired to alienate us were far beyond my control; I regret them as sincerely as you possibly can, but as unavailably. If I have individually occasioned you sorrow or disappointment, God knows it was no fault of mine! We stand on the opposite shores of a dark, bridgeless gulf; but before we turn away to be henceforth strangers, I stretch out my hand to you in friendly farewell—deeply regretting the pain which I may have innocently caused you, and asking your forgiveness. Mr. Aubrey, remember me as I was, not as I am. Good-bye, my friend. May God bless you in coming years, and crown your life with the happiness you merit, is the earnest prayer of my heart."

The rare blue cord on her brow told how fiercely the lava-flood surged under its icy bands, and the blanched lip matched her cheek in colourlessness; save these tokens of anguish, no other was visible.

Russell drew down the hand from his shoulder, and folded it in both his own.

"Irene, are we to walk different paths henceforth—utter strangers? Is such your will?"

"Such is the necessity, which must be as apparent to you as to me. Do not doubt my friendship, Mr. Aubrey; but doubt the propriety of my parading it before the world."

He bent his cheek down on her cold hand, then raised it to his lips once, twice—laid it back on her lap, and taking his hat, walked away toward town.

For some time she remained just as Russell had left her; then the white arms and dry eyes were raised to the midnight sky.

"My God! my God! strengthen me in my desolation!"

She put back the folds of hair that, damp with dew, clung to her gleaming temples, and recrossing the wide road or street, approached the chamber of death.

Irene met at the door Dr. Arnold's buggy.

"Irene, are you ready to go home?"

"Yes. Mrs. Davis is dead."

"As I was leaving Mrs. Churchill's, your father told me where you were, and I thought I would come after you. Put on your shawl and jump in. You are in a pretty plight, truly, to stand over a deathbed! 'Vanity of vanities! all is vanity!' Here, let me wrap that gauze cloud around your head. Now then!"

The top of the buggy had been lowered, and as they rode homeward she leaned her head back, turning her face to the sickly moonlight.

They went into the house, and as he filled and lighted his pipe, his cavernous eyes ran curiously over her.

"How you have blazed to-night! Your diamonds are superb."

"Yes, sir."

"Go to sleep at once, child. You look as if you had seen a ghost. What has knotted up your forehead in that style?"

"I have looked upon a melancholy death to-night, and have seen two helpless children orphaned. Come and see me soon; I want to consult you about an orphan asylum for which father has given me a lot. Good night, sir; I am very much obliged to you for your kindness in bringing me home. Nobody else is half so considerate and thoughtful."

In her own room she took off the jewels, withered violets and moist *tulle*—and drawing on her dressing-gown, went up to the observatory, and sat down on the threshold of one of the glass doors looking eastward.

"Think of a man who laughs at his own idiocy, and strives to forget that he ever believed there lived one woman who would be true to her own heart, though the heavens fell and the world passed away!"

These words of scorn were the burning shares over which her bare feet trod, and his bitter accents wailed up and down her lonely heart. Through the remainder of that cloudless night she wrestled silently. At last, when the sky flushed rosily, like an opal smitten with light, and holy Resignation—the blessing born only of great trial like hers—shed its heavenly chrism over the worn and weary, bruised and bleeding spirit, she gathered up the mangled hopes that might have gladdened, and gilded, and glorified her earthly career, and pressing the ruins to her heart, laid herself meekly down, offering all upon the God-built altar of Filial Obedience.

In the

" ... early morning, when the air
Was delicate with some last starry touch,"

she opened the door of her father's room and approached the bed. The noise wakened him, and raising himself on his elbow, he looked wonderingly at her.

"What is the matter, Irene? You look as if you had not closed your eyes."

"Father, you took me in your arms last night, and kissed me as you have not done before for years. Oh, father! my father! do not cast me off again! Whom have I in the world but you? By the memory of my sainted mother I ask—I claim your love!"

"You are a strange girl, Irene; I never did understand you. But I don't want to drive you from me, if you prefer to live here single. There shall be peace between us, my dear daughter."

He leaned forward, and laid his hand caressingly on her head, as she knelt at his bedside, pleading with uplifted arms.

CHAPTER XXVI

CIVIL WAR

The treacherous four year's lull was broken at last by the mutter of the storm which was so soon to sweep over the nation, prostrating all interests, and bearing desolation to almost every hearthstone in our once happy, smiling land of constitutional freedom. Aubrey was deeply impressed with the vital consequences of the impending election; and as the conviction forced itself upon his mind that, through the demoralization of the Northern wing of Democracy, Lincoln would be elected, he endeavoured to prepare the masses for that final separation which he foresaw was inevitable. Lincoln was elected. Abolitionism, so long adroitly cloaked, was triumphantly clad in robes of state—shameless now, and hideous, and while the North looked upon the loathsome face of its political Mokanna, the South prepared for resistance.

No surer indication of the purpose of the Southern people could have been furnished, than the temper in which the news was received. No noisy outbursts, expending resolve in empty words—no surface excitement—but a stern calm gloom, set lips, heavy bent brows, appropriate in men who realized that they had a revolution on their hands; not indignation meetings, with fruitless resolutions—that they stood as body-guard for the liberty of the Republic, and would preserve the trust at all hazards. It would seem that, for a time at least, party animosities would have been crushed; but bitter differences sprang up at the very threshold on the *modus operandi* of Southern release from Yankee-Egyptic bondage. Separate "State action" or "co-operation" divided the people, many of whom were earnestly impressed by the necessity and expediency of deliberate, concerted, simultaneous action on the part of all the Southern States, while others vehemently advocated this latter course solely because the former plan was advanced and supported by their old opponents. In this new issue, as if fate persistently fanned the flame of hate between Mr. Huntingdon and Russell Aubrey, they were again opposed as candidates for the State Convention.

W—— was once more convulsed, and strenuous efforts were made by both sides. Russell was indefatigable in his labours for prompt, immediate State action, proclaiming his belief that co-operation was impracticable before secession; and it was now that his researches in the dusty regions of statistics came admirably into play, as he built up his arguments on solid foundations of indisputable calculation.

The contest was close and heated, and resulted somewhat singularly in the election of a mixed ticket—two Secessionists being returned, and one Co-operationist, Mr. Huntingdon, owing to personal popularity.

While the entire South was girding for the contest, South Carolina, ever the *avant courier* in the march of freedom, seceded; and if doubt had existed before, it vanished now from every mind—for all felt that the gallant State must be sustained. Soon after, Russell and Mr. Huntingdon stood face to face on the floor of their own State convention, and wrestled desperately. The latter headed the opposition, and so contumacious did it prove, that for some days the fate of the State lay in dangerous equilibrium. Finally, the vigilance of the Secessionists prevailed, and, late in the afternoon of a winter day, the ordinance was signed.

Electricity flashed the decree to every portion of the State, and the thunder of artillery and blaze of countless illuminations told that the people gratefully and joyfully accepted the verdict. W—— was vociferous; and as Irene gazed from the colonnade on the distant but brilliant rows of lights flaming along the streets, she regretted that respect for her father's feelings kept the windows of her own home dark and cheerless.

The 12th and 13th of April were days of unexampled excitement throughout the Southern States. The discharge of the first gun from Fort Moultrie crushed the last lingering vestiges of "Unionism," and welded the entire Confederacy in one huge homogeneous mass of stubborn resistance to despotism. With the explosion of the first shell aimed by General Beauregard against Fort Sumter burst the frail painted bubble of "Reconstruction," which had danced alluringly upon the dark, surging billows of revolution. W—— was almost wild with anxiety; and in the afternoon of the second day of the bombardment, as Irene watched the avenue, she saw her father driving rapidly homeward. Descending the steps, she met him at the buggy.

"Beauregard has taken Sumter. Anderson surrendered unconditionally. No lives lost."

"Thank God!"

They sat down on the steps, and a moment after the roar of guns shook the atmosphere, and cheer after cheer went up the evening sky.

"Act I, of a long and bloody civil war," said Mr. Huntingdon gravely. "To-day I have come to a determination which will doubtless surprise you."

He paused, and eyed her a moment.

"No, father; I am not surprised that you have determined to do your duty."

"How, Irene? What do you suppose that it is?"

"To use Nelson's words, the Confederacy 'expects that every man will do his duty'; and you are going into the army."

"Who told you that?"

"My own heart, father; which tells me what I should do were I in your place."

"Well, I have written to Montgomery, to Clapham, to tender my services. We were at West Point together; I served under him at Contreras and Chapultepec, and he will no doubt press matters through promptly. The fact is, I could not possibly stay at home now. My blood has been at boiling heat since yesterday morning, when I read Beauregard's first dispatch."

"Did you specify any branch of the service?"

"Yes; told him I preferred artillery. What is the matter? Your lips are as white as cotton. By the way what shall I do with you? It won't do to leave you here all alone."

"Why not, father? Home is certainly the proper place for me, if you cannot take me with you."

"What! with nobody but the servants?"

"They will take better care of me than anybody else. Nellie, and Andrew, and John are the only guardians I want in your absence. They have watched over me all my life, and they will do it to the end. Give yourself no trouble, sir, on my account."

"I suppose your Uncle Eric will be home before long; he can stay here till I come back—or—till the troubles are over. In the meantime, you could be with the Harrises, or Hendersons, or Mrs. Churchill."

"No, sir; I can stay here, which is infinitely preferable on many accounts. I will, with your permission, invite Mrs. Campbell to shut up the parsonage in her husband's absence, and remain with me till Uncle Eric returns. I have no doubt that she will be glad to make the change. Do you approve the plan?"

"Yes. That arrangement will answer for the present, and Arnold will be here to take care of you."

At the close of a week a telegraphic dispatch was received, informing Mr. Huntingdon of his appointment as major in the provisional army of the Confederacy and containing an order to report immediately for duty.

Having completed his arrangements, and ordered the carriage to be in readiness at daylight next morning to convey him to the depôt, he bade her good night much as usual, and retired to his own room.

But thought was too busy to admit of sleep. He turned restlessly on his pillow, rose, and smoked a second cigar, and returned, to find himself more wakeful than ever. The clock downstairs in the library struck one; his door opened softly, and, by the dim moonlight struggling through the window, he saw Irene glide to his bedside.

"Why don't you go to sleep, Irene?"

"Because I can't. I am too miserable."

Her voice was dry, but broken, faltering.

"Father, the future is dark and uncertain; and I feel that I want an assurance of your entire reconciliation and affection before you go. I came here to say to you that I deeply regret all the unfortunate circumstances of my life which caused you to treat me so coldly for a season—that if in anything I have ever seemed obstinate or undutiful, it was not because I failed in love for you, but from an unhappy difference of opinion as to my duty under very trying circumstances. Father, my heart ached very bitterly under your estrangement—the very memory is unutterably painful. I want your full, free forgiveness now, for all the trouble I have ever occasioned you. Oh, father! give it to me!"

He drew her close to him, and kissed her twice.

"You have my forgiveness, my daughter—though I must tell you that your treatment of poor Hugh has been a continual source of sorrow and keen disappointment to me. I never can forget your disobedience in that matter. I do not believe you will ever be happy, you have such a strange disposition; but since you took matters so completely in your own hands, you have only yourself to reproach. Irene, I very often wonder whether you have any heart—for it seems to me that if you have, it would have been won by the devotion which has been lavished on you more than once. You are the only woman I ever knew who appeared utterly incapable of love; and I sometimes wonder what will become of you when I am dead."

"God will protect me. I look continually to His guardianship. I won't keep you awake any longer, as you have a tedious journey before you. Good night, my dear father."

She kissed him tenderly and left him, closing the door softly behind her.

A spectral crescent moon flickered in the sky, and stars still burned in the violet East, when the carriage drove to the door, and Irene followed her father to the steps.

Even in that dim, uncertain grey light he could see that her face was rigid and haggard, and tears filled his cold, brilliant eyes as he folded her to his heart.

"Good-bye, Beauty. Cheer up, my brave child! and look on the bright side. After all, I may come back a brigadier-general, and make you one of my staff-officers! You shall be my adjutant, and light up my office with your golden head. Take care of yourself till Eric comes, and write to me often. Good-bye, my dear, my darling daughter."

She trembled convulsively, pressing her lips repeatedly to his.

"Oh, may God bless you, my father, and bring you safely back to me!"

He unwound her arms, put her gently aside, and stepped into the carriage.

William, the cook, who was to accompany him, stood sobbing near the door, and now advancing, grasped her hand.

"Good-bye, Miss Irene. May the Lord protect you all till we come back."

"William, I look to you to take care of father, and let me know at once if anything happens."

"I will, Miss Irene. I promise you I will take good care of master, and telegraph you if he is hurt."

He wrung her hand, the carriage rolled rapidly away, and the sorrow-stricken, tearless woman sat down on the steps and dropped her head in her hands.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOSPITAL STORES

To those who reside at the convulsed throbbing heart of a great revolution, a lifetime seems compressed into the compass of days and weeks; and men and women are conscious of growing prematurely old while watching the rushing, thundering tramp of events, portentous with the fate of nations. W——presented the appearance of a military camp, rather than the peaceful manufacturing town of yore. Every vacant lot was converted into a parade-ground—and the dash of cavalry, the low, sullen rumbling of artillery, and the slow, steady tread of infantry, echoed through its wide, handsome streets. Flag-staffs were erected from public buildings, private residences, and at the most frequent corners, and from these floated banners of all sizes, tossing proudly to the balmy breeze the new-born ensign of freedom—around which clustered the hopes of a people who felt that upon them, and them only, now devolved the sacred duty of proving to the world the capacity of a nation for self-government.

W—— gave her young men liberally; company after company was equipped, furnished with ample funds by the munificence of citizens who remained, and sent forward to Virginia, to make their breasts a shield for the proud old "Mother of Presidents." The battle of Bethel was regarded as part of an overture to the opera of Blood, yclept "Subjugation," and people watched in silence for the crimson curtain to rise on the banks of the Potomac. Russell Aubrey had succeeded in raising a fine full company for the war, as contra-distinguished from twelve-months volunteers; and to properly drill and discipline it, he bent all the energy of his character. It was made the nucleus of a new regiment; recruits gathered rapidly, and when the regiment organized, preparatory to starting for Virginia, he was elected colonel, with Herbert Blackwell for lieutenant-colonel, and Charles Harris was appointed adjutant. They were temporarily encamped on the common between the railroad depôt and Mr. Huntingdon's residence, and from the observatory or colonnade Irene could look down on the gleaming tents and the flag-staff that stood before the officers' quarters. *Reveille* startled her at dawn, and *tattoo* regularly warned her of the shortness of summer nights. As the fiery carriage-horses would not brook the sight of the encampment, she discarded them for a time, and when compelled to leave home rode Erebus at no slight risk of her life—for he evinced the greatest repugnance to the sound of drum or fife.

One afternoon she went over to the Row, and thence to the factory. A new company had been named in honour of her father; uniforms and haversacks were to be furnished, and Mr. Huntingdon had entrusted her with the commission. Selecting the cloth and accomplishing her errand, she returned by way of the orphan asylum, whose brick walls were rapidly rising under her supervision. One of the workmen took her horse, and she went over the building, talking to the principal mechanic about some additional closets which she desired to have inserted. Dr. Arnold chanced to be passing, but saw Erebus at the gate, stopped, and came in.

"I was just going up the Hill to see you, Queen—glad I am saved the trouble. Here, sit down a minute; I will clear the shavings away. When did you hear from Leonard?"

"I had a letter yesterday. He was well, and on outpost duty near Manassas."

"Well, I shall join him very soon."

"Sir?"

"I say I shall join him very soon; don't you believe it? Why shouldn't I serve my country as well as younger men? The fact is, I am going as surgeon of Aubrey's regiment."

She looked at him, betraying neither surprise nor regret.

"When will you leave W——?"

"Day after to-morrow morning; can't get transportation any sooner. Aubrey has received orders to report at once to General Beauregard. Child, have you been sick?"

"No, sir. I am glad you are going with the regiment; very glad. Every good surgeon in the Confederacy should hasten to the front line of our armies. Since you leave home, I am particularly glad that you are going to Manassas, where you can be near father."

He mused a moment, watching her furtively.

"I suppose you have heard of the performance for to-morrow?"

"No, sir. To what do you allude?"

"The daughter of Herodias is preparing to dance."

"I don't understand you, Doctor."

"Oh, don't you, indeed? Well, then, she intends to present a splendid regimental flag with her own brown hands; and as Aubrey is to receive it, the regiment will march to Mrs. Churchill's, where the speeches will be delivered. Will you attend?"

"Scarcely, I presume, as I am not invited. I knew that Salome was having an elegant flag made, but was not aware that to-morrow was appointed for the ceremony of presentation. When will you come to see me? I want you to take a parcel to father for me; and then I want to have a

long talk."

"I know what the long talk amounts to. I am coming, of course, after the flag ceremonies, where I am expected. At one o'clock I will be at the Hill—perhaps earlier. Where now?"

"I must go by Mrs. Baker's, to see about giving out some sewing for the 'Huntingdon Rifles.' I can't do it all at home, and several families here require work. I shall expect you at one o'clock—shall have lunch ready for you. By the way, Doctor, is there anything I can do for you in the sewing line? It would give me genuine pleasure to make something for you, if you will only tell me what you need. Think over your wants."

She had caught up her reins, but paused, looking at him. He averted his head quickly.

"I will tell you to-morrow. Good evening."

As she went homeward a shadow fell upon her face—a shadow darker than that cast by the black plume in her riding-hat—and once or twice her lips writhed from their ordinary curves of beauty. Nearing the encampment she lowered her veil, but saw that dress parade had been dismissed, and as she shook the reins and Erebus quickened his gallop, she found herself face to face with the colonel, who had just mounted his horse and was riding toward town. She looked at him and bowed; but, in passing, he kept his eyes fixed on the road before him, and in the duskiness his face seemed colder and more inflexible than ever. Such had been the manner of their occasional meetings since the interview at the factory, and she was not surprised that this, her first greeting, was disregarded. The public believed that an engagement existed between him and Salome, and the attentions heaped upon him by the family of the latter certainly gave colour to the report. But Irene was not deceived; she had learned to understand his nature, and knew that his bitterness of feeling and studied avoidance of herself betokened that the old affection had not been crushed. Struggling with the dictates of her heart, and a sense of the respect due to her father's feelings, she passed a sleepless night in pacing the gallery of the observatory. It was a vigil of almost intolerable perplexity and anguish. Under all its painful aspects she patiently weighed the matter, and at sunrise next morning, throwing open the blinds of her room, she drew her rosewood desk to the window, and wrote these words—

"Col. Aubrey,—

"Before you leave W—— allow me to see you for a few moments. If your departure is positively fixed for to-morrow, come to me this afternoon, at any hour which may be most convenient.

"Respectfully,
"Irene Huntingdon."

As the regiment prepared to march to Mrs. Churchill's residence, the note was received from Andrew's hands. Returning his sword to its scabbard, the colonel read the paper twice, three times—a heavy frown gathered on his forehead, his swarthy cheek fired, and, thrusting the note into his pocket, he turned toward his regiment, saying hastily to the servant—

"You need not wait. No answer is expected."

At the breakfast-table Irene opened a hasty missive from Salome, inviting her to be present at the presentation of the flag, and begging a few choice flowers for the occasion. Smiling quietly, she filled the accompanying basket with some of the rarest treasures of the greenhouse, added a bowl of raspberries which the gardener had just brought in, and sent all, with a brief line excusing herself from attending.

The morning was spent in writing to her father, preparing a parcel for him, and in superintending the making of a large quantity of blackberry jelly and cordial for the use of the hospitals.

About noon Dr. Arnold came, and found her engaged in sealing up a number of the jars, all neatly labelled. The day was warm; she had pushed back her hair from her brow, as she bent over her work; the full sleeves were pinned up above the elbow, and she wore a white check-muslin apron to protect her dress from the resin and beeswax.

"In the name of Medea and her Colchian cauldron! what are you about, Irene?"

"Fixing a box of hospital stores for you to take with you. I have finished, sir. Let me wash my hands, and I will give you some lunch in the dining-room."

"No; I lunched with the Israelites. Salome was brilliant as a Brazilian fire-fly, and presented her banner quite gracefully. Aubrey looked splendid in his uniform; was superbly happy in his speech—always is. Madam did the honours inimitably, and, in fine—give me that fan on the table—everything was decidedly *comme il faut*. You were expected, and you ought to have gone; it looked spiteful to stay away. I should absolutely like to see you subjected to 212° Fahrenheit, in order to mark the result. Here I am almost suffocating with the heat, which would be respectable in Soudan, and you sit there bolt upright, looking as cool as a west wind in March. Beauty, you should get yourself patented as a social refrigerator, 'Warranted proof against the dog-days.' What rigmarole do you want me to repeat to Leonard?"

"I wish, if you please, when you get to Manassa, that you would persuade father to allow me to come, at least, as far as Richmond. You have some influence with him; will you use it in my

favour?"

"You are better off at home; you could possibly do no good."

"Still I want to go. Remember, my father is all I have in this world."

"And what have you elsewhere, Irene?"

"My mother, my Saviour, and my God."

"Are you, then, so very anxious to go to Virginia?" he repeated, after a pause.

"I am. I want to be near father."

"Well, I will see what I can do with him. If I fail, recollect that he is not proverbial for pliability. Look here—are you nervous? Your fingers twitch, and so do your eyelids, occasionally, and your pulse is twenty beats too quick."

"I believe I am rather nervous to-day."

"Why so?"

"I did not sleep last night; that is one cause, I suppose."

"And the reason why you did not sleep? Be honest with me."

"My thoughts, sir, were very painful. Do you wonder at it in the present state of the country?"

"Irene, answer me one question, dear child: what does the future contain for you? What hope have you?—what do you live for?"

"I have much to be grateful for—much that makes me happy, and I hope to do some good in the world while I live. I want to be useful—to feel that I have gladdened some hearts, strengthened some desponding spirits, carried balm to some hearth-stones, shed some happiness on the paths of those who walk near me through life."

"Have you, then, fully resolved to remain single?"

"Why do you ask me that, Dr. Arnold?"

"Because you are dear to me, Queen; and I should like to see you happily married before I am laid in my grave."

"You will never see it. Be sure I shall live and die Irene Huntingdon."

"What has induced you to doom yourself to a——"

"Ask me no more, Doctor. If I am content with my lot, who else has the right to question?"

He looked into that fair chiselled face, and wondered whether she could be truly "content"; and the purity and peace in her deep, calm eyes baffled him sorely. She rose, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Dr. Arnold, promise me that if there is a battle, and father should be hurt, you will telegraph me at once. Do not hesitate—let me know the truth immediately. Will you?"

"I promise."

"And now, sir, what can I make or have made for you which will conduce to your comfort?"

"Have you any old linen left about the house that could be useful among the wounded?"

"I have sent off a good deal, but have some left. In what form do you want it? As lint, or bandages?"

"Neither; pack it just as it is, and send it on by express. I can't carry the world on my shoulders."

"Anything else?"

"Write to the overseer's wife to sow all the mustard-seed she can lay her hands on, and save all the sage she can. And, Irene, be sure to send me every drop of honey you can spare. That is all, I believe. If I think of anything else, I will write you."

He stooped, kissed her forehead, and hurried out to his buggy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A CONFESSION

The summer day was near its death when Colonel Aubrey rode up the stately avenue, whose cool green arches were slowly filling with shadows. Fastening his spirited horse to the iron post, he ascended the marble steps, and John received his card, and ushered him into the front parlour. The next moment Irene stood at the door; he turned his head, and they were face to face once more.

Never had her extraordinary beauty so stirred his heart; a faint flush tinged his cheek, but he bowed frigidly, and haughtily his words broke the silence.

"You sent for me, Miss Huntingdon, and I obeyed your command. Nothing less would have brought me to your presence."

She crossed the room and stood before him, holding out both hands, while her scarlet lips fluttered perceptibly. Instead of receiving the hands he drew back a step, and crossed his arms proudly over his chest. She raised her fascinating eyes to his, folded her palms together, and, pressing them to her heart, said, slowly and distinctly—

"I heard that you were ordered to Virginia, to the post of danger; and knowing to what risks you will be exposed, I wished to see you at least once more in this world. Perhaps the step I am taking may be condemned by some as a deviation from the delicacy of my sex—I trust I am not wanting in proper appreciation of what is due to my own self-respect—but the feelings which I have crushed back so long now demand utterance. Russell, I have determined to break the seal of many years' silence—to roll away the stone from the sepulchre—to tell you all. I feel that you and I must understand each other before we part for all time, and, therefore, I sent for you."

She paused, drooping her head, unable to meet his searching, steady black eyes riveted upon hers; and, drawing his tall athletic figure to its utmost height, he asked defiantly—

"You sent for me through compassionate compunctions, then—intending, at the close, to be magnanimous, and, in lieu of disdain, tell me that you pity me?"

"Pity you? No, Russell; I do not pity you."

"It is well. I neither deserve nor desire it."

"What motive do you suppose prompted me to send for you on the eve of your departure?"

"I am utterly at a loss to conjecture. I once thought you too generous to wish to inflict pain unnecessarily on any one; but God knows this interview is inexpressibly painful to me."

A numbing suspicion crossed her mind, blanching lip and cheek to the hue of death, and hardening her into the old statue-like expression. Had he, indeed, ceased to love her? Had Salome finally won her place in his heart? He saw, without comprehending, the instantaneous change which swept over her features, and regarded her with mingled impatience and perplexity.

"If such be the truth, Colonel Aubrey, the interview is ended."

He bowed, and turned partially away, but paused irresolute, chained by that electrical pale face, which no man, woman, or child ever looked at without emotion.

"Before we part, probably for ever, I should like to know why you sent for me."

"Do you remember that, one year ago to-night, we sat on the steps of the factory, and you told me of the feeling you had cherished for me from your boyhood?"

"It was a meeting too fraught with pain and mortification to be soon forgotten."

"I believe you thought me cold, heartless, and unfeeling then?"

"There was no room to doubt it. Your haughty coldness carried its own interpretation."

"Because I knew that such was the harsh opinion you had entertained for twelve months, I sought this opportunity to relieve myself of an unjust imputation. If peace had been preserved, and you had always remained quietly here, I should never have undeceived you—for the same imperative reasons, the same stern necessity, which kept me silent on the night to which I allude, would have sealed my lips through life. But all things are changed; you are going into the very jaws of death, with what result no human foresight can predict; and now, after long suffering, I feel that I have earned and may claim the right to speak to you of that which I have always expected to bury with me in my grave."

Again her crowned head bowed itself.

Past bitterness and wounded pride were instantly forgotten; hope kindled in his dark, stern face, a beauty that rarely dwelt there, and, throwing down his hat, he stepped forward and took her folded hands in his strong grasp.

"Irene, do you intend me to understand—are you willing that I shall believe that, after all, I have an interest in your heart—that I am more to you than you ever before deigned to let me

know? If it, indeed, be so, oh! give me the unmistakable assurance."

Her lips moved; he stooped his haughty head to catch the low fluttering words.

"You said that night: 'I could forgive your father all! all if I knew that he had not so successfully hardened, closed your heart against me.' Forgive him, Russell. You never can know all that you have been to me from my childhood. Only God, who sees my heart, knows what suffering our long alienation has cost me."

An instant he wavered, his strong frame quivered, and then he caught her exultingly in his arms, resting her head upon his bosom, leaning his swarthy hot cheek on hers, cold and transparent as alabaster.

"At last I realize the one dream of my life! I hold you to my heart, acknowledged all my own! Who shall dare dispute the right your lips have given me? Hatred is powerless now; none shall come between me and my own. O Irene! my beautiful darling! not all my ambitious hopes, not all the future holds, not time, nor eternity, could purchase the proud, inexpressible joy of this assurance."

"Instead of cherishing your affection for me, you struggled against it with all the energy of your character. I have seen, for some time, that you were striving to crush it out—to forget me entirely."

"I do not deny it; and certainly you ought not to blame me. You kept me at a distance with your chilling, yet graceful, fascinating *hauteur*. I had nothing to hope—everything to suffer. I diligently set to work to expel you utterly from my thoughts; and I tell you candidly, I endeavoured to love another, who was brilliant, and witty, and universally admired. But her fitful, stormy, exacting temperament was too much like my own to suit me. I tried faithfully to become attached to her, intending to make her my wife, but I failed signally. My heart clung stubbornly to its old worship; my restless, fiery spirit could find no repose, no happiness, save in the purity, the profound marvellous calm of your nature. You became the synonym of peace, rest; and, because you gave me no friendly word or glance, locking your passionless face against me, I grew savage toward you. Did you believe that I would marry Salome?"

"No! I had faith that, despite your angry efforts, your heart would be true to me."

"Why did you inflict so much pain on us both, when a word would have explained all? When the assurance you have given me to-day would have sweetened the past years of trial?"

"Because I knew it would not have that effect. A belief of my indifference steeled you against me—nerved you to endurance. But a knowledge of the truth would have increased your acrimony of feeling toward him whom you regarded as the chief obstacle, and this, at all hazards, I was resolved to avoid. Because I realized so fully the necessity of estrangement, I should never have acquainted you with my own feelings had I not known that a long, and perhaps final, separation now stretches before us. In the painful course which duty imposed on me, I have striven to promote your ultimate happiness, rather than my own."

"Irene, how can you persuade yourself that it is your duty to obey an unjust and tyrannical decree, which sacrifices the happiness of two to the unreasonable vindictiveness of one?"

"Russell, do not urge me; it is useless. Spare me the pain of repeated refusals, and be satisfied with what I have given you. Believe that my heart is, and ever will be, yours entirely, though my hand you can never claim. I know what I owe my father, and I will pay to the last iota; and I know as well what I owe myself, and, therefore, I shall live true to my first and only love, and die Irene Huntingdon. More than this you have no right to ask—I no right to grant. Be patient, Russell; be generous."

"Do you intend to send me from you? To meet me henceforth as a stranger?"

"Circumstances, which I cannot control, make it necessary."

"At least you will let me hear from you sometimes? You will give me the privilege of writing to you?"

"Impossible, Russell; do not ask that of me."

"Oh, Irene! you are cruel! Why withhold that melancholy comfort from me?"

"Simply for the reason that it would unavoidably prove a source of pain to both. I judge you by myself. I want neither your usefulness in life nor mine impaired by continual weak repining. If your life is spared I shall anxiously watch your career, rejoicing in all your honours, and your noble use of the talents which God gave you for the benefit of your race and the advancement of truth."

"I am not as noble as you think me; my ambition is not as unselfish as you suppose. Under your influence other aims and motives might possess me."

"You mistake your nature. Your intellect and temperament stamp you one of the few who receive little impression from extraneous influences; and it is because of this stern, obstinate individuality of character that I hope an extended sphere of usefulness for you, if you survive this war. Our country will demand your services, and I shall be proud and happy in the knowledge that you are faithfully and conscientiously discharging the duties of a statesman."

He shook his head sadly, placing his palm under her chin, and tenderly raising the face, in order to scan it fully.

"Irene, give me a likeness of yourself as you stand now; or, if you prefer it, have a smaller one photographed to-morrow from that portrait on the wall, and send it to me by express. I shall be detained in Richmond several days, and it will reach me safely. Do not, I beg of you, refuse me this. It is the only consolation I can have, and God knows it is little enough! Oh, Irene, think of my loneliness, and grant this last request!"

His large brilliant eyes were full of tears, the first she had ever seen dim their light, and, moved by the grief which so transformed his lineaments she answered hastily—

"Of course, if you desire it so earnestly, though it were much better that you had nothing to remind you of me."

"Will you have it taken to-morrow?"

"Yes."

She covered her face with her hands for some seconds, as if striving to overcome some impulse; then, turning quickly to him, she wound her arms about his neck, and drew his face down to hers.

"Oh, Russell! Russell! I want your promise that you will so live and govern yourself that, if your soul is summoned from the battlefield, you can confront Eternity without a single apprehension. If you must yield up your life for freedom, I want the assurance that you have gone to your final home at peace with God; that you wait there for me; and that, when my work is done, and I, too, lay my weary head to rest, we shall meet soul to soul, and spend a blessed eternity together, where strife and separation are unknown."

His black locks lay upon her forehead as he struggled for composure, and, after a moment, he answered solemnly—

"I will try, my darling."

She put into his hand the Bible, which she had carefully marked and which bore on the blank leaf, in her handwriting, "Colonel Russell Aubrey, with the life-long prayers of his best friend."

The shadow fled from her countenance, which grew radiant as some fleecy vapour suddenly smitten with a blaze of sunlight, and clearer and sweeter than chiming bells her voice rang through the room.

"Thank God for that promise! I shall lean my heart upon it till the last pulsations are stilled in my coffin. And now I will keep you no longer from your regiment. I know that you have many duties there to claim your time. Turn your face toward the window; I want to look at it, to be able to keep its expression always before me."

She put up her waxen hand, brushed the hair from his pale, dome-like brow, and gazed earnestly at the noble features, which even the most fastidious could find no cause to carp at.

"Of old, when Eurystheus threatened Athens, Macaria, in order to save the city and the land from invasion and subjugation, willingly devoted herself a sacrifice upon the altar of the gods. Ah, Russell! that were an easy task, in comparison with the offering I am called upon to make. I cannot, like Macaria, by self-immolation, redeem my country—from that great privilege I am debarred—but I yield up more than she ever possessed. I give my all on earth—my father and yourself—to our beloved and suffering country. My God! accept the sacrifice, and crown the South a sovereign, independent nation!"

She smothered a moan, and her head sank on his shoulder; but lifting it instantly, with her fathomless affection beaming in her face, she added—

"To the mercy and guidance of Almighty God I commit you, dear Russell, trusting all things in His hands. May He shield you from suffering, strengthen you in the hour of trial, and reunite us eternally in His kingdom, is, and ever shall be, my constant prayer. Good-bye, Russell. Do your duty nobly; win deathless glory on the battlefield in defence of our sacred cause; and remember that your laurels will be very precious to my lonely heart."

He watched the wonderful loveliness of face and form, till his pride was utterly melted, and, sinking on his knees, he threw one arm around her waist exclaiming—

"O Irene, you have conquered! With God's grace I will so spend the residue of my life as to merit your love, and the hope of reunion beyond the grave."

She laid her hand lightly on his bowed head as he knelt beside her, and, in a voice that knew no faltering, breathed out a fervent prayer, full of pathos and sublime faith—invoking blessings upon him—life-long guardianship, and final salvation through Christ. The petition ended, she rose, smiling through the mist that gathered over her eyes, and he said—

"I now ask something which I feel that you will not refuse me. Electra will probably soon come home, and she may be left alone in the world. Will you sometimes go to her for my sake, and give her your friendship?"

"I will, Russell, for her sake, as well as for yours. She shall be the only sister I have ever known."

She drew his hand to her lips, but he caught it away, and pressed a last kiss upon them.

"Good-bye, my own darling! my life angel!"

She heard his step across the hall; a moment after, the tramp of his horse, as he galloped down the avenue, and she knew that the one happy hour of her life had passed—that the rent sepulchre of silence must be re-sealed.

Pressing her hand over her desolate heart, she murmured sadly—

"Thy will, not mine, O Father! Give me strength to do my work; enable me to be faithful even to the bitter end."

CHAPTER XXIX

A DYING MESSAGE

In July, 1861, when the North, blinded by avarice and hate, rang with the cry of "On to Richmond," our Confederate Army of the Potomac was divided between Manassa and Winchester, watching at both points the glittering coils of the Union boa-constrictor, which writhed in its efforts to crush the last sanctuary of freedom. The stringency evinced along the Federal lines prevented the transmission of dispatches by the Secessionists of Maryland, and for a time Generals Beauregard and Johnston were kept in ignorance of the movements of the enemy. Patterson hung dark and lowering around Winchester, threatening daily descent; while the main column of the grand army under McDowell proceeded from Washington, confident in the expectation of overwhelming the small army stationed at Manassa. The friends of liberty who were compelled to remain in the desecrated old capital appreciated the urgent necessity of acquainting General Beauregard with the designs of McDowell, and the arch-apostate, Scott; but all channels of egress seemed sealed; all roads leading across the Potomac were vigilantly guarded, to keep the great secret safely; and painful apprehensions were indulged for the fate of the Confederate army. But the Promethean spark of patriotic devotion burned in the hearts of Secession women; and, resolved to dare all things in a cause so holy, a young lady of Washington, strong in heroic faith, offered to encounter any perils, and pledged her life to give General Beauregard the necessary information. Carefully concealing a letter in the twist of her luxuriant hair, which would escape detection even should she be searched, she disguised herself effectually, and, under the mask of a market-woman, drove a cart through Washington, across the Potomac, and deceived the guard by selling vegetables and milk as she proceeded. Once beyond Federal lines, and in friendly neighbourhood, it was but a few minutes' work to "off ye lendings," and secure a horse and riding-habit. With a courage and rapidity which must ever command the admiration of a brave people she rode at hard gallop that burning July afternoon to Fairfax Court-house, and telegraphed to General Beauregard, then at Manassa's Junction, the intelligence she had risked so much to convey. Availing himself promptly of the facts, he flashed them along electric wires to Richmond, and to General Johnston; and thus, through womanly devotion, a timely junction of the two armies was effected, ere McDowell's banners flouted the skies of Bull Run.

The artillery duel of the 18th of July ended disastrously for the advance guard of the Federals —a temporary check was given.

A pure Sabbath morning kindled on the distant hill-tops, wearing heavenly credentials of rest and sanctity on its pearly forehead—credentials which the passions of mankind could not pause to recognize; and with the golden glow of summer sunshine came the tramp of infantry, the clatter of cavalry, the sullen growl of artillery. Major Huntingdon had been temporarily assigned to a regiment of infantry after leaving Richmond, and was posted on the right of General Beauregard's lines, commanding one of the lower fords. Two miles higher up the stream, in a different brigade, Colonel Aubrey's regiment guarded another of the numerous crossings. As the day advanced, and the continual roar of cannon toward Stone-Bridge and Sudley's ford indicated that the demonstrations on McLean's, Blackford's and Mitchell's fords were mere feints to hold our right and centre, the truth flashed on General Beauregard that the main column was hurled against Evans' little band on the extreme left. Hour after hour passed, and the thunder deepened on the Warrenton road; then the General learned, with unutterable chagrin, that his order for an advance on Centreville had miscarried, that a brilliant plan had been frustrated, and that new combinations and dispositions must now be resorted to. The regiment to which Major Huntingdon was attached was ordered to the support of the left wing, and reached the distant position in an almost incredibly short time, while two regiments of the brigade to which Colonel Aubrey belonged were sent forward to the same point as a reserve.

Like incarnations of victory, Beauregard and Johnston swept to the front where the conflict was most deadly; everywhere, at sight of them, our thin ranks dashed forward, and were mowed down by the fire of Rickett's and Griffin's batteries, which crowned the position they were so eager to regain. At half-past two o'clock the awful contest was at its height; the rattle of musketry, the ceaseless whistle of rifle balls, the deafening boom of artillery, the hurtling hail of shot, the explosion of shell, dense volumes of smoke shrouding the combatants, and clouds of dust boiling up on all sides, lent unutterable horror to a scene which, to cold, dispassionate observers, might have seemed sublime. As the vastly superior numbers of the Federals forced our stubborn bands to give back slowly, an order came from General Beauregard for the right of his line, except the reserves, to advance, and recover the long and desperately disputed plateau. With a shout, the shattered lines sprang upon the foe and forced them temporarily back. Major Huntingdon's horse was shot under him; he disengaged himself and marched on foot, waving his sword and uttering words of encouragement. He had proceeded but a few yards when a grape-shot entered his side, tearing its way through his body, and he fell where the dead lay thickest. For a time the enemy retired, but heavy reinforcements pressed in, and they returned, reoccupying the old ground. Not a moment was to be lost; General Beauregard ordered forward his reserves for a second effort, and with magnificent effect, led the charge in person. Then Russell Aubrey first came actively upon the field. At the word of command he dashed forward with his splendid regiment, and, high above all, towered his powerful form, with the long black plume of his hat drifting upon the wind as he led his admiring men.

As he pressed on, with thin nostril dilated, and eyes that burned like those of a tiger seizing

his prey, he saw, just in his path, leaning on his elbow, covered with blood, and smeared with dust, the crushed, withering form of his bitterest enemy. His horse's hoofs were almost upon him; he reined him back an instant, and glared down at his old foe. It was only for an instant, and as Major Huntingdon looked on the stalwart figure and at the advancing regiment, life-long hatred and jealousy were forgotten—patriotism throttled all the past in her grasp—he feebly threw up his hand, cheered faintly, and, with his eyes on Russell's, smiled grimly, saying, with evident difficulty—

"Beat them back, Aubrey! Give them the bayonet."

The shock was awful—beggaring language. On, on they swept, while ceaseless cheers mingled with the cannonade; the ground was recovered, to be captured no more. The Federals were driven back across the turnpike, and now dark masses of reinforcements debouched on the plain, and marched toward our left. Was it Grouchy or Blucher? Some moments of painful suspense ensued, while General Beauregard strained his eyes to decipher the advancing banner. Red and white and blue, certainly; but was it the ensign of Despotism or of Liberty? Nearer and nearer came the rushing column, and lo! upon the breeze streamed, triumphant as the Labarum of Constantine, the Stars and Bars. Kirby Smith and Elzey—God be praised! The day was won, and Victory nestled proudly among the folds of our new-born banner. One more charge along our whole line, and the hireling hordes of oppression fled panic-stricken. Russell had received a painful wound from a minnie ball, which entered his shoulder and ranged down toward the elbow, but he maintained his position, and led his regiment a mile in the pursuit. When it became evident that the retreat was a complete rout, he resigned the command to Lieutenant-Colonel Blackwell, and rode back to the battlefield.

Picking his way to avoid trampling the dead, Russell saw Major Huntingdon at a little distance, trying to drag himself toward a neighbouring tree. The memory of his injuries crowded upon the memory of all that he had endured and lost through that man's prejudice—the sorrow that might have been averted from his blind mother—and his vindictive spirit rebelled at the thought of rendering him aid. But as he paused and struggled against his better nature, Irene's holy face, as he saw it last, lifted in prayer for him, rose, angel-like, above all that mass of death and horrors. The sufferer was Irene's father; she was hundreds of miles away. Russell set his lips firmly, and, riding up to the prostrate figure, dismounted. Exhausted by his efforts, Major Huntingdon had fallen back in the dust, and an expression of intolerable agony distorted his features as Russell stooped over him, and asked in a voice meant to be gentle—

"Can I do anything for you? Could you sit up, if I placed you on my horse?"

The wounded man scowled as he recognized the voice and face, and turned his head partially away, muttering—

"What brought you here?"

"There has never been any love between us, Major Huntingdon; but we are fighting in the same cause for the first time in our lives. You are badly wounded, and, as a fellow-soldier, I should be glad to relieve your sufferings, if possible. Once more, for humanity's sake, I ask, can you ride my horse to the rear, if I assist you to mount?"

"No. But, for God's sake, give me some water!"

Russell knelt, raised the head, and unbuckling his canteen, put it to his lips, using his own wounded arm with some difficulty. Half of the contents was eagerly swallowed, and the remainder Russell poured slowly on the gaping, ghastly wound in his side. The proud man eyed him, steadily till the last cool drop was exhausted, and said sullenly—

"You owe me no kindness, Aubrey. I hate you, and you know it. But you have heaped coals of fire on my head. You are more generous than I thought you. Thank you, Aubrey; lay me under that tree yonder, and let me die."

"I will try to find a surgeon. Who belongs to your regiment?"

"Somebody whom I never saw till last week. I won't have him hacking about me. Leave me in peace."

"Do you know anything of your servant? I saw him as I came on the field."

"Poor William! he followed me so closely that he was shot through the head. He is lying three hundred yards to the left, yonder. Poor fellow! he was faithful to the last."

A tear dimmed the master's eagle eye as he muttered, rather than spoke, these words.

"Then I will find Dr. Arnold at once, and send him to you."

It was no easy matter, on that crowded, confused Aceldama, and the afternoon was well-nigh spent before Russell, faint and weary, descried Dr. Arnold busily using his instruments in a group of wounded. He rode up, and, having procured a drink of water and refilled his canteen, approached the surgeon.

"Doctor, where is your horse? I want you."

"Ho, Cyrus! bring him up. What is the matter, Aubrey? You are hurt."

"Nothing serious, I think. But Major Huntingdon is desperately wounded—mortally, I am afraid. See what you can do for him."

"You must be mistaken! I have asked repeatedly for Leonard, and they told me he was in hot pursuit, and unhurt. I hope to Heaven you are mistaken."

"Impossible; I tell you I lifted him out of a pool of his own blood. Come; I will show you the way."

At a hard gallop they crossed the intervening woods, and, without difficulty, Russell found the spot where the mangled form lay still. He had swooned, with his face turned up to the sky, and the ghastliness of death had settled on his strongly marked, handsome features.

"God pity Irene!" said the doctor, as he bent down and examined the horrid wound, striving to press the red lips together.

The pain caused from handling him roused the brave spirit to consciousness, and opening his eyes he looked around wonderingly.

"Well, Hiram! it is all over with me, old fellow."

"I hope not, Leonard; can't you turn a little, and let me feel for the ball?"

"It is of no use; I am torn all to pieces. Take me out of this dirt, on the fresh grass somewhere."

"I must first extract the ball. Aubrey, can you help me raise him a little?"

Administering some chloroform, he soon succeeded in taking out the ball, and, with Russell's assistance, passed a bandage round the body.

"There is no chance for me, Hiram; I know that. I have few minutes to live. Some water."

Russell put a cup to his white lips, and calling in the assistance of Cyrus, who had followed his master, they carried him several yards farther, and made him comfortable, while orders were despatched for an ambulance.

A horrible convulsion seized him at this moment, and so intense was the agony that a groan burst through his set teeth, and he struggled to rise. Russell knelt down and rested the haughty head against his shoulder, wiping off the cold drops that beaded the pallid brow. After a little while, lifting his eyes to the face bending over him, Major Huntingdon gazed into the melancholy black eyes, and said, almost in a whisper—

"I little thought I should ever owe you thanks. Aubrey, forgive me all my hate; you can afford to do so now. I am not a brute; I know magnanimity when I see it. Perhaps I was wrong to visit Amy's sins on you; but I could not forgive her. Aubrey, it was natural that I should hate Amy's son."

Again the spasm shook his lacerated frame, and twenty minutes after his fierce, relentless spirit was released from torture; the proud, ambitious, dauntless man was with his God.

Dr. Arnold closed the eyes with trembling fingers, and covered his face with his hands to hide the tears that he could not repress.

For some moments silence reigned; then Dr. Arnold said suddenly—

"Come in, and let me see your arm. Your sleeve is full of blood."

An examination discovered a painful flesh-wound—the minnie ball having glanced from the shoulder and passed out through the upper part of the arm. In removing the coat to dress the wound, the doctor exclaimed—

"Here is a bullet-hole in the breast, which must have just missed your heart! Was it a spent ball?"

A peculiar smile disclosed Russell's faultless teeth an instant, but he merely took the coat, laid it over his uninjured arm, and answered—

"Don't trouble yourself about spent balls—finish your job. I must look after my wounded."

As soon as the bandages were adjusted he walked away and took from the inside pocket of the coat a heavy square morocco case containing Irene's ambrotype. When the coat was buttoned as on that day, it rested over his heart; and during the second desperate charge of General Beauregard's lines, Russell felt a sudden thump, and, above all the roar of that scene of carnage, heard the shivering of the glass which covered the likeness. The morocco was torn and indented, but the ball was turned aside harmless, and now, as he touched the spring, the fragments of glass fell at his feet. It was evident that his towering form had rendered him a conspicuous target; some accurate marksman had aimed at his heart, and the ambrotype-case had preserved his life. With a countenance pale from physical suffering, but beaming with triumphant joy for the Nation's first great victory, he went out among the dead and dying, striving to relieve the wounded, and to find the members of his own command.

But all of intolerable torture centred not there, awful as was the scene. Throughout the length and breadth of the Confederacy telegraphic despatches told that the battle was raging; and an

army of women spent that 21st upon their knees, in agonizing prayer for husbands and sons who wrestled for their birthright on the far-off field of blood.

The people of W—— were subjected to painful suspense as hour after hour crept by, and a dense crowd collected in front of the telegraph office, whence floated an ominous red flag. Andrew waited on horseback to carry to Irene the latest intelligence, and during the entire afternoon she paced the colonnade, with her eyes fixed on the winding road. At half-past five o'clock the solemn stillness of the sultry day was suddenly broken by a wild, prolonged shout from the town; cheer after cheer was caught up by the hills, echoed among the purple valleys, and finally lost in the roar of the river. Andrew galloped up the avenue with an extra, yet damp from the printing-press, containing the joyful tidings that McDowell's army had been completely routed, and was being pursued toward Alexandria. Meagre was the account—our heroes, Bee and Bartow, had fallen. No other details were given, but the premonition, "Heavy loss on our side," sent a thrill of horror to every womanly heart, dreading to learn the price of victory. Irene's white face flashed as she read the despatch, and raising her hands, exclaimed—

"Oh, thank God! thank God!"

"Shall I go back to the office?"

"Yes; I shall certainly get a despatch from father some time to-night. Go back and wait for it. Tell Mr. Rogers, the operator, what you came for, and ask him I say please to let you have it as soon as it arrives. And, Andrew, bring me any other news that may come before my despatch."

As the night advanced, her face grew haggard, and the wan lips fluttered ceaselessly. Russell she regarded as already dead to her in this world, but for her father she wrestled desperately in spirit. Mrs. Campbell joined her, uttering hopeful, encouraging words, and Nellie came out, with a cup of tea on a waiter.

"Please drink your tea, just to please me, Queen. I can't bear to look at you. In all your life I never saw you worry so. Do sit down and rest; you have walked fifty miles since morning."

"Take it away, Nellie. I don't want it."

"But, child, it will be time enough to fret when you know Mas' Leonard is hurt. Don't run to meet trouble; it will face you soon enough. If you won't take the tea, for pity's sake let me get you a glass of wine."

"No; I tell you I can't swallow anything. If you want to help me, pray for father."

She resumed her walk, with her eyes strained in the direction of the town.

Thus passed three more miserable hours; then the clang of the iron gate at the foot of the avenue fell on her aching ear; the tramp of horses' hoofs and roll of wheels came up the gravelled walk.

The carriage stopped; Judge Harris and his wife came up the steps, followed slowly by Andrew, whose hat was slouched over his eyes. As they approached Irene put out her hands wistfully.

"We have won a glorious victory, Irene, but many of our noble soldiers are wounded. I knew you would be anxious, and we came——"

"Is my father killed!"

"Your father was wounded. He led a splendid charge."

"Wounded! No! he is killed! Andrew, tell me the truth—is father dead?"

The faithful negro could no longer repress his grief, and sobbed convulsively, unable to reply.

"Oh, my God! I knew it!" she gasped.

The gleaming arms were thrown up despairingly, and a low, dreary cry wailed through the stately old mansion as the orphan turned her eyes upon Nellie and Andrew—the devoted two who had petted her from childhood.

Judge Harris led her into the library, and his weeping wife endeavoured to offer consolation, but she stood rigid and tearless, holding out her hand for the despatch. Finally they gave it to her and she read:—

"CHARLES T. HARRIS—

"Huntingdon was desperately wounded at three o'clock to-day, in making a charge. He died two hours ago. I was with him. The body leaves to-morrow for W——.

"HIRAM ARNOLD."

The paper fell from her fingers; with a dry sob she turned from them, and threw herself on the sofa, with her face of woe to the wall. So passed the night.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BLOCKADE RUNNER

"I intend to trust you with important despatches, Miss Grey—for I have great confidence in female ingenuity, as well as female heroism. The meekest of women are miniature Granvelles; nature made you a race of schemers. Pardon me if I ask, how you propose to conceal the despatches? It is no easy matter now to run the blockade of a Southern port, especially on the Gulf; and you must guard against being picked up by the Philistines."

"I am fully aware of all the risk attending my trip; but if you will give me the papers, prepared as I directed in my note from Paris, I will pledge my life that they shall reach Richmond safely. If I am captured and carried North, I have friends who will assist me in procuring a passport to the South, and little delay will occur. If I am searched, I can bid them defiance. Give me the despatches, and I will show you how I intend to take them."

Electra opened her trunk, took out a large portfolio, and selected from the drawings one in crayon representing the heads of Michael Angelo's Fates. Spreading it out, face downward, on the table, she laid the closely-written tissue paper of despatches smoothly on the back of the thin pasteboard; then fitted a square piece of oil-silk on the tissue missive, and having, with a small brush, coated the silk with paste, covered the whole with a piece of thick drawing paper, the edges of which were carefully glued to those of the pasteboard. Taking a hot iron from the grate, she passed it repeatedly over the paper, till all was smooth and dry; then in the centre wrote with a pencil: "Michael Angelo's *Fates*, in the Pitti Palace. Copied May 8th, 1861." From a list of figures in a small note-book she added the dimensions of the picture, and underneath all, a line from Euripides.

Her eyes sparkled as she bent over her work, and at length, lifting it for inspection, she exclaimed triumphantly—

"There, sir! I can baffle even the Paris detective, much more the lynx-eyed emissaries of Lincoln, Seward & Co. Are you satisfied? Examine it with your own hands."

"Perfectly satisfied, my dear young lady. But suppose they should seize your trunk? Confiscation is the cry all over the North."

"Finding nothing suspicious or 'contraband' about me, except my Southern birth and sympathies, they would scarcely take possession of the necessary tools of my profession. I have no fear, sir; the paper is fated to reach its destination."

"Are your other despatches sealed up pictorially?"

She laughed heartily.

"Of course not. We women are too shrewd to hazard all upon one die."

"Well—well! You see that we trust important data to your cunning fingers. You leave London to-morrow for Southampton; will arrive just in time for the steamer. Good-bye, Miss Grey. When I get back to the Confederacy, I shall certainly find you out. I want you to paint the portraits of my wife and children. From the enviable reputation you have already acquired I am proud to claim you for my countrywoman. God bless you, and lead you safely home. Good-bye, Mr. Mitchell. Take care of her and let me hear from you on your arrival."

From the hour when tidings of the fall of Sumter reached Europe, Electra had resolved to cut short the studies which she had pursued so vigorously since her removal to Florence, and return to the South. But the tide of travel set toward, not from European shores, and it was not until after repeated attempts to find some one homeward-bound, that she learned of Eric Mitchell's presence in Paris, and his intention of soon returning to W——. She wrote at once, requesting his permission to place herself under his care. It was cordially accorded; and, bidding adieu to Italy, she joined him without delay, despite the pleadings of Mr., Mrs. Young, and Louisa, who had recently arrived at Florence, and sincerely mourned a separation under such painful circumstances.

Eric was detained in Paris by a severe attack of the old disease, but finally reached London—whence, having completed their arrangements, they set off for Southampton, and took passage in the *Trent*, which was destined subsequently to play a prominent part in the tangled rôle of Diplomacy, and to furnish the most utterly humiliating of many chapters of the pusillanimity, sycophancy, and degradation of the Federal government.

The voyage proved pleasant and prosperous; and, once at Havana, Eric anxiously sought an opportunity of testing the vaunted efficiency of the blockade. Unfortunately, two steamers had started the week previous, one to New Orleans, the other to Charleston; only sailing vessels were to be found, and about the movements of these, impenetrable mystery seemed wrapped. On the afternoon of the third day after their arrival, Eric, wearied with the morning's fruitless inquiry, was resting on the sofa at the hotel, while Electra watched the tide of passers-by, when Willis, Eric's servant, came in quickly, and walked up to the sofa.

"Master, Captain Wright is here. I asked him to come and see you, and he is waiting downstairs."

"Captain Wright?"

"Yes, sir; the captain you liked so much at Smyrna—the one who gave you that pipe, sir."

"Oh, I remember! Yes—yes; and he is here? Well, show him up."

"Master, from the way he watches the clouds, I believe he is about to run out. Maybe he can take us?"

"Willis is invaluable to you, Mr. Mitchell," said Electra, as the negro left the room.

"He is indeed. He is eyes, ears, crutches, everything to me, and never forgets anything or anybody. He has travelled over half the world with me—could desert me, and be free at any moment he felt inclined to do so—but is as faithful now as the day on which I first left home with him."

"Ah, Captain! this is an unexpected pleasure. I am heartily glad to see you. Miss Grey—Captain Wright. Take a seat."

The captain looked about thirty, possibly older; wore a grey suit and broad straw hat, and, when the latter was tossed on the floor, showed a handsome, frank, beaming face, with large, clear, smiling blue eyes, whose steady light nothing human could dim. His glossy reddish-brown hair was thrust back from a forehead white and smooth as a woman's, but the lower portion of the face was effectually bronzed by exposure to the vicissitudes of climate and weather; and Electra noticed a peculiar nervous restlessness of manner, as though he were habitually on the watch.

"I am astonished to see you in Havana, Mitchell. Where did you come from?"

"Just from Paris, where bad health drove me, after I bade you good-bye at Smyrna. Have you a vessel here, captain?"

"Of course I have! Don't you suppose that I would be in the army if I could not serve my country better by carrying in arms and ammunition? I have already made two successful trips with my schooner—ran in, despite the blockaders. I am negotiating for a steamer, but until I can get one ready I intend to sail on."

"When did you arrive here last?"

"About ten days ago. They chased me for nearly fifteen miles, but I stole out of sight before morning."

"When do you expect to leave here?"

The captain darted a swift, searching glance at Electra, rose and closed the door, saying, with a light laugh—

"Take care, man! You are not exactly deer-hunting or crab-catching in a free country! Mind that, and talk softly. I am watched here; the Federal agents all know me, and there are several Federal vessels in port. When do I expect to leave? Well, to-night, if the weather thickens up, as I think it will, and there is evident sign of a storm. Most sailors wait for fair weather; we blockade runners for foul."

"Oh, Captain! do take us with you!" said Electra eagerly.

"What! In a rickety schooner, in the teeth of a gale? Besides, Miss, I am taking a cargo of powder this trip, and if I am hard pressed I shall blow up vessel and all, rather than suffer it to fall into Yankee clutches. You would not relish going up to heaven after the fashion of a rocket, would you?"

"I am willing, sir, to risk everything you threaten, rather than wait here indefinitely."

"Can't you take us, Wright—Miss Grey, Willis, and myself? We are very impatient to get home."

"But I have no accommodation for passengers."

"But I suppose, sir, we could contrive to live a few days without eating at a regular table. I will take some cheese and crackers and fruit along in a basket, if that will ease your mind. Do waive your scruples, and consent to take charge of us."

"I add my prayers to hers. Wright, do take us. We shall not mind privations or inconvenience."

"Well, then, understand distinctly that, if anything happens, you are not to blame me. If the young lady gets sea-sick, or freckled, or sunburnt, or starved to death, or blown up, or drowned, or, worse than all, if the Yankee thieves by the wayside take her as a prize, it will be no fault of mine whatever, and I tell you now I shall not lay it on my conscience."

"Wright, to what part are you bound?"

"Ah! that is more than I can tell you. The winds must decide it. I can't try the Carolinas again this trip; they are watching for me too closely there. New Orleans is rather a longer run than I care to make, and I shall keep my eyes on Apalachicola and Mobile."

"What object have you in starting to-night, particularly in the face of a gale?"

Again the captain's eyes swept round the room, to guard against any doors that might be ajar.

"As I told you before, I am watched here. The Federals have a distinguished regard for me, and I have to elude suspicion, as well as run well, when I do get out. Two hours ago a Federal armed steamer which has been coaling here, weighed anchor, and has probably left the harbour, to cruise between this place and Key West. As they passed, one of the crew yelled out to me that they would wait outside, and catch me certainly this time; that I had made my last jaunt to Dixie, etc. I have carefully put out the impression that I need some repairs, which cannot be finished this week; and have told one or two confidentially that I could not leave until the arrival of a certain cargo from Nassau which is due to-morrow. That Puritanical craft which started off at noon does not expect me for several days, and to-night I shall rub my fingers and sail out right in her wake. Ha! ha! how they will howl! What gnashing of teeth there will be, when they hear of me in a Confederate port! And now about your baggage. Have everything ready; I will show Willis the right wharf, and at dark he must bring the trunks down; I will be on the watch, and send a boat ashore. About sunset you and Miss Grey can come aboard, as if for a mere visit. I must go and make what little preparation I can for your comfort."

Nothing occurred to frustrate the plan; Eric and Electra were cordially received, and at dusk Willis and the baggage arrived punctually. The schooner was lying some distance from the wharf, all sails down, and apparently contemplating no movement. With darkness came a brisk, stiffening wind, and clouds shutting out even dim starlight. At ten o'clock, all things being in readiness, the captain went on deck; very soon after the glimmering lights of the city, then the frowning walls of Moro, were left behind, and the *Dixie* took her way silently and swiftly seaward.

About two o'clock, being unable to sleep, from the rocking of the vessel, Electra, knowing that Eric was still on deck, crept up the steps in the darkness, for the lights had been extinguished. The captain was passing, but paused, saying in a whisper—

"Is that you, Miss Grey? Come this way and I will show you something."

He grasped her hand, led her to the bow, where Eric was sitting on a coil of rope, and, pointing straightforward, added in the same suppressed tone—

"Look right ahead—you see a light? The Philistines are upon us! Look well, and you will see a dark, irregular, moving mass; that is the steamer of which I told you. They have found out at last that there is going to be all sorts of a gale, and as they can't ride it like my snug, dainty little egg-shell, they are putting back with all possible speed. Twenty minutes ago they were bearing down on me; now you see that they will pass to our left. What a pity they don't know their neighbours!"

"Do you think that they will not see you?"

"Certainly! with sails down, and lights out, there is nothing to be seen on such a night as this. There! don't you hear her paddles?"

"No. I hear nothing but the roar of the wind and water."

"Ah! that is because your ears are not trained like mine. Great Neptune! how she labours already! Now! be silent."

On came the steamer, which Electra's untrained eyes, almost blinded by spray, could barely discern; and her heart beat like a muffled drum as it drew nearer and nearer. Once she heard a low, chuckling laugh of satisfaction escape the captain; then, with startling distinctness, the ringing of a bell was borne from the steamer's deck.

"Four bells—two o'clock. How chagrined they will be to-morrow, when they find out they passed me without paying their respects!" whispered the captain.

Gradually the vessel receded, the dark mass grew indistinct, the light flickered, and was soon lost to view, and the sound of the labouring machinery was drowned in the roar of the waves.

Before he went back on deck, the captain made a comfortable place for her on the sofa in the little cabin. The storm increased until it blew a perfect hurricane, and the schooner rolled and creaked, now and then shivering in every timber. It was utterly impossible to sleep, and Eric, who was suffering from a headache, passed a miserable night. In the white sickly dawn the captain looked in again, and Electra thought that no ray of sunshine could be more radiant or cheering than his joyous, noble face.

About noon the fury of the gale subsided, the sun looked out through rifts in the scudding clouds, and toward night fields of quiet blue were once more visible. By next morning the weather had cleared up, with a brisk westerly wind; but the sea still rolled heavily; and Eric, unable to bear the motion, kept below, loth to trust himself on his feet. Electra strove to while away the tedious time by reading aloud to him; but many a yearning look was cast toward the deck, and finally she left him with a few books, and ran up to the open air.

On the afternoon of the third day after leaving Havana the captain said—

"Well, Miss Grey, I shall place you on Confederate soil to-morrow, God willing."

"Then you are going to Mobile?"

"Yes; I shall try hard to get in there early in the morning. You will know your fate before many hours."

"Do you regard this trial as particularly hazardous?"

"Of course; the blockading squadrons grow more efficient and expert every day, and some danger necessarily attends every trial. Mobile ought to be pretty well guarded by this time."

The wind was favourable, and the schooner ploughed its way swiftly through the autumn night. The captain did not close his eyes; and just about daylight Electra and Eric, aroused by a sudden running to and fro, rose, and simultaneously made their appearance on deck.

"What is the matter, Wright?"

"Matter! why, look ahead, my dear fellow, and see where we are. Yonder is Sand Island lighthouse, and a little to the right is Fort Morgan. But the fleet to the left is hardly six miles off, and it will be a tight race if I get in."

There was but a glimmering light, rimming the East, where two or three stars burned with indescribable brilliance and beauty, and in the grey haze and wreaths of mist which curled over the white-capped waves, Electra could distinguish nothing. The air was chill, and she said, with a slight shiver—

"I can't see any lighthouse."

"There is, of course, no light there, these war-times; but you see that tall, white tower, don't you? There, look through my glass. That low dark object yonder is the outline of the fort; you will see it more distinctly after a little. Now, look right where my finger points; that is the flag-staff. Look up overhead—I have hoisted our flag, and pretty soon it will be a target for those dogs.

"Ha! Mitchell! Hutchinson! they see us! There is some movement among them. They are getting ready to cut us off this side of the Swash channel! We shall see."

He had crowded on all sail, and the little vessel dashed through the light fog as if conscious of her danger, and resolved to sustain herself gallantly. Day broke fully, sea and sky took the rich orange tint which only autumn mornings give, and in this glow a Federal frigate and sloop slipped from their moorings, and bore down threateningly on the graceful bounding schooner.

"But for the fog, which puzzled me about three o'clock, I should have run by unseen, and they would never have known it till I was safe in Navy cove. We will beat them, though, as it is, by about twenty minutes. An hour ago I was afraid I should have to beach her. Are you getting frightened, Miss Grey?"

"Oh, no! I would not have missed this for any consideration. How rapidly the Federal vessels move! They are gaining on us."

Her curling hair, damp with mist, clustered around her forehead; she had wrapped a scarlet crape shawl about her shoulders, and stood with her red lips apart and trembling, watched the exciting race.

"Look at the frigate!"

There was a flash at her bow, a curl of white smoke rolled up, then a heavy roar, and a thirty-two pounder round shot fell about a hundred yards to the right of the vessel.

A yell of defiance rent the air from the crew of the *Dixie*—hats were waved—and, snatching off her shawl, Electra shook its bright folds to the stiffening breeze, while her hot cheeks matched them in depth of colour.

Another and another shot was fired in quick succession, and so accurate had they become, that the last whizzed through the rigging, cutting one of the small ropes.

"Humph! they are getting saucy," said the captain looking up coolly, when the yells of his crew ceased for a moment; and, with a humorous twinkle in his fine eyes, he added—

"Better go below, Miss Grey; they might clip one of your curls next time. The Vandals see you, I dare say, and your red flag stings their Yankee pride a little."

"Do you suppose they can distinguish me?"

"Certainly. Through my glass I can see the gunners at work, and of course they see you. Should not be surprised if they aimed specially at you. That is the style of New England chivalry."

Whiz—whiz; both sloop and frigate were firing now in good earnest, and one shell exploded a few yards from the side of the little vessel, tossing the foam and water over the group on deck.

The boom of a columbiad from the fort shook the air like thunder, and gave to the blockaders the unmistakable assurance, "Thus far, and no farther."

The schooner strained on its way; a few shot fell behind, and soon, under the frowning bastions of the fort, whence the Confederate banner floated so proudly on the balmy Gulf breeze, spreading its free folds like an ægis, the gallant little vessel passed up the channel, and came to anchor in Mobile Bay, amid the shouts of crew and garrison, and welcomed by a salute of five

guns.

CHAPTER XXXI

RESULTS OF SECESSION

Immediately after her arrival in Mobile, Electra prepared to forward her despatches by Captain Wright, whose business called him to Richmond before his return to Cuba; and an examination of them proved that the expedient resorted to was perfectly successful. By moistening the edges of the drawing-paper, the tissue missive was drawn out uninjured, and, to Eric's surprise, she removed the carefully-stitched blue silk which lined the tops of her travelling gauntlets, and extracted similar despatches, all of which were at once transmitted to the seat of government. While waiting for a boat, they heard the painful tidings of Major Huntingdon's death, which increased Eric's impatience to reach W——. The remainder of the journey was sad, and four days after leaving the Gulf City the lights of W—— and roar of the Falls simultaneously greeted the spent travellers. Having telegraphed of his safe arrival, the carriage was waiting at the depôt, and Andrew handed to Electra a note from his mistress, requesting her to come at once to her house instead of going to the hotel. Eric added earnest persuasion, and with some reluctance the artist finally consented. They were prepared for the silent, solemn aspect of the house, and for the mourning dress of the orphan, but not for the profound calm, the melancholy, tearless composure with which she received them. Mental and physical suffering had sadly changed her. The oval face was thinner, and her form had lost its roundness, but the countenance retained its singular loveliness, and the mesmeric splendour of the large eyes seemed enhanced. Of her father she did not speak, but gave her uncle a written statement of all the facts which she had been able to gather concerning the circumstances of his death; and thus a tacit compact was formed; to make no reference to the painful subject.

As she accompanied Electra to the room prepared for her, on the night of her arrival, the latter asked, with ill-concealed emotion—

"Irene, can you tell me anything about Russell? I am very anxious to hear something of him."

Irene placed the silver lamp on the table, and standing in its glow, answered quietly—

"He was wounded in the arm at Manassa, but retains command of his regiment, and is doing very well. Dr. Arnold is the regimental surgeon, and in one of his letters to me he mentioned that your cousin's wound was not serious."

"I am going to him immediately."

"Unfortunately, you will not be allowed to do so. The wounded were removed to Richmond as promptly as possible, but your cousin remained at Manassa, where ladies are not permitted."

"Then I will write to him to meet me in Richmond."

Irene made no reply, and, watching her all the while, Electra asked—

"When did you see him last? How did he look?"

"The day before he started to Richmond. He was very well, I believe, but looked harassed and paler than usual. He is so robust, however, that I think you need entertain no apprehension concerning his health."

The inflexible features, the low, clear, firm voice were puzzling, and Electra's brow thickened and darkened as she thought—

"Her father is dead now; there is no obstacle remaining. She must love him, and yet she gives no sign of interest."

Two days later, they sat together before one of the parlour windows. Electra was engaged in tearing off and rolling bandages, while Irene slowly scraped lint from a quantity of old linen, which filled a basket at her side. Neither had spoken for some time; the sadness of their occupation called up gloomy thoughts; but finally Electra laid down a roll of cloth, and, interlacing her slight fingers, said—

"Irene, the women of the South must exercise an important influence in determining our national destiny; and because I felt this so fully, I hurried home to share the perils, and privations, and trials of my countrywomen. It is not my privilege to enter the army, and wield a sword or musket; but I am going to true womanly work—into the crowded hospitals, to watch faithfully over sick and wounded."

"I approve your plan, think it your duty, and wish that I could start to Richmond with you to-morrow—for I believe that in this way we may save valuable lives. You should, as you have said, go on at once; you have nothing to keep you; your work is waiting for you there. But my position is different; I have many things to arrange here before I can join you. I want to see the looms at work on the plantation; and am going down next week with Uncle Eric, to consult with the overseer about several changes which I desire made concerning the negroes. When all this is accomplished, I too shall come into the hospitals."

"About what time may I expect you?"

"Not until you see me; but at the earliest practicable day."

"Your uncle objects very strenuously to such a plan, does he not?"

"He will acquiesce at the proper time. Take care! you are making your bandages too wide."

"A long dark vista stretches before the Confederacy. I cannot, like many persons, feel sanguine of a speedy termination of the war."

"Yes—a vista lined with the bloody graves of her best sons; but beyond glimmers Freedom—Independence."

"But do you still cling to a belief in the possibility of Republican forms of Government? This is a question which constantly disquiets me."

"My faith in that possibility is unshaken. We shall yet teach the world that self-government is feasible."

"But in Europe, where the subject is eagerly canvassed, the impression obtains that, in the great fundamental principle of our government, will be found the germ of its dissolution. This war is waged to establish the right of Secession, and the doctrine that 'all just governments rest on the consent of the governed.' With such a precedent, it would be worse than stultification to object to the secession of any State or States now constituting the Confederacy, who at a future day may choose to withdraw from the present compact. Granting our independence, which Europe regards as a foregone conclusion, what assurance have you (say they, gloating, in anticipation over the prospect) that, so soon as the common dangers of war, which for a time cemented you so closely, are over, entire disintegration will not ensue, and all your boasts end in some dozen anarchical pseudo-republics, like those of South America and Mexico?"

"That is an evil which our legislators must guard against by timely provision. We are now, thank God! a thoroughly homogeneous people, with no antagonistic systems of labour necessitating conflicting interests. As States, we are completely identified in commerce and agriculture, and no differences need arise. Purified from all connection with the North, and with no vestige of the mischievous element of New England Puritanism, we can be a prosperous and noble people."

Electra had finished the bandages, and was walking slowly before the windows, and, without looking up from the lint, which she was tying into small packages, Irene said—

"Electra, my friend, are you sure that you realize your personal responsibility? Your profession will give, you vast influence in forming public taste and I hope much from its judicious use. Be careful that you select only the highest, purest types to offer to your countrymen and women, when Peace enables us to turn our attention to the great work of building up a noble school of Southern Art. We want no feeble, sickly sentimentality, nor yet the sombre austerity which seems to pervade your mind, judging from the works you have shown me."

A slight quiver crossed the mobile features of the artist as she bit her full lip, and asked—

"What would you pronounce the distinguishing characteristic of my works? I saw, yesterday, that you were not fully satisfied."

"A morbid melancholy, which you seem to have fostered tenderly instead of crushing vigorously. A disposition to dwell upon the stern and gloomy aspects of the physical world, and to intensify and reproduce abnormal and unhappy phases of character. Your breezy, sunshiny, joyous moods you have kept under lock and key while in your studio."

"I admit the truth of your criticism, and I have struggled against the spirit which hovers with clouding wings over all that I do; but the shadow has not lifted—God knows whether it ever will. You have finished your work; come to my room for a few minutes."

They went upstairs together; and as Electra unlocked and bent over a large square trunk, her companion noticed a peculiar curl about the lines of the mouth, and a heavy scowl on the broad brow.

"I want to show you the only bright, shining face I ever painted."

She unwrapped an oval portrait, placed it on the mantelpiece, and, stepping back, fixed her gaze on Irene. She saw a tremor cross the quiet mouth, and for some seconds the sad eyes dwelt upon the picture as if fascinated.

"It must have been a magnificent portrait of your cousin, years ago; but he has changed materially since it was painted. He looks much older, sterner, now."

"Irene, I value this portrait above everything else save the original; and, as I may be called to pass through various perils, I want you to take care of it for me until I come back to W——. It is a precious trust, which I would be willing to leave in no hands but yours."

"You forget that, before long, I, too, shall go to Virginia."

"Then pack it away carefully among your old family pictures, where it will be secure. I left my large and best paintings in Italy, with Aunt Ruth, who promised to preserve and send them to me as soon as the blockade should be raised."

"What are Mr. Young's views concerning this war?"

"He utterly abhors the party who inaugurated it, and the principles upon which it is waged. Says he will not return to America at least for the present; and as soon as he can convert his property into money, intends to move to the South. He opposed and regretted Secession until he saw the spirit of the Lincoln dynasty, and from that time he acknowledged that all hope of Union or reconstruction was lost. Have you heard anything from Harvey since the troubles began?"

"It is more than a year since I received a line from him. He was then still in the West, but made no allusion to the condition of the country."

"Irene, I hope to see Russell soon. You were once dear friends; have you any message for him —any word of kind remembrance?"

One of Irene's hands glided to her side, but she answered composedly—

"He knows that he always has my best wishes; but will expect no message."

On the following day Electra started to Richmond, taking with her a large supply of hospital stores, which the ladies of W—— had contributed.

Eric had proposed to his niece the expediency of selling the Hill, and becoming an inmate of his snug, tasteful, bachelor home; but she firmly refused to consent to this plan: said that she would spend her life in the house of her birth; and it was finally arranged that her uncle should reserve such of the furniture as he valued particularly, and offer the residue for sale, with the pretty cottage, to which he was warmly attached. During the remainder of autumn Irene was constantly engaged in superintending work for the soldiers, in providing for several poor families in whom she was much interested, and in frequent visits to the plantation, where she found more than enough to occupy her mind; and Eric often wondered at the admirable system and punctuality she displayed—at the grave composure with which she discharged her daily duties, and the invariable reticence she observed with regard to her past life.

CHAPTER XXXII

WOMANLY USEFULNESS

"Did you ring, Mas' Eric?"

"Yes. Has Irene come home?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Bring some more wood."

Owing to the scarcity of coal, the grate had been removed, and massive brass andirons substituted. John piled them with oak wood, swept the hearth, and retired. After a time, the door opened and the mistress came in.

"Irene! you must be nearly frozen. What kept you out so late?"

"I had more than usual to attend to at the Asylum this afternoon."

"What was the matter?"

"We have a new matron, and I was particularly anxious that she should start right in one or two respects. I waited, too, in order to see the children at supper, and satisfy myself about the cooking."

"How many orphans are there in the Asylum?"

"Thirty-four. I admitted two this evening—children of one of our soldiers, who died from a wound received at Leesburg."

"Poor little things! I am afraid you will find numbers of similar instances before this war is at an end."

"We will try to find room for all such cases. The building will accommodate one hundred."

"You must be very cold; I will make John bring you a glass of wine."

"No, sir; I do not need it. My shawl was thick and warm."

"Irene."

She turned her head slightly, and raised her eyes.

"Did you receive a letter which I sent to your room?"

"Yes, sir. It was from Dr. Arnold."

"He has established himself in Richmond."

"Yes, sir; his recent attack of rheumatism unfitted him for service in the field."

"I had a letter from Colonel Aubrey to-day. He wants to buy my house."

She made no comment, and her eyes drooped again to the perusal of the strange shapes which danced and flickered on the burnished andirons.

"What use do you suppose he had for it?"

"I cannot imagine, unless he intends it as a home for Electra."

"What a witch you are at guessing; that is exactly it. He says, in this letter, that he may not survive the war, and wishes to have the assurance that his cousin is comfortably provided for, before he goes into another battle. His offer is liberal, and I shall accept it."

"Well, I am glad she will own it—for I have often heard her speak of those old poplar trees in the front yard. She has always admired the place."

At this juncture the tea-bell summoned them to the dining-room, and she allowed her uncle no opportunity of renewing the conversation. When the meal was concluded, and they had returned to the library, Irene drew her table and basket near the lamp, and resumed her knitting. The invalid frowned, and asked impatiently—

"Can't you buy as many of those coarse things as you want, without toiling night and day?"

"In the first place, I do not toil; knitting is purely mechanical, very easy, and I like it. In the second place, I cannot buy them, and our men need them when they are standing on guard. It is cold work holding a musket in the open air, such weather as this."

He looked annoyed, and dived deeper among his cushions.

"Don't you feel as well as usual this evening, Uncle Eric?"

"Oh! I am well enough—but I hate the everlasting motion of those steel needles."

She rolled up the glove, put it in her basket, and rose.

"Shall I read to you? Or, how would you like a game of chess?"

"I do not expect you to humour my whims. Above all things, my child, I dread the thought of becoming troublesome to you."

"You can never be that, Uncle Eric; and I shall always be glad if you will tell me how I can make your time pass more pleasantly. I know this house must seem gloomy enough at best. Let us try a game of chess; we have not played since you came from Europe."

She brought the board, and they sat down to the most quiet and absorbing of all games. Both played well, and when Eric was finally vanquished, he was surprised to find, from the hands of the clock, that the game had lasted nearly two hours. As she carefully replaced the ivory combatants in their box, Irene said—

"Uncle, you know that I have long desired and intended to go to Richmond, but various circumstances combined to keep me at home. I felt that I had duties here which must first be discharged; now the time has come when I can accomplish my long-cherished plan. Dr. Arnold has taken charge of the hospital in Richmond which was established with the money we sent from W—— for the relief of our regiments. Mrs. Campbell is about to be installed as matron, and I have to-day decided to join them. In his letter received this afternoon he orders me not to come, but I know that he will give me a ward when he finds me at his elbow. I am aware that you have always opposed this project, but I hope, sir, that you will waive your objections, and go on with me next week."

"It is a strange and unreasonable freak, which, I must say, I do not approve of. There are plenty of nurses to be hired, who have more experience, and are every way far more suitable for such positions."

"Uncle, the men in our armies are not hired to fight our battles; and the least the women of the land can do is to nurse them when sick or wounded."

She laid her hand gently on his whitening hair, and added pleadingly—

"Do not oppose me, Uncle Eric. I want your sanction in all that I do. There are only two of us left; go with me as my adviser—protector. I could not be happy if you were not with me."

His eyes filled instantly, and drawing her close to him, he exclaimed tremulously—

"My dear Irene! there is nothing I would not do to make you happy. Happy I fear you never will be. Ah! don't smile and contradict me; I know the difference between happiness and resignation. Patience, uncomplaining endurance, never yet stole the garments of joy. I will go with you to Virginia, or anywhere else that you wish."

"Thank you, Uncle Eric. I will try to make you forget the comforts of home, and give you no reason to regret that you sacrificed your wishes and judgment to mine. I must not keep you up any later."

The army of the Potomac had fallen back to Yorktown when Irene reached Richmond; and the preparations which were being made for the reception of the wounded gave melancholy premonition of impending battles.

Dr. Arnold had been entrusted with the supervision of several hospitals, but gave special attention to one established with the funds contributed by the citizens of W——, and thither Irene repaired on the day of her arrival.

In reply to her inquiries, she was directed to a small room, and found the physician seated at a table examining a bundle of papers. He saw only a form darkening the doorway, and, without looking up, called out gruffly—

"Well, what is it? What do you want?"

"A word of welcome."

He sprang to his feet instantly, holding out both hands.

"Dear child! Queen! God bless you! How are you? Pale as a cloud, and thin as a shadow. Sit down here by me. Where is Eric?"

"He was much fatigued, and I left him at the hotel."

"You have been ill a long time, Irene, and have kept it from me. That was not right; you should have been honest in your letters. A pretty figure you will cut nursing sick folks! Work in my sight, indeed! If you say work to me again, I will clap you into a lunatic asylum and keep you there till the war is over. Turn your face to the light."

"I am well enough in body; it is my mind only that is ill at ease; my heart only that is sick—sorely sick. Here I shall find employment, and, I trust, partial forgetfulness. Put me to work at once; that will be my best medicine."

"And you really missed me, Queen?"

"Yes, inexpressibly; I felt my need of you continually. You must know how I cling to you now."

Again he drew her little hands to his granite mouth, and seemed to muse for a moment.

"Doctor, how is Electra?"

"Very well—that is, as well as such an anomalous, volcanic, torrid character ought to be. At first she puzzled me (and that is an insult I find it hard to forgive), but finally I found the clue. She is indefatigable and astonishingly faithful as a nurse; does all her duty, and more, which is saying a good deal—for I am a hard taskmaster. Aren't you afraid that I will work you more unmercifully than a Yankee factory-child, or a Cornwall miner? See here, Queen; what do you suppose brought Electra to Richmond?"

"A desire to render some service to the sick and suffering, and also to be comparatively near her cousin."

"Precisely; only the last should be first, and the first last. Russell is a perverse, ungrateful dog."

As he expected, she glanced up at him, but refrained from comment.

"Yes, Irene—he is a soulless scamp. Here is his cousin entirely devoted to him, loving him above everything else in this world, and yet he has not even paid her a visit, except in passing through to Yorktown with his command. He might be a happy man if he would but open his eyes and see what is as plain as the nose on my face—which, you must admit, requires no microscope. She is a gifted woman, and would suit him exactly—even better than my salamander, Salome."

A startled, incredulous expression came into Irene's large eyes, and gradually a look of keen pain settled on her features.

"Aha! did that idea never occur to you before?"

"Never, sir; and you must be mistaken."

"Why, child? The fact is patent. You women profess to be so quick-witted, too, in such matters—I am amazed at your obtuseness. She idolizes Aubrey."

"It is scarcely strange that she should; she has no other relatives near her, and it is natural that she should love her cousin."

"I tell you I know what I say! she will never love anybody else as she loves Aubrey. Besides, what is it to you whether he marries her or not?"

"I feel attached to her, and want to see her happy."

"As Russell's wife?"

"No, sir. The marriage of cousins was always revolting to me."

She did not flinch from his glittering grey eye, and her grieved look deepened.

"Is she here? Can I see her?"

"She is not in this building, but I will inform her of your arrival. I have become much interested in her. She is a brilliant, erratic creature, and has a soul! which cannot safely be predicated of all the sex nowadays. Where are you going?"

"Back to Uncle Eric. Will you put me in the same hospital with Electra and Mrs. Campbell?"

"I will put you in a strait-jacket! I promise you that."

Electra was agreeably surprised at the unusual warmth with which Irene received her some hours later, but little suspected why the lips lingered in their pressure of hers, or understood the wistful tenderness of the eyes which dwelt so fondly on her face. The icy wall of reserve had suddenly melted, as if in the breath of an August noon, and dripped silently down among things long past. Russell's name was casually mentioned more than once, and Electra fell asleep that night wholly unconscious that the torn and crumpled pages of her heart had been thoroughly perused by the woman from whom she was most anxious to conceal the truth.

Having engaged a suite of rooms near the hospital, a few days sufficed for preliminary arrangements, and Irene was installed in a ward of the building to which she had requested Dr. Arnold to appoint her.

Thus, by different, by devious thorny paths, two sorrowing women emerged upon the broad highway of Duty, and, clasping hands, pressed forward to the divinely appointed goal—Womanly Usefulness.

Only those who have faithfully ministered in a hospital can fully appreciate the onerous nature of the burdens thus assumed—can realize the crushing anxiety, the sleepless apprehension, the ceaseless tension of brain and nerve, the gnawing, intolerable sickness and aching of heart over sufferings which no human skill can assuage; and the silent blistering tears which are shed over corpses of men whose families kneel in far distant homes, praying God's mercy on dear ones lying at that moment stark and cold on hospital cots with strangers' hands about the loved limbs.

Day by day, week after week, those tireless women-watchers walked the painful round from patient to patient, administering food and medicine to diseased bodies, and words of hope and

encouragement to souls, who shrank not from the glare and roar and carnage of battle, but shivered and cowered before the daring images which deathless memory called from the peaceful, happy Past. It was not wonderful that the home-sick sufferers regarded them with emotions which trenched on adoration, or that often, when the pale thin faces lighted with a smile of joy at their approach, Irene and Electra felt that they had a priceless reward.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN THE HOSPITAL

It was a long, low, rather narrow room, lined with rows of cots, which stretched on either side to the door, now left open to admit free circulation of air. A muffled clock ticked on the mantelpiece. Two soldiers, who had been permitted to visit their sick comrades, slumbered heavily, one with head drooped on his chest, the other with chair tilted against the window-facing, and dark-bearded face thrown back. The quivering flame of the candle gleamed fitfully along the line of features—some youthful, almost childish; others bearing the impress of accumulated years; some crimsoned with fever, others wan and glistening with the dew of exhaustion; here a forehead bent and lowering, as in fancy the sleeper lived over the clash and shock of battle; and there a tremulous smile, lighting the stern manly mouth, as the dreamer heard again the welcome bay of watchdog on the doorstep at home, and saw once more the loved forms of wife and children springing joyfully from the cheery fireside to meet his outstretched arms. A few tossed restlessly, and frequent incoherent mutterings wandered, waif-like up and down the room, sometimes rousing Andrew, who once or twice lifted his head to listen, and then sank back to slumber.

Before a small pine table, where stood numerous vials, Irene drew her chair, and, leaning forward, opened her pocket-Bible, and rested her head on her hand.

A wounded boy started up, twirling one arm, as if in the act of cheering, and then fell back, groaning with pain which the violent effort cost him.

Irene stooped over him, and softly unbuttoning his shirt-collar, removed the hot, bloody cloths from his lacerated shoulder, and replaced them with fresh folds of linen, cold and dripping. She poured out a glass of water, and lifted his head, but he frowned, and exclaimed—

"I won't have it in a tumbler. Mother, make Harry bring me a gourdful fresh from the spring. I say, send Buddie for some."

She humoured the whim, walked out of the room, and paused in the passage. As she did so, a dark form glided unperceived into a dim corner, and when she re-entered the room with the gourd of water the figure passed through the hall-door out into the night.

"Here is your gourd, Willie, fresh and cold."

He swallowed the draught eagerly, and his handsome face wore a touching expression as he smiled and whispered—

"Hush! Jessie is singing under the old magnolia down by the spring. Listen! 'Fairy Belle!' We used to sing that in camp; but nobody sings like Jessie. So sweet! so sweet!"

He set his teeth hard and shuddered violently, and taking his fingers in hers she found them clenched.

"Andrew!"

"Here I am, Miss Irene."

"Go upstairs and ask the doctor to come here."

The surgeon came promptly.

"I am afraid he is going into convulsions. What shall I do for him?"

"Yes; just what I have been trying to guard against. I fear nothing will do any good; but you might try that mixture which acted like a charm on Leavans."

"Here is the bottle. How much shall I give?"

"A spoonful every half-hour while the convulsions last, if he can swallow it; it can't possibly do any harm, and may ease his suffering. Poor fellow! may the vengeance of a righteous God seek out his murderer! I would stay here with you, Miss Huntingdon, if I could render any service. As it is, I am more needed upstairs."

The paroxysms were short, but so severe that occasionally she required Andrew's assistance to hold the sufferer on his cot, and as they grew less frequent, she saw that his strength failed rapidly. Finally he fell into a troubled sleep, with one hand clutching her arm.

Nearly an hour passed thus, and the nurse knelt softly beside her charge, and prayed long and fervently that the soul of the young martyr might find its home with God, and that his far-off mourning mother might be strengthened to bear this heavy burden of woe.

As she knelt with her face upturned, a soft, warm palm was laid upon her forehead, and a low, sweet, manly voice pronounced in benediction—

"May the Lord bless you, Irene, and abundantly answer all your prayers."

She rose quickly, and put out her disengaged hand.

"Oh, Harvey, dear friend! Thank God, I have found you once more."

He lifted the candle and held it near her face, scanning the sculptured features, then stooped and kissed her white cheek.

"I felt that I could not be mistaken. I heard our soldiers blessing a pale woman in black, with large eyes bluer than summer skies, and hair that shone like rays of a setting sun; and I knew the silent, gentle, tireless watcher, before they told me her name. For many years I have prayed that you might become an instrument of good to your fellow-creatures, and to-night I rejoice to find you, at last, an earnest co-worker."

"Where have you been this long time, Harvey? And how is it that you wear a Confederate uniform?"

"I am chaplain in a Texas regiment, and have been with the army from the beginning of these days of blood. At first it was a painful step for me; my affections, my associations, the hallowed reminiscences of my boyhood, all linked my heart with New York. My relatives and friends were there, and I knew not how many of them I might meet among the war-wolves that hung in hungry herds along the borders of the South. Moreover, I loved and revered the Union—had been taught to regard it as the synonym of national prosperity. Secession I opposed and regretted at the time as unwise; but to the dogma of consolidated government I could yield no obedience; and when every sacred constitutional barrier had been swept away by Lincoln—when the *habeas corpus* was abolished, and freedom of speech and press denied—when the Washington conclave essayed to coerce freemen, to 'crush Secession' through the agency of the sword and cannon—then I swore allegiance to the 'Seven States' where all of republican liberty remained. Henceforth my home is with the South; my hopes and destiny hers; her sorrows and struggles mine."

His white, scholarly hands were sunburnt now; his bronzed complexion, and long, untrimmed hair and beard gave a grim, grizzled aspect to the noble face; and the worn and faded uniform showed an acquaintance with the positive hardships and exposure of an active campaign.

"I expected nothing less from you, my brother. You were dear to me before; but, ah, Harvey! how much dearer now in these dark days of trial, which you have voluntarily chosen to share, with a young, brave, struggling Nation!"

His eyes dwelt upon her face as she looked gladly at him, and over her waving hair his hands passed tenderly, as they had done long years before, when she was an invalid in his father's house.

"You have found your work, and learned contentment in usefulness. Irene, the peaceful look of your childhood has come back to your face. With my face pressed against the window-pane, I have been watching you for more than an hour—ever since Colonel Aubrey came out—and I know all the sadness of the circumstances that surround you; how painful it is for you to see those men die."

"Colonel Aubrey? He has not been here."

"Yes; I passed him on the steps; we rode up together from camp. He came on special business, and returns at daylight; but I shall remain several days, and hope to be with you as much as the nature of your engagements will permit. Aubrey is from W——; you know him, of course?"

"Yes, I know him."

He saw a shade of regret drift over her countenance, and added—

"I have many things to say to you, and much to learn concerning your past; but this is not the time or place for such interchange of thought and feeling. To-morrow we will talk; to-night I could not repress my impatience to see you, though but for a few moments."

She drew a chair near young Walton, the wounded boy, and seating herself, continued—

"When independence is obtained, and white-robed Peace spreads her stainless hands in blessing over us, let history proclaim, and let our people reverently remember, that to the uncomplaining fortitude and sublime devotion of the private soldiers of the Confederacy, not less than to the genius of our generals and the heroism of our subordinate officers, we are indebted for Freedom."

She laid her head close to the boy's mouth to listen to his low breathing, and the minister saw her tears fall on his pillow and gleam on his auburn locks. The delirium seemed to have given place to the dreamless sleep of exhaustion, and folding one of her hands around his fingers, with the other she softly stroked the silky hair from his fair, smooth forehead.

"Irene, will my presence here aid or comfort you? If so I will remain till morning."

"No; you can do no good. It is midnight now, and you must be wearied with your long ride. You cannot help me here, but to-morrow I shall want you to go with me to the cemetery. I wish his family to have the sad consolation of knowing that a minister knelt at his grave, when we laid the young patriot in his last resting-place. Good-bye, my brother, till then. Electra is in the next room; will you go in and speak to her?"

"No; I will see her early in the morning."

He left her to keep alone her solemn vigil; and through the remaining hours of that starry June night she stirred not from the narrow cot—kept her fingers on the sufferer's fleeting pulse, her

eyes on his whitening face. About three o'clock he moaned, struggled slightly, and looked intently at her. She gave him some brandy, and found that he swallowed with great difficulty.

Slowly a half-hour rolled away; Irene could barely feel the faint pulsation at Willie Walton's wrist, and as she put her ear to his lips, a long, last shuddering sigh escaped him—the battle of life was ended. Willie's Relief had come. The young sentinel passed to his Eternal Rest.

"The picket's off duty for ever."

Tears dropped on the still face as the nurse cut several locks of curling hair that clustered round the boyish temples, and took from the motionless heart the loved picture which had been so often and so tenderly kissed in the fitful light of camp-fires. Irene covered the noble head, the fair, handsome features, with her handkerchief, and, waking Andrew, pointed to the body—left her own ward, and entered one beyond the passage.

It was smaller, but similar in arrangement to the room where she had passed the night. A candle was sputtering in its socket, and the cold, misty, white dawn stared in at the eastern window upon rows of cots and unquiet, muttering sleepers. There, in the centre of the room, with her head bowed on the table, sat, or rather leaned, Electra, slumbering soundly, with her scarlet shawl gathered about her shoulders—her watch grasped in one hand, and the other holding a volume open at "Hesperid-Æglé."

Irene lifted the black curls that partially veiled the flushed neck, and whispered—

"Electra, wake up! I am going home."

"Is it light yet, out of doors? Ah, yes—I see! I have been asleep exactly fifteen minutes—gave the last dose of medicine at four o'clock. How is the boy? I am almost afraid to ask."

"Dead. Willie lived till daylight."

"Oh! how sad! how discouraging! I went to your door twice and looked in, but once you were praying, and the last time you had your face down on Willie's pillow, and as I could do nothing, I came back. Dr. Whitmore told me he would die, and it only made me suffer to look at what I could not relieve. I am thankful my cases are all doing well; that new prescription has acted magically on Mr. Hadley yonder, who has pneumonia. Just feel his skin—soft and pleasant as a child's."

"I have some directions to leave with Martha, about giving quinine before the doctor comes down, and then I shall go home. Are you ready?"

"Yes. I have a singular feeling about my temples, and an oppression when I talk—shouldn't wonder if I have caught cold."

"Electra, did you see Harvey last night?"

"No. Where did he come from?"

"He is chaplain in a regiment near Richmond, and said he would see us both this morning. Was Russell here last night?"

"Russell? No. Why do you ask? Is he in the city? Have you seen him?"

She rose quickly, laid her hand on Irene's, and looked searchingly at her.

"I have not seen him, but your cousin Harvey mentioned that Colonel Aubrey came up with him, on some very important errand, and had but a few hours to remain. I will get my shawl and join you in five minutes. Electra, you must stay at home and rest for a day or two; you are feverish, and worn out with constant watching."

CHAPTER XXXIV

MORTALLY WOUNDED

"It is a mercy that she is delirious; otherwise her unavoidable excitement and anxiety would probably prove fatal. She is very ill, of course; but, with careful nursing, I think you have little to apprehend. Above all things, Irene, suffer nobody to bolt into that room with the news—keep her as quiet as possible. I have perfect confidence in Whitmore's skill; he will do all that I could, though I would not leave her if I did not feel it my duty to hurry to the battlefield. Queen, you look weary; but it is not strange, after all that you have passed through."

"Doctor, when will you start?"

"In twenty minutes."

"Has any intelligence been received this morning?"

"Nothing but confirmation of last night's news. Hill holds Mechanicsville, and the enemy have fallen back in the direction of Powhite Swamp. A general advance will be made all along our lines to-day, and I must be off. What is the matter? Surely you are not getting frightened."

"Frightened—Dr. Arnold? No. I have no fears about the safety of Richmond; defeat is not written in Lee's lexicon; but I shudder in view of the precious human hecatombs to be immolated on yonder hills before McClellan is driven back. No doubt of victory disquiets me, but the thought of its awful price."

She paused, and her whole face quivered as she laid her clasped hands on his arm.

"Well—what is it? Dear child, what moves you so?"

"Doctor, promise me that if Colonel Aubrey is mortally wounded you will send instantly for me. I must see him once more."

Her head went down on her hands, and she trembled as white asters do in an early autumn gale. Compassionately the old man drew one arm around her.

"After all, then, you do care for him—despite your life-long reserve and apparent indifference? I have suspected as much, several times, but that imperturbable sphinx-face of yours always baffled me. My child, you need not droop your head; he is worthy of your love; he is the only man I know whom I would gladly see you marry. Irene, look up—tell me—did Leonard know this? Conscious of your affection for Aubrey, did he doom you to your lonely lot?"

"No. My father died in ignorance of what would have pained and mortified him beyond measure. Knowing him as well as you do, can you suppose that I would ever have allowed him to suspect the truth? I realized my duty and fulfilled it; that is the only consolation I have left. It never caused him one throb of regret, or furnished food for bitter reflection; and the debt of respect I owe to his memory shall be as faithfully discharged. If Colonel Aubrey lives to enjoy the independence for which he is fighting—if he should be spared to become a useful, valued member of society—one of the pure and able statesmen whom his country will require when these dark days of strife are ended, I can be content, though separated from him, and watching his brilliant career afar off. But if he must give his life for that which he holds dearer still, I ask the privilege of seeing him again, of being with him in his last moments. This consolation the brave spirit of my father would not withhold from me, were communion allowed between living and dead; this none can have the right to deny me."

"I promise that you shall know all as early as possible. If you receive no tidings, believe that he is uninjured. As yet, his regiment has not moved forward, but I know not how soon it may. Heaven preserve you! my precious child."

He pressed a kiss on the drooped head, and left her to resume her watch in the darkened room where Electra had been ill with typhoid-fever for nearly three weeks. It was thought that she contracted the disease in the crowded hospital; and when delirium ensued, Irene temporarily relinquished her ward to other nurses, and remained at the boarding-house, in attendance on her friend. It was a season of unexampled anxiety, yet all was singularly quiet in the beleaguered city. Throughout the Confederacy hushed expectancy reigned. Gallant Vicksburg's batteries barred the Mississippi; Beauregard and Price, lion-hearted idols of the West, held the Federal army in Corinth at bay; Stonewall Jackson—synonym of victory—after sweeping like a whirlwind through the Valley, and scattering the columns that stealthily crept southward, had arrived at Richmond at the appointed time. A greater than Serrurier, at a grander than Castiglone, he gave the signal to begin; and as a sheet of flame flashed along the sombre forests of Chickahominy, the nation held its breath, and watched the brilliant Seven Days' conflict, which converted twenty-six miles of swamp and forest into a vast necropolis.

During Friday the wounded came slowly in, and at four in the afternoon the roar of artillery told that the Battle of Gaines Mill was raging: that the enemy were fighting desperately, behind entrenchments which none but Confederate soldiers could successfully have assaulted. Until eight at night the houses trembled at every report of cannon, and then McClellan's grand army, crippled and bleeding, dragged itself away, under cover of darkness, to the south bank of the Chickahominy. Saturday saw a temporary lull in the iron storm; but the wounded continued to arrive, and the devoted women of the city rose from their knees to minister to the needs of these

numerous sufferers. Sunday found our troops feeling about the swamps for the retreating foe; and once more, late in the afternoon, distant thunder resounded from the severely contested field of Savage's Station, whence the enemy again retreated.

On Sabbath morning Irene learned that Russell's command had joined in the pursuit; and during that day and night, as the conflict drifted farther southward, and details became necessarily more meagre, her anxiety increased. Continually her lips moved in prayer, as she glided from Electra's silent room to aid in dressing the wounds of those who had been disabled for further participation in the strife; and, as Monday passed without the receipt of tidings from Dr. Arnold, she indulged in the hope that Russell would escape uninjured. During Tuesday morning Electra seemed to have recovered her consciousness, but in the afternoon she relapsed into incoherent muttering of "Cuyp," "Correggio," "Titian's Bella," and "my best great picture left in Florence."

Irene was sitting at her bedside, rolling bandages, when the sudden, far-distant, dull boom of cannon, followed by the quick rattling of the window-panes, gave intimation that the long contest was fiercely renewed. A courier had arrived from Malvern Mill with intelligence that here the enemy's forces were very strongly posted, were making desperate resistance; and though no doubt of the result was entertained, human nature groaned over the carnage.

At ten o'clock, having given a potion, and renewed the folds of wet linen on Electra's head, Irene stole back to the window, and, turning the shutters, looked down the street. Here and there an anxious group huddled on the corners, with ears strained to catch every sound, and, while she watched, a horseman clattered at a hard gallop over the paving-stones, reined up at the door of the boarding-house, swung himself to the sidewalk, and an instant after the sharp clang of the bell rang startlingly through the still mansion.

"Oh, my God! it has come at last!"

Irene groaned, and leaned heavily against the window-facing, and quick steps came up the stairway. Martha entered, and held out a slip of paper.

"Miss Irene, Cyrus has just brought this."

Her mistress' icy fingers clutched it, and she read—

"Come at once. Aubrey is badly wounded. Cyrus will show the way.

"Hiram Arnold."

"You are going to faint, Miss Irene! Drink some of this cordial."

"No. Tell Andrew to go after the carriage as quick as possible, and have it brought here immediately; and ask Uncle Eric to come to my room at once."

Irene went to her own apartment, which adjoined Electra's, put on her bonnet and veil, and, though the night was warm, wrapped a shawl about her.

Mr. Mitchell entered soon after, and started at sight of his niece's face.

"Irene, what does this mean? Where are you going at this hour?"

"To the battlefield!—to Malvern Hill. Colonel Aubrey is mortally wounded, and I must see him. Will you go with me? Oh, Uncle Eric! if you have any mercy in your soul ask me no questions now! only go with me."

"Of course, my dear child, I will go with you, if it is possible to procure a carriage of any kind. I will see——"

"I have had one engaged for three days. Martha, stay with Electra till I come back; leave her on no account. If you notice any change, send for Dr. Whitmore. Here is my watch; count her pulse carefully, and as long as it is over one hundred, give her, every two hours, a spoonful of the medicine in that square vial on the table. I trust to you, Martha, to take care of her. If she should be rational, and ask for me, tell her nothing about the battles, and say I have gone to see a sick man, and will be back soon. Come, Uncle Eric."

They entered the close carriage which she had ordered reserved for her, and she called Cyrus to the door.

"Did you see Colonel Aubrey after he was wounded?"

"I only had a glimpse of him, as they brought him in. Miss Irene, he was shot in the breast."

"You know the way; ride outside; and, Cyrus, drive as fast as possible."

By the glimmer of the carriage lamps she could see the wagons going to and fro, some filled with empty coffins, some with mangled sufferers. Now and then weary, spent soldiers sat on the roadside, or struggled on toward the city which they had saved, with their arms in slings, or hands bound up, or bloody bandages across their stern faces. After another hour, when the increasing number of men showed proximity to the scene of danger, Cyrus turned away from the beaten track, and soon the flash of lights and the hum of voices told that they were near the place of destination. The carriage stopped, and Cyrus came to the door.

"We are at the lines, and I can't drive any nearer. If you will wait, I will go and find master."

The delay seemed intolerably long, and for the first time an audible moan escaped Irene just as Cyrus came back accompanied by a muffled figure.

"Irene, my child."

She leaned out till her face nearly touched Dr. Arnold's.

"Only tell me that he is alive, and I can bear all else."

"He is alive, and sleeping just now. Can you control yourself if I take you to him?"

"Yes; you need not fear that I will disturb him. Let me go to him."

He gave her his arm, and led her through the drizzling rain for some distance—avoiding, as much as possible, the groups of wounded, where surgeons were at their sad work. Finally, before a small tent, he paused, and whispered—

"Nerve yourself, dear child."

"Is there no hope?"

She swept aside her long mourning veil, and gazed imploringly into his face.

Tears filled his eyes, and hastily averting his head, he raised the curtain of the tent and drew her inside.

A candle burned dimly in one corner, and there, on a pallet of straw, over which a blanket had been thrown, lay the powerful form of the dauntless leader, whose deeds of desperate daring had so electrified his worshipping command but a few hours before. The noble head was pillowed on a knapsack; one hand pressed his heart, while the other drooped nerveless at his side, and the breast of his coat was saturated with blood, which at intervals oozed through the bandages and dripped upon the straw. The tent was silent as a cemetery, and not a sound passed Irene's white, fixed lips as she bent down and looked upon the loved face, strangely beautiful in its pallid repose. The shadowy wings of the bitter bygone hovered no longer over the features, darkening their chiselled perfection; a tranquil half-smile parted the lips, and unbent the lines between the finely-arched black brows.

Sinking softly on the floor of the tent, Irene rested her chin on her folded hands, and calmly watched the deep sleep. So passed three-quarters of an hour; then, as Dr. Arnold cautiously put his fingers on the pulse, the sufferer opened his eyes.

Irene was partially in the shade, but as she leaned forward, a sudden, bewildered smile lighted his countenance; he started up, and extended one arm.

"Irene! My darling! Do I dream, or are you indeed with me?"

"I have come to nurse you, Russell; but if you do not calm yourself, the doctor will send me away."

She took the outstretched hand in both of hers, and pressed her lips repeatedly upon it.

"Come close to me. I am helpless now, and cannot go to you."

She seated herself on the edge of the straw, laid her shawl in her lap, and lifting his head, rested it on the soft woollen folds. Dr. Arnold removed the warm cloth soaked with blood, placed a cold, dripping towel on the gaping wound, and after tightening the bandages to check the hæmorrhage, passed out of the tent, leaving the two alone.

"Oh, Irene! this is a joy I never hoped for. I went at night to the hospital in Richmond just to get a glimpse of you—to feast my eyes with another sight of your dear, dear face! I watched you ministering like an angel to sick and wounded soldiers, and I envied them the touch of your hand—the sound of your voice. I little expected to die in your arms. This reconciles me to my fate; this compensates for all."

Her fingers tenderly smoothed the black locks that clung to his temples, and bending down she kissed his forehead. His uninjured arm stole up around her neck, drew her face to his, and his lips pressed hers again and again.

"Dear Russell, you must be quiet, or you will exhaust yourself. Try to sleep—it will refresh, strengthen you."

"Nothing will strengthen me. I have but a short time to live; shall I sleep away the opportunity of my last earthly communion with you, my life-long idol! Oh, Irene! my beautiful treasure! This proof of your love sweetens death itself. There have been hours (ever since we parted a year ago) when I reproached you for the sorrow and pain you sternly meted out to me, and to yourself. When I said bitterly, *if* she loved as she should, she would level all barriers—she would lay her hands in mine—glorify my name by taking it as my wife, and thus defy and cancel the past. I was selfish in my love; I wanted you in my home; I longed for the soft touch of your fingers, for your proud, dazzling smile of welcome when the day's work was ended; for the privilege of drawing you to my heart, and listening to your whispered words of encouragement and fond congratulation in my successes. I knew that this could never be; that your veneration for your

father's memory would separate us in future, as in the past; that my pleadings would not shake your unfortunate and erroneous resolution; and it was hard to give up the dearest hope that ever brightened a lonely man's life. Now I know, I feel that your love is strong, deathless as my own, though long locked deep in your heart. I know it by the anguish in your face, by the quiver of your mouth, by your presence in this place of horrors. God comfort and bless you, my own darling!—my brave, patient, faithful Irene!"

He smiled triumphantly, and drew her hand caressingly across his cheek.

"Russell, it is useless now to dwell upon our sorrowful past; what suffering our separation has cost me, none but my God can ever know. To His hands I commit my destiny, and 'He doeth all things well.' In a little while you will leave me, and then—oh! then, I shall be utterly desolate indeed! But I can bear loneliness—I can walk my dreary earthly path uncomplainingly, I can give you up for the sake of my country, if I have the blessed assurance that you have only hastened home before me, waiting for me there—that, saved through Christ, we shall soon meet in Heaven, and spend Eternity together. Oh, Russell! can you give me this consolation, without which my future will be dark indeed? Have you kept your promise, to live so that you could at last meet the eyes of your God in peace?"

"I have. I have struggled against the faults of my character; I have earnestly endeavoured to crush the vindictive feelings of my heart; and I have conscientiously tried to do my duty to my fellow-creatures, to my command, and my country. I have read the Bible you gave me; and, dearest, in praying for you, I have learned to pray for myself. Through Jesus, I have a sure hope of happiness beyond the grave. There, though separated in life, you and I shall be united by death. Oh, Irene! but for your earnest piety this precious anticipation might never have been mine. But for you I would have forgotten my mother's precepts and my mother's prayers. Through your influence I shall soon join her, where the fierce waves of earthly trial can lash my proud soul no more."

"Thank God! Oh, Russell! this takes away the intolerable bitterness of parting; this will support me in coming years. I can brave all things in future."

She saw that a paroxysm of pain had seized him. His brow wrinkled, and he bit his lips hard, to suppress a groan. Just at this moment Dr. Arnold re-entered, and immediately after gave him another potion of morphine.

"Aubrey, you must be quiet, if you would not shorten your life."

He silently endured his sufferings for some moments, and raising his eyes again to Irene's said, in a tone of exhaustion—

"It is selfish for me to make you witness my torture; but I could not bear to have you leave me. There is something I want to say while I have strength left. How is Electra?"

"Partially delirious still, but the doctor thinks she will recover. What shall I tell her for you?"

"That I loved and remembered her in my dying hour. Kiss her for me, and tell her I fell where the dead lay thickest, in a desperate charge on the enemy's batteries—that none can claim a nobler, prouder death than mine—that the name of Aubrey is once more glorified—baptized with my blood upon the battlefield. Irene, she is alone in the world; watch over her and love her, for my sake. Doctor, give me some water."

As the hæmorrhage increased despite their efforts to stanch it, he became rapidly weaker, and soon after, with one hand locked in Irene's, he fell asleep.

She sat motionless, supporting his head, uttering no sound, keeping her eyes fixed on his upturned countenance. Dr. Arnold went noiselessly in and out, on various errands of mercy; occasionally anxious, weather-beaten soldiers softly lifted the curtain of the tent, gazed sadly, fondly, on the prostrate figure of the beloved commander, and turned away silently, with tears trickling down their bronzed faces. Slowly the night waned, and the shrill tones of *reveille* told that another day had risen before the murky sky brightened. Hundreds, who had sprung up at that call twenty-four hours ago, now lay stiffening in their gore, sleeping their last sleep, where neither the sound of fife and drum, nor the battle-cry of comrades, would ever rouse them from their final rest before Malvern Hill—over which winds wailed a requiem, and trailing, dripping clouds settled like a pall.

The bustle and stir of camp increased as preparations were made to follow the foe, who had again taken up the line of retreat; but within the tent unbroken silence reigned. It was apparent that Russell was sinking fast, and at eight o'clock he awoke, looked uneasily around him, and said feebly—

"What is going on in front?"

"McClellan has evacuated Malvern Hill, and is in full retreat toward his gunboats," answered the doctor.

"Then there will be no more fighting. My shattered regiment will rest for a season. Poor fellows! they did their duty nobly yesterday."

He lifted his eyes toward heaven, and for some moments his lips moved inaudibly in prayer. Gradually a tranquil expression settled on his features, and as his eyes closed again he murmured

faintly—

"Irene—darling—raise me a little."

They lifted him, and rested his head against her shoulder.

"Irene!"

"I am here, Russell; my arms are around you."

She laid her cheek on his, and listened to catch the words, but none came. The lips parted once, and a soft, fluttering breath swept across them. Dr. Arnold put his hand over the heart—no pulsation greeted him; and, turning away, the old man covered his face with his handkerchief.

"Russell, speak to me once more."

There was no sound, no motion. She knew that the soldier's spirit had soared to the shores of Everlasting Peace, and that not until she joined him there would the loved tones again make music in her heart. She tightened her arms around the still form, and nestled her cheek closer to his, now growing cold. No burst of grief escaped her, to tell of agony and despair.

* * * * *

Electra's speedy convalescence repaid the care bestowed upon her, and one afternoon, ten days after quiet had again settled around the Confederate capital, she insisted on being allowed to sit up later than usual, protesting that she would no longer be regarded as an invalid.

"Irene, stand in the light where I can see you fully. How worn and weary you look! I suspect I am regaining my health at the expense of yours."

"No; I am as well in body as I could desire. But no doubt my anxiety has left its traces on my countenance."

She leaned over Electra's chair, and stroked back the artist's shining hair.

"I wish you would let me see the papers. My eyes are strong enough now, and I want to know exactly what has taken place everywhere during my sickness. It seems to me impossible that General Lee's army can face McClellan's much longer without bringing on a battle, and I am so anxious about Russell. If he should be hurt, of course, I must go to him. It is very strange that he has not written. Are you sure no letters came for me?"

"There are no letters, I am sure; but I have a message for you. I have seen him once since you were taken sick."

"Ah! what is it? He heard that I was ill, and came to see me, I suppose. When was he here?"

Irene bent down and kissed her companion tremulously, saying slowly—

"He desired me to kiss you for him. Electra, I have not told you before because I feared the effect upon you in your weak state; but there have been desperate battles around Richmond during your illness, and the Federals have been defeated—driven back to James river."

"Was Russell wounded? Yes—I understand it all now! Where is he? Oh! tell me that I may go to him."

She sprang up, but a deathlike pallor overspread her face and she tottered to the open window.

Irene followed the thin figure, and, putting her arms about her, made her lean against her.

"He was wounded on the last day, and I went to see him; you were then delirious."

"Let me go at once! I will not disturb him; I will control myself! Only let me see him to-day!"

"Electra, you cannot see him. He has gone to his God; but in his dying hour he spoke of you fondly, sent love, and——"

The form reeled, drooped, shivered, and fell back insensible in Irene's arms.

So heavy was the swoon, that it seemed as if her spirit had fled to join her cousin's in endless union; but at length consciousness returned, and with it came the woeful realization of her loss. A long, low wail rose and fell upon the air, like the cry from lips of feeble, suffering, helpless children, and her head sank upon the shoulder of the sad-faced nurse, whose grief could find no expression in sobs, or moans, or tears.

"Dead! dead! and I shall see his dear face no more! Oh! why did you not let me die, too? What is my wretched life worth now? One grave might have held us both! My noble, peerless Russell! the light of my solitary life! O God! be merciful! take me with my idol! Take me now!"

Very tenderly and caressingly Irene endeavoured to soothe her—detailed the circumstances of her cousin's death, and pointed her despairing soul to a final reunion.

But no rift appeared in the artist's black sky of sorrow; she had not yet learned that, in drawing near the hand that holds the rod, the blow is lightened, and she bitterly demanded of her Maker to be released from the burden of life.

CHAPTER XXXV

"THE SANCTIFIED DEVOTION AND FULL WORK"

The sunlight of a warm spring day flashed through the open window, and made golden arabesque tracery on the walls, and portraits of the parlour at Huntingdon Hill. The costly crimson damask curtains had long since been cut into shirts for the soldiers, and transported to the army of Tennessee, and air and sunshine entered unimpeded. Electra sat before her canvas in this room, absorbed in the design which now engaged every thought. The witchery of her profession had woven its spell about her, banishing for a time the spectral past.

The extension of the Conscription statute had, several months before, deprived Irene of a valued and trusty overseer; and to satisfy herself concerning the character of his successor, and the condition of affairs at home, she and her uncle had returned to W——, bringing Electra with them.

Irene was with Electra in the parlour.

"What progress are you making, Electra?"

"Very little. I shall not hurry myself; I intend that the execution shall be equal to my ideal—and that ideal entirely worthy of the theme. I want to lay my '*Modern Macaria*,' as the first offering of Southern art, upon my country's altar, as a nucleus around which nobler and grander pictures, from the hands of my countrymen and women, shall cluster."

"Electra, in order to effect this 'consummation devoutly to be wished,' it is necessary that the primary branches of Art should be popularized, and thrown open to the masses; and in order to open for them new avenues of support, I have determined to establish in W—— a School of Design for Women—similar in plan, though more extensive, than that founded some years ago by Mrs. Peter of Philadelphia. The upper portion of the building will be arranged for drawing classes, wood-engraving, and the various branches of Design; and the lower, corresponding in size and general appearance, I intend for a circulating library for our county. Over that School of Design I want you to preside; your talents, your education, your devotion to your Art fit you peculiarly for the position. The salary shall be such as to compensate you for your services; and, when calmer days dawn upon us, we may be able to secure some very valuable lecturers among our gentlemen-artists. I have a large lot on the corner of Pine Street and Huntingdon Avenue, opposite the court-house, which will be a fine location for it, and I wish to appropriate it to this purpose. While you are adorning the interior of the building, the walls of which are to contain frescoes of some of the most impressive scenes of our Revolution, I will embellish the grounds in front, and make them my special charge. I understand the cultivation of flowers, though the gift of painting them is denied me. Yesterday I sold my diamonds for a much larger amount than I supposed they would command, and this sum, added to other funds now at my disposal, will enable me to accomplish the scheme. Dr. Arnold and Uncle Eric cordially approve my plan, will aid me very liberally, and as soon as tranquillity is restored I shall succeed in erecting the building without applying to any one else for assistance. When your picture is finished, I wish you to make me a copy to be hung up in our School of Design, that the students may be constantly reminded of the debt of gratitude we owe our armies."

The canvas, which she leaned forward to inspect more closely, contained an allegorical design representing, in the foreground, two female figures. One stern, yet noble-featured, crowned with stars—triumph and exultation flashing in the luminous eyes. Independence, crimson-mantled, grasping the Confederate Banner of the Cross, whose victorious folds streamed above a captured battery, where a Federal flag trailed in the dust. At her side stood white-robed, angelic Peace with one hand over the touch-hole of the cannon against which she leaned, and the other extended in benediction. Vividly the faces contrasted—one all athrob with national pride, beaming with brilliant destiny; the other wonderfully serene and holy. In the distance, gleaming in the evening light which streamed from the West, tents dotted a hill-side; and, intermediate between Peace and the glittering tents, stretched a torn, stained battlefield, over which the roar and rush of conflict had just swept, leaving mangled heaps of dead in attestation of its fury.

"How many months do you suppose it will require to complete it?" asked Irene, whose interest in the picture was scarcely inferior to that of its creator.

"If I work steadily upon it, I can soon finish it; but if I go with you to a Tennessee hospital, I must, of course, leave it here until the war ends. After all, Irene, the joy of success does not equal that which attends the patient working. Perhaps it is because 'anticipation is the purest part of pleasure.' I love my work; no man or woman ever loved it better; and yet there is a painful feeling of isolation, of loneliness, which steals over me sometimes, and chills all my enthusiasm. It is so mournful to know that, when the labour is ended, and a new chaplet encircles my brow, I shall have no one but you to whom I can turn for sympathy in my triumph. If I feel this so keenly now, how shall I bear it when the glow of life fades into sober twilight shadows, and age creeps upon me?"

She threw down her brush and palette, and, turning towards her companion, leaned her purplish head against her.

"Electra, it is very true that single women have trials for which a thoughtless, happy world has little sympathy. But lonely lives are not necessarily joyless; they should be, of all others, most

useful.

"Remember that the woman who dares to live alone, and be sneered at, is braver, and nobler, and better than she who escapes both in a loveless marriage. It is true that you and I are very lonely, and yet our future holds much that is bright. You have the profession you love so well, and our new School of Design to engage your thoughts; and I a thousand claims on my time and attention. I have Uncle Eric to take care of and to love, and Dr. Arnold, who is growing quite infirm, has promised me that, as soon as he can be spared from the hospitals, he will make his home with us. When this storm of war has spent itself, your uncle's family will return from Europe and reside here with you. Harvey, too, will come to W—— to live—will probably take charge of Mr. Campbell's church—and we shall have the pleasure and benefit of his constant counsel. If I could see you a member of that church I should be better satisfied—and you would be happier."

"I would join to-morrow, if thereby I could acquire your sublime faith, and strength, and resignation. Oh, Irene! my friend and comforter! I want to live differently in future. Once I was wedded to life and my Art—pre-eminence in my profession, fame, was all that I cared to attain; now I desire to spend my remaining years so that I may meet Russell beyond the grave. His death broke the ties that bound me to this world; I live now in hope of reunion in God's eternal kingdom. I have been selfish, and careless, and complaining; but, oh! I want to do my whole duty henceforth. Irene, my calm, sweet, patient guide, teach me to be more like you."

"Electra, take Christ for your model, instead of an erring human being like yourself, constantly falling short of her own duty. With Harvey to direct us, we ought to accomplish a world of good, here in sight of Russell's grave."

The eyes of the artist went back to the stainless robes and seraphic face of her pictured Peace in the loved "Modern Macaria," and, as she resumed her work, her brow cleared, the countenance kindled as in days of yore, bitter memories hushed their moans and fell asleep at the wizard touch of her profession, and the stormy, stricken soul found balm and rest in Heaven-appointed Labour.

Standing at the back of Electra's chair, with one hand resting on her shoulder, Irene raised her holy violet eyes, and looked through the window toward the cemetery, where glittered a tall marble shaft which the citizens of W—— had erected over the last quiet resting-place of Russell Aubrey. Sands of Time were drifting stealthily around the crumbling idols of the morning of life, levelling and tenderly shrouding the Past, but sorrow left its softening shadow on the orphan's countenance, and laid its chastening finger about the lips which meekly murmured: "Thy will be done." The rays of the setting sun gilded her mourning dress, gleamed in the white roses that breathed their perfume in her rippling hair, and lingered like a benediction on the placid pure face of the lonely woman who had survived every earthly hope; and who, calmly fronting her Altars of Sacrifice, here dedicated herself anew to the hallowed work of promoting the happiness and gladdening the paths of all who journeyed with her down the chequered aisles of Time.

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner, *Frome and London*

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