

Green Anna Katharine

The Sword of Damocles: A Story of New York Life



Anna Green

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Damocles, one of the courtiers of Dionysius, was perpetually extolling with rapture that tyrant's treasures, grandeur, the number of his troops, the extent of his dominions, the magnificence of his palaces, and the universal abundance of all good things and enjoyments in his possession; always repeating, that never man was happier than Dionysius. "Since you are of that opinion," said the tyrant to him one day, "will you taste and make proof of my felicity in person?" The offer was accepted with joy; Damocles was placed upon a golden couch, covered with carpets richly embroidered. The side-boards were loaded with vessels of gold and silver. The most beautiful slaves in the most splendid habits stood around, ready to serve him at the slightest signal. The most exquisite essences and perfumes had not been spared. The table was spread with proportionate magnificence. Damocles was all joy, and looked upon himself as the happiest man in the world; when unfortunately casting up his eyes, he beheld over his head the point of a sword, which hung from the roof only by a single horse-hair.

Rollin.

BOOK I TWO MEN

I A WANDERER

"There's no such word." – BULWER.

A wind was blowing through the city. Not a gentle and balmy zephyr, stirring the locks on gentle ladies' foreheads and rustling the curtains in elegant boudoirs, but a chill and bitter gale that rushed with a swoop through narrow alleys and forsaken courtyards, biting the cheeks of the few solitary wanderers that still lingered abroad in the darkened streets.

In front of a cathedral that reared its lofty steeple in the midst of the squalid houses and worse than squalid saloons of one of the dreariest portions of the East Side, stood the form of a woman. She had paused in her rush down the narrow street to listen to the music, perhaps, or to catch a glimpse of the light that now and then burst from the widely swinging doors as they opened and shut upon some tardy worshipper.

She was tall and fearful looking; her face, when the light struck it, was seared and desperate; gloom and desolation were written on all the lines of her rigid but wasted form, and when she shuddered under the gale, it was with that force and abandon to which passion lends its aid, and in which the soul proclaims its doom.

Suddenly the doors before her swung wide and the preacher's voice was heard: "Love God and you will love your fellow-men. Love your fellow-men and you best show your love to God."

She heard, started, and the charm was broken. "Love!" she echoed with a horrible laugh; "there is no love in heaven or on earth!"

And she swept by, and the winds followed and the darkness swallowed her up like a gulf.

II A DISCUSSION

"Young men think old men fools, and old men know young men to be so."
– Ray's Proverbs.

"And you are actually in earnest?"

"I am."

The first speaker, a fine-looking gentleman of some forty years of age, drummed with his fingers on the table before him and eyed the face of the young man who had repeated this assent so emphatically, with a certain close scrutiny indicative of surprise.

"It is an unlooked-for move for you to make," he remarked at length. "Your success as a pianist has been so decided, I confess I do not understand why you should desire to abandon a profession that in five years' time has procured you both competence and a very enviable reputation – for the doubtful prospects of Wall Street, too!" he added with a deep and thoughtful frown that gave still further impressiveness to his strongly marked features.

The young man with a sweep of his eye over the luxurious apartment in which they sat, shrugged his shoulders with that fine and nonchalant grace which was one of his chief characteristics.

"With such a pilot as yourself, I ought to be able to steer clear of the shoals," said he, a frank smile illumining a face that was rather interesting than handsome.

The elder gentleman did not return the smile. Instead of that he remained gazing at the ample coal-fire that burned in the grate before him with a look that to the young musician was simply inexplicable. "You see the ship in haven," he murmured at last; "but do not consider what storms it has weathered or what perils escaped. It is a voyage I would encourage no son of mine to undertake."

"Yet you are not the man to shrink from danger or to hesitate in a course you had marked out for yourself, because of the struggle it involved or the difficulties it presented!" the young man exclaimed almost involuntarily as his glance lingered with a certain sort of fascination on the powerful brow and steady if somewhat melancholy eye of his companion.

"No; but danger and difficulty should not be sought, only subdued when encountered. If you were driven into this path, I should say, 'God pity you!' and hold you out my hand to steady you along its precipices and above its sudden quicksands. But you are not driven to it. Your profession offers you the means of an ample livelihood while your good heart and fair talents insure you ultimate and honorable success, both in the social and artistic world. For a man of twenty-five such prospects are not common and he must be difficult to please not to be satisfied with them."

"Yes," said the other rising with a fitful movement but instantly sitting again; "I have nothing to complain of as the world goes, only – Sir," he exclaimed with a sudden determination that lent a force to his features they had hitherto lacked, "you speak of being driven into a certain course; what do you mean by that?"

"I mean," returned the other; "forced by circumstances to enter a line of business to which many others, if not all others are preferable."

"You speak strongly, speculation evidently has none of your sympathy, notwithstanding the favorable results which have accrued to you from it. But excuse me, by circumstances you mean poverty, I suppose, and the lack of every other opening to wealth and position. You would not consider the desire to make a large fortune in a short space of time a circumstance of a sufficiently determining nature to reconcile you to my entering Wall Street speculation?"

The elder gentleman rose, not as the other had done with a restless impulse quickly subsiding at the first excuse, but forcibly and with a feverish impatience that to appearance was somewhat

out of proportion to the occasion. "A large fortune in a short space of time!" he reiterated, pausing where he had risen with an eagle glance at his companion and a ringing tone in his voice that bespoke a deep but hitherto suppressed agitation. "It is the alluring inscription above the pitfall into which many a noble youth has fallen; the battle-cry to a struggle that has led many a strong man the way of ruin; the guide-post to a life whose feverish days and sleepless nights offer but poor compensation for the sudden splendors and as sudden reverses attached to it. I had rather you had accounted for this sudden freak of yours by the strongest aspiration after power than by this cry of the merely mercenary man who in his desire to enjoy wealth, prefers to win it by a stroke of luck rather than conquer it by a life of endeavor." He stopped. "I am aware that this tirade against the ladder by which I myself have risen so rapidly, must strike you as in ill-taste. But Bertram, I am interested in your welfare and am willing to incur some slight charge of inconsistency in order to insure it," and here he turned upon his companion with that expression of extreme gentleness which lent such a peculiar charm to his countenance and explained perhaps the almost unlimited power he held over the hearts and minds of those who came within the circle of his influence.

"You are very good, sir," murmured his young friend, who to explain matters at once was in reality the nephew of this Wall Street magnate, though from the fact of his having taken another name on entering the musical profession, was not generally known as such. "No one, not even my father himself, could have been more considerate and kind; but I do not think you understand me, or rather I should say I do not think I have made myself perfectly intelligible to you. It is not for the sake of wealth itself or the eclat attending its possession that I desire an immediate fortune, but that by means of it I may attain another object dearer than wealth, and more precious than my career."

The elder gentleman turned quickly, evidently much surprised, and cast a sudden inquiring glance at his nephew, who blushed with a modest ingenuousness pleasing to see in one so well accustomed to the critical gaze of his fellow-men.

"Yes," said he, as if in answer to that look, "I am in love."

A deep silence for a moment pervaded the apartment, a sombre silence almost startling to young Mandeville, who had expected some audible expression to follow this announcement if only the good-natured "Pooh! pooh!" of the matured man of the world in the presence of ardent youthful enthusiasm. What could it mean? Looking up he encountered his uncle's eye fixed upon him with the last expression he could have anticipated seeing there, namely that of actual and unmistakable alarm.

"You are displeased," Mandeville exclaimed. "You have thought me proof against such a passion, or perhaps you do not believe in the passion itself!" Then with a sudden remembrance of the notable if somewhat indolent loveliness of his uncle's wife, blushed again at his unusual want of tact, while his eye with an involuntary impulse sought the large panel at their right where, in the full bloom of her first youth, the lady of the house smiled upon all beholders.

"I do not believe in that passion influencing a man's career," his uncle replied with no apparent attention to the other's embarrassment. "A woman needs be possessed of uncommon excellences to justify a man in leaving a path where success is certain, for one where it is not only doubtful but if attained must bring many a regret and heart-ache in its train. Beauty is not sufficient," he went on with sterner and sterner significance, "though it were of an angelic order. There must be worth." And here his mind's eye if not that of his bodily sense, certainly followed the glance of his companion.

"I believe there is worth," the young man replied; "certainly, it is not her beauty that charms me. I do not even know if she *is* beautiful," he continued.

"And you believe you love!" the elder exclaimed after another short pause.

There was so much of bitterness in the tone in which this was uttered, that Mandeville forgot its incredulity. "I think I must," returned he with a certain masculine naïveté not out of keeping with his general style of face and manner, "else I should not be here. Three weeks ago I was satisfied

with my profession, if not enthusiastic over it; to-day I ask nothing but to be allowed to enter upon some business that in three years' time at least will place me where I can be the fit mate of any woman in this land, that is not worth her millions."

"The woman for whom you have conceived this violent attachment is, then, above you in social position?"

"Yes, sir, or so considered, which amounts to the same thing, as far as I am concerned."

"Bertram, I have lived longer than you and have seen much of both social and domestic life, and I tell you no woman is worth such a sacrifice on the part of a man as you propose. No woman of to-day, I should say; our mothers were different. The very fact that this young lady of whom you speak, obliges you to change your whole course of life in order to obtain her, ought to be sufficient to prove to you – " He stopped suddenly, arrested by the young man's lifted hand. "She does not oblige you, then?"

"Not on her own account, sir. This lily," lifting a vase of blossoms at his elbow, "could not be more innocent of the necessities that govern the social circle it adorns, than the pure, single-minded girl to whom I have dedicated what is best and noblest in my manhood. It is her father – "

"Ah, her father!"

"Yes, sir," the young man pursued, more and more astonished at the other's tone. "He is a man who has a right to expect both wealth and position in a son-in-law. But I see I shall have to tell you my story, sir. It is an uncommon one and I never meant that it should pass my lips, but if by its relation I can win your sympathy for a pure and noble passion, I shall consider the sacred seal of secrecy broken in a good cause. But," said he, seeing his uncle cast a short and uneasy glance at the door, "perhaps I am interrupting you. You expect some one!"

"No," said his uncle, "my wife is at church; I am ready to listen."

The young man gave a hurried sigh, cast one look at his companion's immovable face, as if to assure himself that the narrative was necessary, then leaned back and in a steady business-like tone that softened, however, as he proceeded, began to relate as follows:

III

A MYSTERIOUS SUMMONS

"Without unspotted, innocent within,
She feared no danger, for she knew no sin." – Dryden.

It was after a matinée performance at – Hall some two weeks ago that I stopped to light a cigar in the small corridor leading to the back entrance. I was in a dissatisfied frame of mind. Something in the music I had been playing or the manner in which it had been received had touched unwonted chords in my own nature. I felt alone. I remember asking myself as I stood there, what it all amounted to? Who of all the applauding crowd would watch at my bedside through a long and harassing sickness, or lend their sympathy as they now yielded their praise, if instead of carrying off the honors of the day I had failed to do justice to my reputation. I was just smiling over the only exception I could make to this sweeping assertion, that of the pale-eyed youth you have sometimes observed dogging my steps, when Briggs came up to me.

"There is a woman here, sir, who insists on seeing you; she has been waiting through half the last piece. Shall I tell her you are coming out?"

"A woman!" exclaimed I, somewhat surprised, for my visitors are not apt to be of the gentler sex.

"Yes sir, an old one. She seems very anxious to speak to you. I could not get rid of her no how."

I hurried forward to the muffled figure which he pointed out cowering against the wall by the door. "Well, my good woman, what do you want?" I asked, bending towards her in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the face she held partly concealed from me.

"Are you Mr. Mandeville?" she inquired in a tone shaken as much by agitation as age.

I bowed.

"The one who plays upon the piano?"

"The very same," I declared.

"You are not deceiving me," she went on, looking up with a marked anxiety plainly visible through her veil. "I haven't seen you play and couldn't contradict you, but –"

"Here!" said I calling to Briggs with a kindly look at the old woman, "help me on with my coat, will you?"

The "Certainly, Mr. Mandeville," with which he complied seemed to reassure her, and as soon as the coat was on and he was gone, she grasped me by the arm and drew my ear down to her mouth.

"If you are Mr. Mandeville, I have a message for you. This letter," slipping one into my hand, "is from a young lady, sir. She bade me give it to you myself. She is young and pretty," she pursued as she saw me make a movement of distaste, "and a lady. We depend upon your honor, sir."

I acknowledge that my first impulse was to fling her back the note and leave the building; I was in no mood for trifling, my next to burst into a laugh and politely hand her to the door, my last and best, to open the poor little note and see for myself whether the writer was a lady or not. Proceeding to the door, for it was already twilight in the dim passage way, I tore open the envelope which was dainty enough and took out a sheet of closely written paper. A certain qualm of conscience assailed me as I saw the delicate chirography it disclosed and I was tempted to thrust it back and return it unread to the old woman now trembling in the corner. But curiosity overcame my scruples, and hastily unfolding the sheet I read these lines:

"I do not know if what I do is right; I am sure aunty would not say it was; but aunty never thinks anything is right but going to church and reading the papers to papa. I am just a little girl who has heard you play, and who would think the world was too beautiful, if she could hear you say to her just once, some of the kind

things you must speak every day to the persons who know you. I do not expect very much – you must have a great many friends, and you would not care for me – but the least little look, if it were all my own, would make me so happy and so proud I should not envy anybody in the world, unless it was some of those dear friends who see you always.

"I do not come and hear you play often, for aunty thinks music frivolous, but I am always hearing you no matter where I am, and it makes me feel as if I were far away from everybody, in a beautiful land all sunshine and flowers. But nurse says I must not write so much or you will not read it, so I will stop here. But if you *would* come it would make some one happier than even your beautiful music could do."

That was all; there was neither name nor date. A child's epistle, written with a woman's circumspection. With mingled sensations of doubt and curiosity I turned back to the old woman who stood awaiting me with eager anxiety.

"Was this written by a child or woman?" I asked, meeting her eye with as much sternness as I could assume.

"Don't ask me – don't ask me anything. I have promised to bring you if I could, but I cannot answer any questions."

I stepped back with an incredulous laugh. Here was evidently an adventure. "You will at least tell me where the young miss lives," said I, "before I undertake to fulfil her request."

She shook her head. "I have a carriage at the door, sir," said she. "All you have got to do is to get into it with me and we shall soon be at the house."

I looked from her face to the letter in my hand, and knew not what to think. The spirit of simplicity and ingenuousness that marked the latter was scarcely in keeping with this air of mystery. The woman observing my hesitation moved towards the door.

"Will you come, sir?" she inquired. "You will not regret it. Just a moment's talk with a pretty young girl – surely –"

"Hush," said I, hearing a hasty step behind me. And sure enough just then my intimate friend Selby came along and grasping me by the arm began dragging me towards the door. "You are my property," said he. "I've promised, on my word of honor as a gentleman and a musician, to bring you to the Handel Club this afternoon. I was afraid you had escaped me, but –" Here he caught sight of the small black figure halting in the door-way, and paused.

"Who's this?" said he.

I hesitated. For one instant the scale of my whole future destiny hung trembling in the balance, then the demon of curiosity got the better of my judgment, and with the rather unworthy consideration that I might as well enjoy my youth while I could, I released myself from my friend's detaining hand and replied, "Some one with whom I have very particular business. I cannot go to the Handel Club to-day," and darting out without further delay, I rejoined the old woman on the sidewalk.

Without a word she drew me towards a carriage I now observed standing by the curbstone a few feet to the left. As I got in I remember pausing a moment to glance at the man on the box, but it was too dark for me to perceive anything but the fact that he was dressed in livery. More and more astonished I leaned back in my seat and endeavored to open conversation with my mysterious companion. But it did not work. Without being actually rude, she parried my questions in such a way that by the end of five minutes I found myself as far from any knowledge of the real situation of the case as when I started. I therefore desisted from any further attempts and turned to look out, when I made a discovery that for the first time awoke some vague feelings of alarm within my breast. This was, that the window was not covered by a curtain as I supposed, but by closed blinds which when I tried to raise them resisted all my efforts to do so.

"It is very close here," I muttered, in some sort of excuse for this display of uneasiness. "Cannot you give us a little air?" But my companion remained silent, and I felt ashamed to press the matter though I took advantage of the darkness to remove to a safer place a roll of money which I had about me.

Yet I was far from being really anxious, and did not once meditate backing out of an adventure that was at once so piquant and romantic. For by this time I became conscious from the sounds about me that we had left the side street for one of the avenues and were then proceeding rapidly up town. Listening, I heard the roll of omnibuses and the jingle of car-bells, which informed me that we were in Broadway, no other avenue in the city being traversed by both these methods of conveyance. But after awhile the jingle ceased and presently the livelier sounds of constant commotion inseparable from a business thoroughfare, and we entered what I took to be Madison Avenue at Twenty-third Street.

Instantly I made up mind to notice every turn of the carriage, that I might fix to some degree the locality towards which we were tending. But it turned but once and that after a distance of steady travelling that quite overthrew any calculation I was able to make at that time of the probable number of streets we had passed since entering the avenue. Having turned, it went but about half a block to the left when it stopped. "I shall see where I am when I get out," thought I; but in this I was mistaken.

First we had stopped in the middle of a block of houses built, as far as I could judge, all after one model. Next the fact of the front door being open, though I saw no one in the hall, somewhat disconcerted me, and I hurried across the sidewalk and up the stoop in a species of maze hardly to be expected from one of my naturally careless disposition. The next moment the door closed behind me and I found myself in a well-lighted hall whose quiet richness betokened it as belonging to a private dwelling of no mean pretensions to elegance.

This was the first surprise I received.

"Follow me," said the old woman, hurrying me down the hall and into a small room at the end. "The young lady will be here in a moment," and without lifting her veil or affording me the least glimpse of her features, she retired, leaving me to face the situation before me as best I might.

It was anything but a pleasant one as it appeared to me at that moment, and for an instant I seriously thought of retracing my steps and leaving a domicile into which I had been introduced in such a mysterious manner. Then the quiet aspect of the room, which though sparsely furnished with a piano and chairs was still of an order rarely seen out of gentlemen's houses, struck my imagination and reawakened my curiosity, and nerving myself to meet whatever interview might be accorded me, I waited. It was only five minutes by the small clock ticking on the mantel-piece, but it seemed an hour before I heard a timid step at the door, and saw it swing slowly open, disclosing – well, I did not stop to inquire whether it was a child or a woman. I merely saw the shrinking modest form, the eager blushing face, and bowed almost to the ground in a sudden reverence for the sublime innocence revealed to me. Yes, it did not take a second look to read that tender countenance to its last guileless page. Had she been a woman of twenty-five I could not have mistaken her expression of pure delight and timid interest, but she was only sixteen, as I afterwards learned, and younger in experience than in age.

Closing the door behind her, she stood for a moment without speaking, then with a deepening of the blush which was only a child's embarrassment in the presence of a stranger, looked up and murmured my name with a word or so of grateful acknowledgment that would have called forth a smile on my lips if I had not been startled by the sudden change that passed over her features when she met my eyes. Was it that I showed my surprise too plainly, or did my admiration manifest itself in my gaze? an admiration great as it was humble, and which was already of a nature such as I had never before given to girl or woman. Whatever it was, she no sooner met my look than she paused,

trembled, and started back with a confused murmur, through which I plainly heard her whisper in a low distressed tone, "Oh, what have I done!"

"Called a good friend to your side," said I in the frank, brotherly way I thought most likely to reassure her. "Do not be alarmed, I am only too happy to meet one who evidently enjoys music so well."

But the hidden chord of womanhood had been struck in the child's soul, and she could not recover herself. For an instant I thought she would turn and flee, and struck as I was with remorse at my reckless invasion of this uncontaminated temple, I could not but admire the spirited picture she presented as, with form half turned and face bent back, she stood hesitating on the point of flight.

I did not try to stop her. "She shall follow her own impulse," said I to myself, but I felt a vague relief that was deeper than I imagined, when she suddenly relinquished her strained attitude, and advancing a step or so began to murmur:

"I did not know – I did not realize I was doing what was so very wrong. Young ladies do not ask gentlemen to come and see them, no matter how much they desire to make their acquaintance. I see it now; I did not before. Will you – can you forgive me?"

I smiled; I could not help it. I could have taken her to my heart and soothed her as I would a child, but the pallor of womanhood, which had replaced the blush of the child, awed me and made my own words come hesitatingly.

"Forgive you? You must forgive me! It was as wrong for me," I went on with a wild idea of not mincing matters with this pure soul, "to obey your innocent request, as it was for you to make it. I am a man of the world and know its *convenances*; you are very young."

"I am sixteen," she murmured.

The abrupt little confession, implying as it did her determination not to accept any palliation of her conduct which it did not deserve, touched me strangely. "But very young for that," I exclaimed.

"So aunty says, but no one can ever say it any more," she answered. Then with a sudden gush, "We shall never see each other again, and you must forget the motherless girl who has met you in a way for which she must blush through life. It is no excuse," she pursued hurriedly, "that nurse thought it was all right. She always approves of everything I do or want to do, especially if it is anything aunt would be likely to forbid. I have been spoiled by nurse."

"Was nurse the woman who came for me?" I asked.

She nodded her head with a quick little motion inexpressibly charming. "Yes, that was nurse. She said she would do it all, I need only write the note. She meant to give me a pleasure, but she did wrong."

"Yes," thought I, "how wrong you little know or realize." But I only said, "You must be guided by some one with more knowledge of the world after this. Not," I made haste to add, struck by the misery in her child eyes, "that any harm has been done. You could not have appealed to the friendship of any one who would hold you in greater respect than I. Whether we meet again or not, my memory of you shall be sweet and sacred, I promise you that."

But she threw out her hand with a quick gesture. "No, do not remember me. My only happiness will lie in the thought you have forgotten." And the last remnants of the child soul vanished in that hurried utterance. "You must go now," she continued more calmly. "The carriage that brought you is at the door; I must ask you to take it back to your home."

"But," I exclaimed with a wild and unbearable sense of sudden loss as she laid her hand on the knob of the door, "are we to part like this? Will you not at least trust me with your name before I go?"

Her hand dropped from the knob as if it had been hot steel, and she turned towards me with a slow yearning motion that whatever it betokened set my heart beating violently. "You do not know it, then?" she inquired.

"I know nothing but what this little note contains," I replied, drawing her letter from my pocket.

"Oh, that letter! I must have it," she murmured; then, as I stepped towards her, drew back and pointing to the table said, "Lay it there, please."

I did so, whereupon something like a smile crossed her lips and I thought she was going to reward me with her name, but she only said, "I thank you; now you know nothing;" and almost before I realized it she had opened the door and stepped into the hall.

As I made haste to follow her, the sound of a low, "He is a gentleman, he will ask no questions," struck my ear, and looking up, I saw her just leaving the side of the old nurse who stood evidently awaiting me half down the hall. Bowing with formal ceremony, I passed her by and proceeded to the front door. As I did so I caught one glimpse of her face. It had escaped from all restraint and the expression of the eyes was overpowering. I subdued a wild impulse to leap back to her side, and stepped at once over the threshold. The nurse joined me, and together we went down the stoop to the street.

"May I inquire where you wish to be taken?" she asked.

I told her, and she gave the order to the coachman, together with a few words I did not hear; then stepping back she waited for me to get in. There was no help for it. I gave one quick look behind me, saw the front door close, realized how impossible it would ever be for me to recognize the house again, and placed my foot on the carriage step. Suddenly a bright idea struck me, and hastily dropping my cane I stepped back to pick it up. As I did so I pulled out a bit of crayon I chanced to have in my pocket, and as I stooped, chalked a small cross on the curbstone directly in front of the house, after which I recovered my cane, uttered some murmured word of apology, jumped into the carriage and was about to shut the door, when the old nurse stepped in after me and quietly closed it herself. By the pang that shot through my breast as the carriage wheels left the house, I knew that for the first time in my life, I *loved*.

IV SEARCHINGS

"Patience, and shuffle the cards." – Cervantes.

If I had expected anything from the presence in the carriage of the woman who had arranged this interview, I was doomed to disappointment. Reticent before, she was absolutely silent now, sitting at my side like a grim statue or a frozen image of watchfulness, ready to awake and stop me if I offered to open the door or make any other move indicative of a determination to know where I was, or in what direction I was going. That her young mistress in the momentary conversation they had held before our departure had succeeded in giving her some idea of the shame with which she had felt herself overwhelmed and her present natural desire for secrecy, I do not doubt, but I think now, as I thought then, that the unusual precautions taken both at that time and before, to keep me in ignorance of the young lady's identity, were due to the elderly woman's own consciousness of the peril she had invoked in yielding to the wishes of her young and thoughtless mistress; a theory which, if true, argues more for the mind than the conscience of this mysterious woman. However, it is with facts we have to deal, and you will be more interested in learning what I did, than what I thought during that short ride in perfect darkness.

The mark which I had left on the curbstone behind me sufficiently showed the nature of my resolve, and when we made the first turn at the end of the block I leaned back in my seat and laying my finger on my wrist, began to count the pulsations of my blood. It was the only device that suggested itself, by which I might afterward gather some approximate notion of the distance we travelled in a straight course down town. I had just arrived at the number seven hundred and sixty-two, and was inwardly congratulating myself upon this new method of reckoning distance, when the wheels gave a lurch and we passed over a car track. Instantly all my fine calculations fell to the ground. We were not in Madison Avenue, as I supposed; could not be, since no track crosses that avenue below Fifty-ninth Street, and we were proceeding on as we could not have done had we gained the terminus of the avenue at Twenty-third Street. Could it be that the carriage had not been turned around while I was in the house, and that we had come back by way of Fifth Avenue? I could not remember – in fact, the more I tried to think which way the horses' heads were directed when we went into the house, the more I was confused. But presently I considered that wherever we were, we certainly had not passed over the narrow strip of smooth pavement in front of the Worth monument, and therefore could not have reached Twenty-third Street by way of Fifth Avenue. We must be up town, and that track we crossed must have been at Fifty-ninth Street. And soon, as if to assure me of this, we took a turn, quickly followed at a block's length by another, after which I had no difficulty in recognizing the smooth pavement of the entrance to the Park or the roll down Fifth Avenue afterwards. "They have thought to confuse me by an extra mile or so of travel," thought I, with some complacency, "but the streets of New York are too simply laid out to lend themselves to any such easy mode of mystification." Yet I have thought since then how, with a smarter man on the box, the affair might have been conducted so as to have baffled the oldest citizen in any attempt at calculation.

When we stopped in front of the Albemarle I quietly thanked the woman who had conducted me, and stepped to the ground. Instantly the door shut behind me, the carriage drove off, and I was left standing there like a man suddenly awakened from a dream.

Entering my hotel, I ordered supper, thinking that the very practical occupation of eating would serve to divert my mind into its ordinary channels. But the dream, if dream it was, had made too vivid an impression to be shaken off so easily. It followed me to the hall in the evening and mingled with every chord I struck.

I could scarcely sleep that night for thinking of the sweet child's face that had blossomed into a woman's before my eyes, and what a woman! With the first hint of daylight I rose, and as soon as it was in any degree suitable to be out, hired a cab and proceeded to the corner of Fifty-ninth Street and Madison Avenue, where, according to my calculations of the evening before, we had crossed the car track which had first interrupted me in that very original method of computing distance of which I have already spoken, a method by the way, which you must acknowledge is an improvement on the boy's plan of finding his way back from the woods by means of the bread-crumbs he had scattered behind him, forgetting that the birds would eat up his crumbs and leave him without a clew. Bidding the driver proceed at the ordinary jog trot down the avenue, I laid my finger on my wrist, and counted each throb of my pulse till I had reached the magical number seven hundred and sixty-two. Then putting my head out of the window, I bade him stop. We were in the middle of a block, but that did not disconcert me. I had not expected to gain more than an approximate idea of the spot where we had first turned into the avenue, it being impossible to regulate the horses' pace so as to tally with that taken by the span of the night before, even if the pulsations in my wrist were to be absolutely relied upon. Noting the streets between which we had paused, I bade the driver to turn down one and come back by the other, occupying myself in the meanwhile, in searching the curbstone for the small mark I had left in front of her door the night before. But though we drove slowly and I searched carefully, not a trace did I perceive of that tell-tale sign, and forsaking those two streets, I ordered my obedient Jehu to try the two outlying ones below and above. He did so, and I again consulted the curbstone, but with no better success. No mark or remnants of a mark was to be found anywhere. Nor, though we travelled through three or four other streets in the same way, did we come upon any clew liable to assist me in my search. Clean discouraged and somewhat out of temper with myself for my pusillanimity of the evening before in not having braved the anger of my companion by opening the carriage door at the first corner and leaping out, I commanded to be taken back to the hotel, where for a whole miserable day I racked my brain with devices for acquiring the knowledge I so much desired. The result was futile, as you may imagine; nor will I stop to recount the various expedients to which I afterwards resorted in my vain attempt to solve the mystery of this young girl's identity.

Enough that they all failed, even the very promising one of searching the various photographic establishments of the city, for the valuable clew which her picture would give me. And so a week passed.

"It is time this mad infatuation was at an end," said I to myself one morning as I sat down to write a letter. "There is no hope of my ever seeing her again, and I am but frittering away the best emotions of my life in thus indulging in a dream that is not the prelude to a reality." But in spite of the wise determination thus made, I soon found my thoughts recurring to their old channel, and seized with sudden impatience at my evident weakness, took up the letter I had been writing and was about to read it, when to my great amazement I perceived that instead of inditing the usual words of a business communication, I had been engaged in scribbling a certain number up and down the page and even across the bottom where my signature should have been.

"Am I a fool?" I exclaimed, and was about to tear the sheet in two, when glancing again at the number, which was a simple thirty-six, I asked myself where I had got those especial figures. Instantly there arose before my mind's eye the vision of a brown-stone front with its vestibule and door. It was, then, the number of a house; but what house? a *chateau en Espagne* or a *bona fide* New York dwelling, which for some reason had unconsciously impressed itself upon my memory? I could not answer. There on the page was the number thirty-six, and equally plain in my mind was the look of the brown-stone front to which that number belonged – and that was all.

But it was enough to awaken within me the spirit of inquiry. The few houses thus numbered in that quarter of the city where I had lately been, were not so hard to find but that a morning given to the business ought to satisfy me whether the vision in my mind had its basis in reality.

Taking a cab, I rode up town and into that region of streets I had traversed so carefully a week before. For I was assured that if the impression had been made by an actual dwelling it had been done at that time. Following the same course I then took, I consulted the appearance of the various houses to which that number was assigned. The first was built of brick; that was not it. The next one had pillars to the vestibule; and that was not it. The third, to use an Irish bull, was no house at all, but a stable, while the fourth was an elegant structure of much more pretension than the plain and simple front I had in my mind or memory. I was about to utter a curse upon my folly and go home, when I remembered there was yet a street or two taken in my zig-zag course of the week before, which I had not yet tested. "Might as well be thorough," I muttered, and bade my driver proceed down – Street.

What was there in its aspect that dimly excited me at the first glance? A dim remembrance, a certain ghostly assurance that we had reached the right spot? As we neared the number I sought, I could not suppress an exclamation of surprise. For there before me to its last detail, stood the house which involuntarily presented itself to my mind, when my eye first fell upon that mysterious number scribbled at the foot of the page I was writing.

It was, then, no chimera of an overwrought brain, this vision of a house-front which had been haunting me, but a distinct remembrance of an actual dwelling seen by me in my former journey through this street. But why this house-front above all others; what was there in it to make such an impression? Looking at it I could not determine, but after we had passed, something, I cannot tell what, brought back another remembrance, trivial in itself, but yet a link in the chain that was destined sooner or later to lead me out of the maze into which I had stumbled. It was merely this; that as I rode along the streets on that memorable morning, searching for that mark on the curbstone from which I hoped so much, I had come upon a spot where the pavement had been freshly washed. With that unconscious action of the brain with which we are familiar, I looked at the sidewalk a moment, running even then with the water that had been cast upon it, and then gave a quick glance at the house. That glance, account for it as you will, took in the picture before it as the camera catches the impression of a likeness, and though in another instant I had forgotten the whole occurrence, it needed but a certain train of thought or perhaps a certain state of emotion to revive it again.

A noble cause for such an act of unconscious cerebration you will say, a freshly washed pavement: *Le jeu ne faut pas la chandelle*. And so I thought too, or would have thought if I had not been so interested in the pursuit in which I was engaged, and if the idea had not suggested itself that water and a broom might obliterate chalk-marks from curbstones, and that the imps that preside over our mental forces would not indulge in such a trick at my expense unless the play *was* worth the candle. At all events, from the moment I made this discovery, I fixed my faith on that house as the one which held the object of my search, and though I contented myself with merely noting the number of the street as we left it, I none the less determined to pursue my investigations, till I had learned beyond the possibility of a doubt whether my conjectures were not true.

A perseverance worthy of a better cause you will say, but you are no longer twenty-five and under the influence of your first passion. I own I was astonished at myself and frequently paused in the pursuit I had undertaken, to ask if I were the same person who but a fortnight before laughed at the story of a man who had gone mad over the body of an unknown woman he had saved from a wreck only to find her dead in his arms.

The first thing I did was to ascertain the name of the gentleman occupying the house I have specified. It was that of one of our wealthiest and most respectable bankers, a name as well known in the city – as your own for instance. This was somewhat disconcerting, but with a dogged resolution somewhat foreign to my natural disposition, I persevered in my investigations, and learning in the next breath that the gentleman alluded to was a widower with an only child, a young daughter of about sixteen or so, recovered my assurance, though not my equanimity. Seeking out my friend Farrar, who as you know is a walking gazette of New York society, I broached the subject of Mr. –

excuse me if I do not mention his name; allow me to say, Preston's domestic affairs, and learned that Miss Preston, "A naive little piece for so great an heiress," I remember Farrar called her, had left town within a day or two for a visit to some friends in Baltimore. "I happen to know," said he with that careless sweep of his hand at which you have so often laughed, "because my friend Miss Forsyth met her at the depot. She was intending to be gone – two weeks, I think she said. Do you know her?"

That last question sprung upon me unawares, and I am afraid I blushed. "No," I returned, "I have not that honor but an acquaintance of mine has – well – has met her and –"

"I see, I see," broke in Farrar with his most disagreeable smile. Then with a short laugh, meant to act as a warning, I suppose, added as he walked off, "I hope your friend is in fair circumstances and not connected with the fine arts. Music is Mr. Preston's detestation, while Miss Preston though too young to be much sought after yet, will in two years' time have the pick of the city at her command."

"So!" thought I to myself; "my little innocent charmer is an embryo aristocrat, eh? Well then, I was a greater fool than I imagined." And I walked out of the hotel where I had met Farrar, with the very sensible conclusion to drop a subject that promised nothing but disappointment.

But the fates were against me, or the good angels perhaps, and at the next comer I met an old acquaintance, the very opposite of Farrar in character, who with a long love story of his own fired, my imagination to such an extent that in spite of myself I turned down – Street, and was proceeding to pass her house, when suddenly the thought struck me, "How do I know that this unapproachable daughter of one of our most prominent citizens is one and the same person with my dainty little charmer? Widowers with young daughters are not so rare in this great city that I need consider the question as decided, because by a half superstitious freak of my own I have settled upon this house as the one I was in the other night. My innamorata may be the offspring of a musician for all I know." And inflamed at the thought of this possibility – I remembered the piano, you see – I gave to the winds all my fine resolutions and only asked how I could determine for once and all, whether I had ever crossed the threshold of the house before me. Some men would have run up the stoop, rung the bell and asked to see Mr. Preston on some pretended business he could easily conjure up to suit the occasion, but my face is too well known for me to risk any such attempt, besides I was too anxious to win the confidence of the young girl to shock her awakened sense of propriety by seeming to seek her where she did not wish to be found. And yet I must enter that house and see for myself if it was the one that held her on that memorable evening.

Pondering the question, I looked back at the door so obstinately closed against my curiosity, when to my satisfaction and delight it suddenly opened and a man stepped out, whom I instantly recognized as a business agent for one of the largest piano-forte manufactories in the city. "The heavens smile upon my enterprise," thought I, and waited for the man to come up with me. He was not only a friend of mine but largely indebted to me in various ways, so that I knew I had only to urge a request for it to be immediately granted, and that, too, without any questions or gossip.

You will not be interested in anything but the result, which was somewhat out of the usual course, and may therefore shock you. But you must remember that I am telling you of matters which young men usually keep to themselves, and that whatever I did, was accomplished in a spirit of respect only a shade less constraining in its power than the love that was at once my impelling force, and my constant embarrassment.

To come, then, to the point, a piano was to be set up in that house on that very day, Mr. Preston having yielded to the solicitations of his daughter for a new instrument. My friend was to be engaged in the transfer, and at my solicitation for leave to assist in the operation, gave his consent in perfect confidence as to my possessing good and sufficient reasons for such a remarkable request, and appointed the hour at which I was to meet him at the ware-rooms.

Behold me, then, at half-past two that afternoon, assisting with my own hands in carrying a piano up the stoop of that house which, four hours before, I had regarded as unapproachable. Dressed in a workman's blouse and with my hair well roughened under a rude cap that effectually disguised me, I advanced with but little fear of detection. And yet no sooner had I entered the house and seen at a glance that the aspect of the hall coincided with my rather vague remembrance of that through which I had been ushered a week before, than I was struck by a sudden sense of my situation, and experiencing that uncomfortable consciousness of self-betrayal, which a blush always gives a man, stumbled forward under my heavy burden, feeling as if a thousand eyes were fixed upon me and my cherished secret, instead of the two sharp but totally unsuspecting orbs of the elderly matron that surveyed us from the top of the banisters. "Be careful there, you'll knock a hole through that glass door!" though a natural cry under the circumstances, struck on my ears with the force and mysterious power of a secret warning, and when after a moment of blind advance I suddenly lifted my eyes and found myself in the little room, which like a silhouette on a white ground, stood out in my memory in distinct detail as the spot where I had first heard my own heart beat, I own that I felt my hands slipping from my burden, and in another moment had disgraced my character of a workman if I had not caught the sudden ring of a well known voice in the hall, as nurse answered from above some question propounded by the elderly lady with the piercing eyes. As it was, I recovered myself and went through my duties as promptly and deftly as if my heart did not throb with memories that each passing hour and event only served to hallow to my imagination.

At length the piano was duly set up and we turned to leave. Will you think I am too trivial in my details if I tell you that I lingered behind the rest and for an instant let my hand with all its possibilities for calling out a soul from that dead instrument, lie a moment on the keys over which her dainty fingers were so soon to traverse?

V THE RUBICON

"I'll stake my life upon her faith." – Othello.

Once convinced of the identity of my sweet young friend with the Miss Preston at whose feet a two year hence, the wealth and aristocracy of New York would be kneeling, I drew back from further effort as having received a damper to my presumptuous hopes that would soon effectually stifle them. Everything I heard about the family – and it seemed as if suddenly each chance acquaintance that I met had something to say about Mr. Preston either as a banker or a man, only served to confirm me in this view. "He is a money worshipper," said one. "The bluest of blue Presbyterians," declared another. "The enemy of presumption and anything that looks like an overweening confidence in one's own worth or capabilities," remarked a third. "A man who would beggar himself to save the honor of a corporation with which he was concerned," observed a fourth "but who would not invite to his table the most influential man connected with it if that man was unable to trace his family back to the old Dutch settlers to which Mr. Preston's own ancestors belonged."

This latter statement I have no doubt was exaggerated for I myself have seen him at dinners where half the gentlemen who lifted the wine glass were self-made in every sense of the term. But it showed the bent of his mind and it was a bent that left me entirely out of the sweep of his acquaintanceship much less that of his exquisite daughter, the pride of his soul if not the jewel of his heart.

But when will a man who has seen or who flatters himself that he has seen in the eyes of the woman he admires, the least spark of that fire which is consuming his own soul, pause at an obstacle which after all has its basis simply in circumstances of position or will. By the time the two weeks of her expected absence had expired, I had settled it in my own mind that I would see her again and if I found the passing caprice of a child was likely to blossom into the steady regard of a woman, risk all in the attempt to win by honorable endeavor and persistence this bud of loveliness for my future wife.

How I finally succeeded by means of my friend Farrar in being one evening invited to the same house as Miss Preston it is not necessary to state. You will believe me it was done with the utmost regard for her feelings and in a way that deceived Farrar himself, who if he is the most prying is certainly the most volatile of men. In a crowded parlor, then, in the midst of the flash of diamonds and the flutter of fans Miss Preston and I again met. When I first saw her she was engaged in conversation with some young companion, and I had the pleasure of watching for a few minutes, unobserved, the play of her ingenuous countenance, as she talked with her friend, or sat silently watching the brilliant array before her. I found her like and yet unlike the vision of my dreams. More blithesome in her appearance, as was not strange considering her party attire and the lustre of the chandelier under which she sat, there was still that indescribable something in her expression which more than the flash of her eye or the curve of her lip, though both were lovely to me, made her face the one woman's face in the world for me; a charm which circumstances might alter, or suffering impair, but of which nothing save death could ever completely divest her and not death either, for it was the seal of her individuality, and that she would take with her into the skies.

"If I might but advance and sit down by her side without a word of explanation or the interference of conventionalities how happy I should be," thought I. But I knew that would not do, so I contented myself with my secret watch over her movements, longing for and yet dreading the advance of my hostess, with its inevitable introduction. Suddenly the piano was touched in a distant

room and not till I saw the quick change in her face, a change hard to explain, did I recognize the selection as one I was in the habit of playing. *She* had not forgotten at least, and thrilled by the thought and the remembrance of that surge of color which had swept like a flood over her cheek, I turned away, feeling as if I were looking on what it was for no man's eyes to see, least of all mine.

My hostess' voice arrested me and next moment I was bowing to the ground before Miss Preston.

I am not a boy; nor have I been without my experiences: life with its vicissitudes has taught me many a lesson, subjected me to many a trial, yet in all my career have I never known a harder moment than when I raised my eyes to meet hers after that lowly obeisance. That she would be indignant I knew, that she might even misinterpret my motives and probably withdraw without giving me an opportunity to speak, I felt to be only too probable, but that she would betray an agitation so painful I had not anticipated, and for an instant I felt that I had hazarded my life's happiness on a cast that was going against me. But the necessity of saving her from remark speedily restored me to myself, and following the line of conduct I had previously laid out, I addressed her with the reserve of a stranger, and neither by word, look or manner conveyed to her a suggestion that we had ever met or spoken to each other before. She seemed to appreciate my consideration and though she was as yet too much unused to the ways of the world to completely hide her perturbation, she gradually regained a semblance of self-possession, and ere long was enabled to return short answers to my remarks, though her eyes remained studiously turned aside and never so much as ventured to raise themselves to the passing throng much less to my face, half turned away also.

Presently however a change passed over her. Pressing her two little hands together, she drew back a step or two, speaking my name with a certain tone of command. Struck with apprehension, I knew not why, I followed her. Instantly like one repeating a lesson she spoke.

"It is very good in you to talk to me as though we were the strangers that people believe us. I appreciate it and thank you very much. But it is not being just true; that is I feel as if I were not being just true, and as we can never be friends, would it not be better for us not to meet in this way any more?"

"And why," I gently asked, with a sense of struggling for my life, "can we never be friends?"

Her answer was a deep blush; not that timid conscious appeal of the blood that is beating too warmly for reply, but the quick flush of indignant generosity forced to do despite to its own instincts.

"That is a question I would rather not answer," she murmured at length. "Only it is so; or I should not speak in this way."

"But," I ventured, resolved to know on just what foundations my happiness was tottering, "you will at least tell me if this harsh decree is owing to any offence I myself may have inadvertently given. The honor of your acquaintance," I went on, determined she should know just what a hope she was slaying, "is much too earnestly desired, for me to wilfully hazard its loss by saying or doing aught that could be in any way displeasing to you."

"You have done nothing but what was generous," said she with increasing womanliness of manner, "unless it was taking advantage of my being here, to learn my name and gain an introduction to me after I had desired you to forget my very existence."

I recoiled at that, the chord of my self-respect was touched. "It was not here I learned your name, Miss Preston. It has been known to me for two weeks. At the risk of losing by your displeasure what is already hazarded by your prudence, I am bound to acknowledge that from the hour I left your father's house that night, I have spared no effort compatible with my deep respect for your feelings, to ascertain who the young lady was that had done me such an honor, and won from me such a deep regard. I had not intended to tell you this," I added, "but your truth has awakened mine, and whatever the result may be, you must see me as I am."

"You are very kind," she replied governing with growing skill the trembling of her voice. "The acquaintance of a girl of sixteen is not worth so much trouble on the part of a man like yourself." And blushing with the vague apprehension of her sex in the presence of a devotion she rather feels than understands, she waved her trembling little hand and paused irresolute, seemingly anxious to terminate the interview but as yet too inexperienced to know how to manage a dismissal requiring so much tact and judgment.

I saw, comprehended her position and hesitated. She was so young, uncle, her prospects in life were so bright; if I left her then, in a couple of weeks she would forget me. What was I that I should throw the shadow of manhood's deepest emotion across the paradise of her young untrammelled being. But the old Adam of selfishness has his say in my soul as well as in that of my fellow-men, and forgetting myself enough to glance at her half averted face, I could not remember myself sufficiently afterwards to forego without a struggle, all hope of some day beholding that soft cheek turn in confidence at my approach.

"Miss Preston," said I, "the promise of the bud atones for its folded leaves." Then with a fervor I did not seek to disguise, "You say we cannot be friends; would your decision be the same if this were our first meeting?"

Again that flush of outraged feeling. "I don't know – yes I think – I fear it would."

I strove to help her. "There is too great a difference between Bertram Mandeville the pianist, and the daughter of Thaddeus Preston."

She turned and looked me gently in the eye, she did not need to speak. Regret, shame, longing flashed in her steady glance.

"Do not answer," said I, "I understand; I am glad it is circumstances that stand in the way, and not any misconception on your part as to my motives and deep consideration for yourself. Circumstances can be changed." And satisfied with having thus dropped into the fruitful soil of that tender breast, the seed of a future hope, I bowed with all the deference at my command and softly withdrew.

But not to rest. With all the earnestness with which a man sets himself to decide upon the momentous question of life or death, I gave myself up to a night of reflection, and seated in my solitary bachelor apartment, debated with myself as to the resolution at which I had dimly hinted in my parting words to Miss Preston.

That I am a musician by nature, my success with the the public seems to indicate. That by following out the line upon which I had entered I would attain a certain eminence in my art, I do not doubt. But uncle, there are two kinds of artists in this world; those that work because the spirit is in them and they cannot be silent if they would, and those that speak from a conscientious desire to make apparent to others the beauty that has awakened their own admiration. The first could not give up his art for any cause, without the sacrifice of his soul's life; the latter – well the latter could and still be a man with his whole inner being intact. Or to speak plainer, the first has no choice, while the latter has, if he has a will to exert it. Now you will say, and the world at large, that I belong to the former class. I have risen in ten years from a choir boy in Trinity Church to a position in the world of music that insures me a full audience wherever and whenever I have a mind to exert my skill as a pianist. Not a man of my years has a more promising outlook in my profession, if you will pardon the seeming egotism of the remark, and yet by the ease with which I felt I could give it up at the first touch of a master passion, I know that I am not a prophet in my art but merely an interpreter, one who can speak well but who has never felt the descent of the burning tongue and hence not a sinner against my own soul if I turn aside from the way I am walking. The question was, then, should I make a choice? Love, as you say, seems at first blush too insecure a joy, if not often too trivial a one, to unsettle a man in his career and change the bent of his whole after life; especially a love born of surprise and fed by the romance of distance and mystery. Had I met her in ordinary intercourse, surrounded by her friends and without the charm

cast over her by unwonted circumstances, and then had felt as I did now that of all women I had seen, she alone would ever move the deep springs of my being, it would be different. But with this atmosphere of romance surrounding and hallowing her girl's form till it seemed almost as ethereal and unearthly as that of an angel's, was I safe in risking fame or fortune in an attempt to acquire what in the possession might prove as bare and common-place as a sweep of mountain heather stripped of its sunshine. Curbing every erratic beat of my heart, I summoned up her image as it bloomed in my fancy, and surveying it with cruel eyes, asked what was real and what the fruit of my own imagination. The gentle eye, the trembling lip, the girlish form eloquent with the promise of coming womanhood, – were these so rare, that beside them no other woman should seem to glance or smile or move? And her words! what had she said, that any simple-minded, modest yet loving girl might not have uttered under the circumstances. Surely my belief in her being the one, the best and the dearest was a delusion, and to no delusion was I willing to sacrifice my art. But straight upon that conclusion came sweeping down a flood of counter-reasons. If not the wonder she seemed, she was at least a wonder to me. If I had seen her under romantic circumstances, and unconsciously been influenced by them, the influence had remained and nothing would ever rob her form of the halo thus acquired. Whether I ever won her to my fireside or not, she must always remain the fairy figure of my dreams, and being so, the gentle eye and tender lip acquired a value that made them what they seemed, the exponent of love and happiness. And lastly if love well or illy founded was an uncertain joy, and the passion for a woman a poor substitute for the natural incentive of talent or ambition, *this* love had within it the beginning of something deeper than joy, and in the passion thus cheaply characterized, dwelt a force and living fire that notwithstanding all I have hitherto achieved, has ever been lacking from my dreams of endeavor.

As you will see, the most natural question of all did not disturb me in these cogitations: And that was, whether in making the sacrifice I proposed, I should meet with the reward I had promised myself. The fancies of a young girl of sixteen are not usually of a stable enough character to warrant a man in building upon them his whole future happiness, especially a young girl situated like Miss Preston in the midst of friends who would soon be admirers, and adulators who would soon be her humble slaves. But the doubt which a serious contemplation of this risk must have presented, was of so unnerving a character, I dared not admit it. *If* I made the sacrifice, I must meet with my reward. I would listen to no other conclusion. Besides, something in the young girl herself, I cannot tell what, assured me then as it assures me now, that whatever virtues or graces she might lack, that of fidelity to a noble idea was not among them; that once convinced of the purity and value of the flame that had been lit in her innocent breast, nothing short of the unworthiness of the object that had awakened it, would ever serve to eliminate or extinguish it. That I was not worthy but would make it the business of my life to become so, was certain; that she would mark my endeavors and bestow upon me the sympathy they deserved, I was equally sure. No one would ever make such a sacrifice to her love as I was willing to do, and consequently in no one would I find a rival.

The morning light surprised me in the midst of the struggle, nor did I decide the question that day. Mr. Preston might not be as determined in his prejudices against musicians as my friends or even his daughter had imagined. I resolved to see him. Taking advantage of his connection with the – Club, I procured an introducer in the shape of a highly respected person of his own class, and went one evening to the Club-rooms with the full intention of making his acquaintance if possible. He was already there and in conversation with some business associates. Procuring a seat as near him as possible, I anxiously surveyed his countenance. It was not a reassuring one, and studied in this way, had the effect of dampening any hopes I may have cherished in the outset. He softened to the sounds of sweet strains or the voice of youthful passion! As soon as the granite rock to the surge of the useless billow. His very necktie spoke volumes. It was an old fashioned stock, full of the traditions of other days, while his coat, shabbier than any I would presume to wear, betrayed in every well-worn seam the pride of the aristocrat and millionaire who in his native city and before

the eyes of his fellow magnates does not need to carry the evidences of his respectability upon his back.

"It would be worse than folly for me to approach him on such a subject," I mentally ejaculated. "If he did not stare the musician out of countenance he would the newly risen man." And I came very near giving up the whole thing.

But the genius that watches over the affairs of true love was with me notwithstanding the unpropitious state of my surroundings. In a few minutes I received my expected introduction to Mr. Preston, and I found that underneath the repelling austerity of his expression, was a kindly spark for youth, and a decided sympathy for all instances of manly endeavor if only it was in a direction he approved; further that my own personality was agreeable to him and that he was disposed to regard me with favor until by some chance and very natural allusion to my profession by the friend standing between us, he learned that I was a musician, when a decided change came over his countenance and he exclaimed in that blunt, decisive way of his that admits of no reply:

"A jingler on the piano, eh? Pretty poor use for a man to put his brains to, I say, or even his fingers. Sorry to hear we cannot be friends." And without waiting for a reply, took my introducer by the arm and drew him a step or so to one side. "Why didn't you say at once he was Mandeville the musician," I overheard him ask in somewhat querulous tones. "Don't you know I consider the whole race of them an abomination. I would have more respect for my bank clerk than I would for the greatest man of them all, were it Rubenstein himself." Then in a lower tone but distinctly and almost as if he meant me to hear, "My daughter has a leaning towards this same fol-de-rol and has lately requested my permission to make the acquaintance of some musical characters, but I soon convinced her that manhood under the disguise of a harlequin's jacket could have no interest for her; that when a human being, man or woman has sunk to be a mere rattler of sweet sounds, he has reached a stage of infantile development that has little in common with the nervous energy and business force of her Dutch ancestry. And my daughter stoops to make no acquaintances she cannot bid sit at her father's table."

"Your daughter is a child yet, I thought," was ventured by his companion.

"Miss Preston is sixteen, just the age at which my mother gave her hand to my respected father sixty-seven years ago." And with this drop of burning lead let fall into my already agitated bosom they passed on.

He would have more respect for his bank clerk! Would his bank clerk or what was better, a young man with means at his command, working in a business capacity more in consonance with the tastes he had evinced, have a chance of winning his daughter? I began to think he might. "The way grows clearer!" I exclaimed.

But it was not till after another interview with him ten minutes later in the lobby that I finally made up my mind. He was standing quite alone in an obscure corner, fumbling in an awkward way with his muffler that had caught on the button of his coat. Seeing it, I hastened forward to his assistance and was rewarded by a kind enough nod to embolden me to say,

"I have been introduced to you as a musician; would my acquaintance be more acceptable to you if I told you that the pursuit of art bids fair in my case to yield to the exigencies of business? That I purpose leaving the concert-room for the banker's office and that henceforth my only ambition promises to be that of Wall Street?"

"It most certainly would," exclaimed he, holding out his hand with an unmistakable gesture of satisfaction. "You have too good a countenance to waste before a piano-top strumming to the smirks of women and the plaudits of weak-headed men. Let us see you at the desk, my lad. We are in want of trustworthy young men to take the place of us older ones." Then politely, "Do you expect to make the change soon?"

"I do," said I.

And the Rubicon was passed.

VI A HAND CLASP

"Fer:— Here's my hand.

Mir:— And mine with my heart in it." — Tempest.

Once arrived at a settled conclusion, I put every thought of wavering out of my mind. Deciding that with such a friend in business circles as yourself, I needed no other introducer to my new life, I set apart this evening for a confab with you on the subject. Meanwhile it is pretty generally known that I make no more engagements to appear through the country.

I have but one more incident to relate. Last Sunday in walking down Fifth Avenue I met her. I did not do this inadvertently. I knew her custom of attending Bible class and for once put myself in her way. I did not give her time to remonstrate.

"Do not express your displeasure," said I, "this shall never be repeated. I merely wish to say that I have concluded to leave a profession so little appreciated by those whose esteem I most desire to possess; that I am about entering a banker's office where it shall be my ambition to rise if possible, to wealth and consequence. If I succeed — you shall then know what my incentive has been. But till I succeed or at least give such tokens of success as shall insure respect, silence must be my portion and patience my sole support. Only of one thing rest assured, that until I inform you with my own lips that the hope which now illumines me is gone, it will continue to burn on in my breast, shedding light upon a way that can never seem dark while that glow rests upon it." And bowing with the ceremonious politeness our positions demanded, I held out my hand. "One clasp to encourage me," I entreated.

It seemed as if she did not comprehend. "You are going to give up music, and for — for — "

"You?" said I. "Yes, don't forbid me," I implored; "it is too late."

Like a lovely image of blushing girlhood turned by a lightning flash into marble, she paused, pallid and breathless where she was, gazing upon me with eyes that burned deeper and deeper as the full comprehension of all that this implied gradually forced itself upon her mind.

"You make a chaos of my little world," she murmured at length.

"No," said I, "*your* world is untouched. If it should never be my good fortune to enter it, you are not to grieve. You are free, Miss Preston, free as this sunshiny air we breathe; I alone am bound, and that because I must be whether I will or no."

Then I saw the woman I had worshipped in this young fair girl shine fully and fairly upon me. Drawing herself up, she looked me in the face and calmly laid her hand in mine. "I am young," said she, "and do not know what may be right to say to one so generous and so kind. But this much I can promise, that whether or not I am ever able to duly reward you for what you undertake, I will at least make it the study of my life never to prove unworthy of so much trust and devotion."

And with the last lingering look natural to a parting for years, we separated then and there, and the crowd came between us, and the Sunday bells rang on, and what was so vividly real to us at the moment, became in remembrance more like the mist and shadow of a dream.

VII MRS. SYLVESTER

Love is more pleasant than marriage, for the same reason that romances are more amusing than history. – Chamfort.

"He draweth out the thread of his verbosity, finer than the staple of his argument." – Loves Labor Lost.

Young Mandeville having finished his story, looked at his uncle. He found him sitting in an attitude of extreme absorption, his right arm stretched before him on the table, his face bent thoughtfully downwards and clouded with that deep melancholy that seemed its most natural expression, "He has not heard me," was the young man's first mortifying reflection. But catching his uncle's eye which at that moment raised itself, he perceived he was mistaken and that he had rather been listened to only too well.

"You must forgive me if I have seemed to rhapsodize," the young man stammered. "You were so quiet I half forgot I had a listener and went on much as I would if I had been thinking aloud."

His uncle smiled and throwing off the weight of his reflections whatever they might be, arose and began pacing the floor. "I see you are past surgery," quoth he, "any wisdom of mine would be only thrown away."

Young Mandeville was hurt. He had expected some token of approval on his uncle's part, or at least some betrayal of sympathy. His looks expressed his disappointment.

"You expected to convert me by this story," continued the elder, pausing with a certain regret before his nephew; "nothing could convert me but –"

"What?" inquired Mandeville after waiting in vain for the other to finish.

"Something which we will never find in the whirl of New York fashionable life. A woman with faith to reward and soul to understand such unqualified trust as yours."

"But I believe Miss Preston is such a girl and will be such a woman. Her looks, her last words prove it."

"Nothing proves it but time and as for your belief, I have believed too." Then as if fearing he had said too much, assumed his most business-like tone and observed, "But we will drop all that; you have resolved to quit music and enter Wall Street, your object money and the social consideration which money secures. Now, why Wall Street?"

"Because I can think of no other means for attaining what I desire, in the space of time I would consent to keep a young lady of Miss Preston's position waiting."

"Humph! and you have money, I suppose, which you propose to risk on the hazard?"

"Some! enough to start with; a small amount to you, but sufficient if I am fortunate."

"And if you are not?"

The young man opened his arms with an expressive gesture, "I am done for, that is all."

"Bertram," his uncle exclaimed with a change of tone, "has it ever struck you that Mr. Preston might have as strong a prejudice against speculation as against the musical profession?"

"No, that is, pardon me but I have sometimes thought that even in the event of success I should have to struggle against his inherited instincts of caste and his natural dislike of all things new, even wealth, but I never thought of the possibility of my arousing his distrust by speculating in stocks and engaging in enterprises so nearly in accord with his own business operations."

"Yet if I guess aright you would run greater risk of losing the support of his countenance by following the hazardous course you propose, than if you continued in the line of art that now engages you."

"Do you know –"

"I know nothing, but I fear the chances, Bertram."

"Then I am already defeated and must give up my hopes of happiness."

A smile thin and indefinable crossed the other's face. "No," said he, "not necessarily." And sitting down by his nephew's side, he asked if he had any objections to enter a bank. "In a good capacity," he exclaimed.

"No indeed; it would be an opportunity surpassing my hopes. Do you know of an opening?"

"Well," said he, "under the circumstances I will let you into the secret of my own affairs. I have always had one ambition, and that was to be at the head of a bank. I have not said much about it, but for the last five years I have been working to this end, and to-day you see me the possessor of at least three-fourths of the stock of the Madison Bank. It has been deteriorating for some time, consequently I was enabled to buy it low, but now that I have got it I intend to build up the concern. I am able to throw business of an important nature in its way, and I dare prophesy that before the year is out you will see it re-established upon a solid and influential footing."

"I have no doubt of it, sir; you have the knack of success, any thing that you touch is sure to go straight."

"Unhappily yes, as far as business operations go. But no matter about that; – " as if the other had introduced some topic incongruous to the one they were considering – "the point is this. In two weeks time I shall be elected President of the Bank; if you will accept the position of assistant cashier, – the best I can offer in consideration of your total ignorance of all details of the business, – it is open to you – "

"Uncle! how generous! I – "

"Hush! your duties will be nominal, the present cashier is fully competent; but the leisure thus afforded will offer you abundant opportunity to make yourself acquainted with all matters connected with the banking system as well as with such capitalists as it would be well for you to know. So that when the occasion comes, I can raise you to the cashier's place or make such other disposal of your talents as will best insure your rapid advance."

The young man's eyes sparkled; with a sudden impetuous movement he jumped to his feet and grasped his uncle's hand. "I can never thank you enough; you have made me your debtor for life. Now let any one ask me who is my father, and I will say – "

"He was Edward Sylvester's brother. But come, come, this extreme gratitude is unnecessary. You have always been a favorite with me, Bertram, and now that I have no child, you seem doubly near; it is my pleasure to do what I can for you. But – " and here he surveyed him with a wistful look, "I wish you were entering into this new line from love of the business rather than love of a woman. I fear for you my boy. It is an awful thing to stake one's future upon a single chance and that chance a woman's faith. If she should fail you after you had compassed your fortune, should die – well you could bear that perhaps; but if she turned false, and married some one else, or even married you and then – "

"What?" came in silvery accents from the door, and a woman richly clad, her trailing velvets filling the air at once with an oppressive perfume, entered the room and paused before them in an attitude meant to be arch, but which from the massiveness of her figure and the scornful carriage of her head, succeeded in being simply imperious.

Mr. Sylvester rose abruptly as if unpleasantly surprised. "Ona!" he exclaimed, hastening, however, to cover his embarrassment by a courteous acknowledgement of her presence and a careless remark concerning the shortness of the services that had allowed her to return from church so early. "I did not hear you come in," he observed.

"No, I judge not," she returned with a side glance at Mandeville. "But the services were not short, on the contrary I thought I should never hear the last amen. Mr. Turner's voice is very agreeable," she went on, in a rambling manner all her own, "it never interferes with your thoughts; not that I am considered as having any," she interjected with another glance at their silent guest,

"a woman in society with a reputation for taste in all matters connected with fashionable living, has no thoughts of course; business men with only one idea in their heads, that of making money, have more no doubt. Do you know, Edward," she went on with sudden inconsequence, which was another trait of this amiable lady's conversation, "that I have quite come to a conclusion in regard to the girl Philip Longtree is going to marry; she may be pretty, but she does not know how to dress. I wish you could have seen her to-night; she had on mauve with old gold trimmings. Now with one of her complexion – But I forget you haven't seen her. Bertram, I think I shall give a German next month, will you come? Oh, Edward!" as if the thought had suddenly struck her, "Princess Louise is the sixth child of Queen Victoria; I asked Mr. Turner to-night. By the way, I wonder if it will be pleasant enough to take the horses out to-morrow? Bird has been obliging enough to get sick just in the height of the season, Mr. Mandeville. There are a thousand things I have got to do and I hate hired horses." And with a petulant sigh she laid her prayer-book on the table and with a glance in the mirror near by, began pulling off her gloves in the slow and graceful fashion eminently in keeping with her every movement.

It was as if an atmosphere of worldliness had settled down upon this room sanctified a moment before by the utterances of a pure and noble love. Mr. Sylvester looked uneasy, while Bertram searched in vain for something to say.

"I seem to have brought a blight," she suddenly murmured in an easy tone somewhat at variance with the glance of half veiled suspicion which she darted from under her heavy lids, at first one and then the other of the two gentlemen before her. "No, I will not sit," she added as her husband offered her a chair. "I am tired almost to death and would retire immediately, but I interrupted you I believe in the utterance of some wise saying about matrimony. It is an interesting subject and I have a notion to hear what one so well qualified to speak in regard to it – " and here she made a slow, half lazy courtesy to her husband with a look that might mean anything from coquetry to defiance – "has to say to a young man like Mr. Mandeville."

Edward Sylvester who was regarded as an autocrat among men, and who certainly was an acknowledged leader in any company he chose to enter, bowed his head before this anomalous glance with a gesture of something like submission.

"One is not called upon to repeat every inadvertent phrase he may utter," said he. "Bertram was consulting me upon certain topics and – "

"You answered him in your own brilliant style," she concluded. "What did you say?" she asked in another moment in a low unmoved tone which the final act of smoothing out her gloves on the table with hands delicate as white rose leaves but firm as marble, did not either hasten or retard.

"Oh if you insist," he returned lightly, "and are willing to bear the reflection my unfortunate remark seems to cast upon the sex, I was merely observing to my nephew, that the man who centered all his hopes upon a woman's faith, was liable to disappointment. Even if he succeeded in marrying her there were still possibilities of his repenting any great sacrifice made in her behalf."

"Indeed!" and for once the delicate cheek flushed deeper than its rouge. "And why do you say this?" she inquired, dropping her coquettish manner and flashing upon them both, the haughty and implacable woman Bertram had always believed her to be, notwithstanding her vagaries and fashion.

"Because I have seen much of life outside my own house," her husband replied with undiminished courtesy; "and feel bound to warn any young man of his probable fate, who thinks to find nothing but roses and felicity beyond the gates of fashionable marriage."

"Ah then, it was on general principles you were speaking," she remarked with a soft laugh that undulated through an atmosphere suddenly grown too heavy for easy breathing. "I did not know; wives are so little apt to be appreciated in this world, Mr. Mandeville, I was afraid he might be giving you some homely advice founded upon personal experience." And she moved towards

their guest with that strange smile of hers which some called dangerous but which he had always regarded as oppressive.

She saw him drop his eyes, and smiled again, but in a different way. This woman, whom no one accused of anything worse than levity, hailed every tribute to her power, as a miser greets the glint of gold. With a turn of her large but elegant figure that in its slow swaying reminded you of some heavy tropical flower, hanging inert, intoxicated with its own fragrance, she dismissed at once the topic that had engaged them, and launched into one of her choicest streams of inconsequent talk. But Mandeville was in no mood to listen to trivialities, and being of a somewhat impatient nature, presently rose and excusing himself, took a hurried leave. Not so hurried however that he did not have time to murmur to his uncle as they walked towards the door:

"You would make comparison between the girl I worship and other women in fashionable life. Do not I pray; she is no more like them than a star that shines is like a rose that blooms. My fate will not be like that of most men that we know, but better and higher."

And his uncle standing there in the grand hall-way, with the fresh splendors of unlimited wealth gleaming upon him from every side, looked after the young man with a sigh and repeated, "Better and higher? God in his merciful goodness grant it."

VIII SHADOWS OF THE PAST

"Memory, the warder of the brain." – Macbeth.

It was long past midnight. The fire in the grate burned dimly, shedding its lingering glow on the face of the master of the house as with bowed head and folded hands he sat alone and brooding before its dying embers.

It was a lonesome sight. The very magnificence of the spacious apartment with its lofty walls and glittering works of art, seemed to give an air of remoteness to that solitary form, bending beneath the weight of its reflections. From the exquisitely decorated ceiling to the turkish rugs scattered over the polished floor, all was elegant and luxurious, and what had splendors like these to do with thoughts that bent the brows and overshadowed the lips of man? The very lights burned deprecatingly, illuminating beauties upon which no eye gazed and for which no heart beat. The master himself seemed to feel this, for he presently rose and put them out, after which he seated himself as before, only if possible with more abandon, as if with the extinguishing of the light some eye had been shut whose gaze he had hitherto feared. And in truth my lady's image shone fainter from its heavy panel, and the smile which had met with unrelenting sweetness the glare of the surrounding splendor, softened in the mellow glimmer of the fire-light to an ethereal halo that left you at rest.

One, two, THREE, the small clock sounded from the mantel and yet no stir took place in the sombre figure keeping watch beneath. What were the thoughts which could thus detain from his comfortable bed a man already tired with manifold cares? It would be hard to tell. The waters that gush at the touch of the diviner's rod are tumultuous in their flow and rush hither and thither with little heed to the restraining force of rule and reason. But of the pictures that rose before his eyes in those dying embers, there were two which stood out in startling distinctness. Let us see if we can convey the impression of them to other eyes and hearts.

First, the form of his mother. Ah grey-bearded men weighted with the cares of life and absorbed in the monotonous round of duties that to you are the be all and end all of existence, to whom morning means a jostling ride to the bank, the store or the office, and with whom night is but the name for a worse unrest because of its unfulfilled promises of slumber, what soul amongst you all is so callous to the holy memories of childhood, as not to thrill with something of the old time feeling of love and longing as the memory of that tender face with its watchful eye and ready smiles, comes back to you from the midst of weary years! Your mother!

But Edward Sylvester with that black line across his life cutting past from present, what makes him think of his mother to-night; and the cottage door upon the hillside where she used to stand with eager eyes looking up and down the road as he came trudging home from school, swinging his satchel and shouting at every squirrel that started across the road or peeped from the branches of the grand old maples overhead! And the garret-chamber under the roof, the scene of many a romp with Elsie and Sonsie and Jack, neighbors' children to whom the man of to-day would be an awe and a mystery! And the little room where he slept with Tom his own blue-eyed brother so soon to die of a wasting disease, but full of warm blood then and all alive with boyish pranks. He could almost hear the wild clear laugh with which the mischievous fellow started upon its travels, the rooster whose legs he had tied a short space apart with one of Sonsie's faded ribbons, a laugh that became unrestrained when the poor creature in attempting to run down hill, rolled over and over, cutting such a figure before his late admirers, the hens, that even Elsie smiled in the midst of her gentle entreaties. And Jocko the crow, whom taming had made one of the boys! poor Jocko! is

it nearly thirty years since you used to stalk in majesty through the village streets, with your neat raven coat closely buttoned across your breast and your genteel caw, caw, and condescending nod for old acquaintances? The day seems but as yesterday when you marred the stolen picnic up in the woods by flying off with a flock of your fellow black-coats, nor is it easy to realize that the circle of tow-headed fellows who hailed with shouts your ignominious return after a day or so's experience of the vaunted pleasures of freedom, are now sharp featured men without a smile for youth or a thought beyond the hard cold dollar buried deep in their pockets.

And the church up over the hills! and the long Sunday walk at mother's side with the sunshine glowing on the dusty road and beating on the river flowing far beyond! The same road, the same river of Monday and Tuesday but how different it looked to the boy; almost like another scene, as if Sunday clothes were on the world as well as upon his restless little limbs. How he longed for it to be Monday though he did not say so; and what a different day Saturday would have been if only there was no long, sleepy Sunday to follow it.

But the mother! She did not dread that day. Her eyes used to brighten when the bell began to ring from the old church steeple. Her eyes! how they mingled with every picture! They seemed to fill the night. What a sparkle they had, yet how they used to soften at his few hurried caresses. He was always too busy for kisses; there were the snares in the north woods to be looked after; the nest in the apple-tree to be inquired into; the skates to be ground before the river froze over; the nuts to be gathered and stored in that same old garret chamber under the eaves. But now how vividly her least look comes back to the tired man, from the glance of wistful sympathy with which she met his childish disappointments to the flash of joy that hailed his equally childish delights.

And another scene there is in the embers to-night; a remembrance of later days when the mother with her love and yearning was laid low in the grave, and manhood had learned its first lessons of passion and ambition from the glance of younger eyes and the smile of riper lips. Not the picture of a woman, however; that was already present beside him, shining from its panel with an insistence that not even the putting out of the lights could quite quench or subdue, but of a child young, pure and beautiful, sitting by the river in the glow of a June sunshine, gazing at the hills of his boyhood's home with a look on her face such as he had never before seen on that of child or woman. A simple picture with a simple villager's daughter for its centre, but as he mused upon it to-night, the success and triumph of the last ten years faded from his sight like the ashes that fell at his feet, and he found himself questioning in vain as to what better thing he had met in all the walks of his busy life than that young child's innocence and faith as they shone upon him that day from her soft uplifted eyes.

He had been sitting the whole warm noontide at the side of her whose half gracious, half scornful, wholly indolent acceptance of his homage, he called love, and enervated by an atmosphere he was as yet too inexperienced to recognize as of the world, worldly, had strolled forth to cool his fevered brow in the fresh autumn breeze that blew up from the river. He was a gay-hearted youth in those days, heedless of everything but the passing moment; nature meant little to him; and when in the course of his ramble he came upon the form of a child sitting on the edge of the river, he remembers wondering what she saw in a sweep of empty water to interest her so deeply. Indeed he was about to inquire when she turned and he caught a glimpse of her eyes and knew at once without asking. Yet in those days he was anything but quick to recognize the presence of feeling. A face was beautiful or plain to him, not eloquent or expressive. But this child's countenance was exceptional. It made you forget the cotton frock she wore, it made you forget yourself. As he gazed on it, he felt the stir of something in his breast he had never known before, and half dreaded to hear her speak lest the charm should fail or the influence be lost. Yet how could he pass on and not speak. Laying his hand on her head, he asked her what she was thinking of as she sat there all alone looking off on the river; and the wee thing drew in her breath and surveyed him with all her soul in her great black eyes before she replied, "I do not know, I never know." Then looking back

she dreamily added, "It makes me want to go away, miles away," – and she held out her tiny arms towards the river with a longing gesture; "and it makes me want to cry."

And he understood or thought he did and for the first time in his life looked upon the river that had met his gaze from childhood, with eyes that saw its exceeding beauty. Ah it was an exquisite scene, a rare scene, mountain melting into mountain and meadow vanishing into meadow, till the flow of silver waters was lost in a horizon of azure mist. No wonder that a child without snares to set or nuts to gather, should pause a moment to gaze upon it, as even he in the days gone by would sometimes stop on Sabbath eves to snatch a kiss from his mother's lips.

"It is like a fairy land, is it not?" quoth the child looking up into his face with a wistful glance. "Do you know what it is that makes me feel so?"

He smiled and sat down by her side. Somehow he felt as if a talk with this innocent one would restore him more than a walk on the hills. "It is the spirit of beauty, my child, you are moved by the loveliness of the scene; is it a new one to you?"

"No, oh no, but I always feel the same. As if something here was hungry, don't you know?" and she laid her little hand on her breast.

He did not know, but he smiled upon her notwithstanding, and made her talk and talk till the gush of the sweet child spirit with its hidden longings and but half understood aspirations, bathed his whole being in a reviving shower, and he felt as if he had wandered into a new world where the languors of the tropics were unknown, and passion, if there was such, had the wings of an eagle instead of the siren's voice and fascination.

Her name was Paula, she said, and before leaving he found that she was a relative of the woman he loved. This was a slight shock to him. The lily and the cactus abloom on one stalk! How could that be? and for a moment he felt as if the splendors of the glorious woman paled before the lustre of the innocent child. But the feeling, if it was strong enough to be called such, soon passed. As the days swept by bringing evenings with light and music and whispered words beneath the vine-leaves, the remembrance of the pure, sweet hour beside the river, gradually faded till only a vague memory of that gentle uplifted face sweet with its childish dimples, remained to hallow now and then a passing reverie or a fevered dream.

But to-night its every lineament filled his soul, vying with the memories of his mother in its vividness and power. O why had he not learned the lesson it taught. Why had he turned his back upon the high things of life to yield himself to a current that swept him on and on until the power of resistance left him and – O dwell not here wild thoughts! Pause not on the threshold of the one dark memory that blasts the soul and sears the heart in the secret hours of night. Let the dead past bury its dead and if one must think, let it be of the hope, which the remembrance of that short glimpse into a pure if infantile soul has given to his long darkened spirit.

One, two, three, FOUR; and the fire is dead and the night has grown chill, but he heeds it not. He has asked himself if his life's book is quite closed to the higher joys of existence? whether money getting and money holding is to absorb him body and soul forever; and with the question a great yearning seizes him to look upon that sweet child again, if haply in the gleam of her pure spirit, something of the noble and the pure that lay beneath the crust of life might be again revealed to his longing sight.

"She must be a great girl now," murmured he to himself, "as old as if not older than she whom Bertram adores so passionately, but she will always be a child to me, a sweet pure child whose innocence is my teacher and whose ignorance is my better wisdom. If anything will save me – "

But here the shadow settled again; when it lifted, the morning ray lay cool and ghostly over the hearthstone.

IX PAULA

"The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face." – Wordsworth.

A wintry scene. Snow-piled hills stretching beyond a frozen river. On the bank a solitary figure tall, dark and commanding, standing with eyes bent sadly on a long narrow mound at his feet. It is Edward Sylvester and the mound is the grave of his mother.

It is ten years since he stood upon that spot. In all that time no memories of his childhood's home, no recollection of that lonely grave among the pines, had been sufficient to allure him from the city and its busy round of daily cares. Indeed he had always shrunk at the very name of the place and never of his own will alluded to it, but the reveries of a night had awakened a longing that was not to be appeased, and in the face of his wife's cold look of astonishment and a secret dread in his own heart, had left his comfortable fireside, for the scenes of his early life and marriage, and was now standing, in the bleak December air, gazing down upon the stone that marked his mother's grave.

But tender as were the chords that reverberated at this sight, it was not to revisit this tomb he had returned to Grotewell. No, that other vision, the vision of young sweet appreciative life has drawn him more strongly than the memory of the dead. It was to search out and gaze again upon the innocent girl, whose eloquent eyes and lofty spirit had so deeply moved him in the past, that he had braved the chill of the Connecticut hills and incurred the displeasure of his wife.

Yet when he turned away from that simple headstone and set his face towards the village streets it was with a sinking of the heart that first revealed to him the severity of the ordeal to which he had thus wantonly subjected himself. Not that the wintry trees and snow covered roofs appealed to him as strongly as the same trees and homes would have done in their summer aspect. The land was bright with verdure when that shadow fell whose gloom resting upon all the landscape, made a walk down this quiet road even at this remote day, a matter of such pain to him. But scenes that have caught the reflection of a life's joy or a heart's sorrow, lose not their power of appeal, with the leaves they shake from their trees, and nothing that had met the eyes of this man from the hour he left this spot, no, not the glance of his wife as his child fell back dead in his arms, had shot such a pang to his soul as the sight of that long street with its array of quiet homes, stretching out before him into the dim grey distance.

But for all that he was determined to traverse it, ay to the very end, though his steps must pass the house whose ghostly portals were fraught with memories dismal as death to him. On then he proceeded, walking with his usual steady pace that only faltered or broke, as he met the shy eyes of some hurrying village maiden, speeding upon some errand down the snowy street, or encountered some old friend of his youth who despite his altered mien and commanding carriage, recognized in him the slim young bank cashier who had left them now ten long years ago to make a name and fortune in the great city.

It was noon by the time he gained the heart of the village, and school was out and the children came rushing by with just the same shout and scamper with which he used to hail that hour of joyous release. How it carried him back to the days when those four red walls towered upon him

with awful significance, as with books on his back and a half eaten apple in his pocket he crept up the walk, conscious that the bell had rung its last shrill note a good half hour before. He felt half tempted to stop and make his way through the crowd of shouting boys and dancing girls to that same old door again, and see for himself if the huge LATE which in a fit of childish revenge he had cut on its awkward panels, was still there to meet the eyes of tardy boys and loitering girls. But the wondering looks of the children unused to behold a figure so stately in their simple streets deterred him and he passed thoughtfully on. So engrossed was he by the reminiscences of Tom and Elsie which the school house had awakened, that he passed the ominous mansion which had been his dread, and the bank where he had worked, and the arbor by the side of the road where he had sat out the first hours of his fatal courtship, almost without realizing their presence, and was at the end of the street and in full view of the humble cottage which the little Paula had pointed out as her home on that day of their first acquaintance.

"Good heaven! and I do not even know if she is alive," he suddenly ejaculated, stopping where he was and eying the lowly walls before him with a quick realization of the possibilities of a great disappointment. "Ten years have strown many a grave on the hillside and Ona would not mention it if she lost every relative she had in this town. What a fool I have been," thought he.

But with the stern resolution which had carried him through many a difficulty, he prepared to advance, when he was again arrested by seeing the door of the house he was contemplating, suddenly open and a girlish figure issue forth. Could it be Paula? With eager, almost feverish interest he watched her approach. She was a slight young thing and came towards him with a rapid movement almost jaunty in its freedom. If it were Paula, he would know her by her eyes, but for some reason he hoped it was not she, not the child of his dreams.

At a yard or two in front of him she paused astonished. This grave, tall figure with the melancholy brow, deep eyes and firmly compressed lips was an unaccustomed sight in this primitive town. Scarcely realizing what she did she gave a little courtesy and was proceeding on when he stopped her with a hurried gesture.

"Is Mrs. Fairchild still living?" he asked, indicating the house she had just left.

"Mrs. Fairchild? O no," she returned, surveying him out of the corner of a very roguish pair of brown eyes, with a certain sly wonder at the suspense in his voice. "She has been dead as long as I can remember. Old Miss Abby and her sister live there now."

"And who are they?" he hurriedly asked; he could not bring himself to mention Paula's name.

"Why, Miss Abby and Miss Belinda," she returned with a puzzled air. "Miss Abby sews and Miss Belinda teaches the school. I don't know anything more about them, sir."

The courteous gentleman bowed. "And they live there quite alone?"

"O no sir, Paula lives with them."

"Ah, she does;" and the young girl looking at him could not detect the slightest change in his haughty countenance. "Paula is Mrs. Fairchild's daughter."

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you," said he, and allowed the pretty brown-eyed miss to pass on, which she did with lingering footsteps and many a backward glance of the eye.

Halting at the door of that small cottage, Edward Sylvester reasoned with himself.

"She may be just such another fresh-looking, round-faced, mischievous-eyed school-girl. Spiritual children do not always make earnest-souled women. Let me beware what hopes I build on a foundation so unsubstantial." Yet when in a moment later the door opened and a weazen-faced dapper, little woman appeared, all smiles and welcome, he owned to a sensation of dismay that sufficiently convinced him what a hold this hope of meeting with something exceptionally sweet and high, had taken upon his hitherto careless and worldly spirit.

"Mr. Sylvester I am sure! I thought Ona would remember us after a while. Come in sir, do, my sister will be home in a few moments." And with a deprecatory flutter comical enough in a

woman at least seventy odd years old, she led her distinguished guest into a large unused room where in spite of his remonstrances she at once proceeded to build a fire.

"It is a pleasure sir," she said to every utterance of regret on his part at the trouble he was causing. And though her vocabulary was thus made to appear somewhat small, her sincerity was undoubted. "We have counted the days, Belinda and I, since we sent the last letter. It may seem foolish to you, sir; but Paula is growing so fast and Belinda says is so uncommon smart for her age that we did think that it was time Ona knew just what a straight we were in. Do you want to see Paula?"

"Very much," he returned, shocked and embarrassed at the position in which he found himself put by the reticence of his wife on the subject of her relations. "They think I have come in reply to a letter," he mused, "and I did not even know my wife had received one."

"You will be surprised," she exclaimed with a complacent nod as the fire blazed up brightly; "every one is surprised who sees her for the first time. Is my niece well?" And thus it was he learned the relation between his wife of ten years and these simple inhabitants of the little cottage in Grotewell.

He replied as in duty bound, and presently by the use of a few dexterous questions succeeded in eliciting from this simple-minded old lady, the few facts necessary to a proper understanding of the situation. Miss Abby and Miss Belinda were two maiden ladies, sisters of Mrs. Fairchild and Ona's mother, who on the death of the former took up their abode in the little cottage for the purpose of bringing up the orphan Paula. They had succeeded in this by dint of the utmost industry, but Paula was not a common child, and Belinda, who was evidently the autocrat of the house, had decided that she ought to have other advantages. She had therefore written to Mrs. Sylvester concerning the child, in the hopes that that lady would take enough interest in her pretty little cousin to send her to boarding-school; but they had received no reply till now, all of which was perfectly right of course, Mrs. Sylvester being undoubtedly occupied and Mr. Sylvester himself being better than any letter.

"And does Paula herself know what efforts you have been making in her behalf," asked Mr. Sylvester upon the receipt of this information.

The little lady shook her head with vivacity. "Belinda advised me to say nothing," she remarked. "The child is contented with her home and we did not like to raise her expectations. You will never regret anything you may do for her," she went on in a hurried way with a peep now and then towards the door as if while enjoying a momentary freedom of speech, she feared an intrusion that would cut that pleasure short. "Paula is a grateful child and never has given us a moment of concern from the time she began to put pieces of patchwork together. But there is Belinda," she suddenly exclaimed, rising with the little dip and jerk of her left shoulder that was habitual to her whenever she was amused or excited. "Belinda," she cried, going to the door and speaking with great impressiveness, "Mr. Sylvester is in the parlor." And almost instantly a tall middle aged lady entered, whose plain but powerful countenance and dignified demeanor, stamped her at once as belonging to a very different type of woman from her sister.

"I am very glad to see you sir," she exclaimed in a slow determined voice as dissimilar as possible from the piping tones of Miss Abby. "Is not Mrs. Sylvester with you?"

"No," returned he, "I have come alone; my wife is not fond of travelling in winter."

The slightest gleam shot from her bright keen eye. "Is she not well?"

"Yes quite well, but not over strong," he rejoined quietly.

She gave him another quick look, settled some matter with herself and taking off her bonnet, sat down by the fire. At once her sister ceased in her hovering about the room and sitting also, became to all appearance her silent shadow.

"Paula has gone up stairs to take off her bonnet," the younger woman said in a straightforward manner just short of being brusque. "She is a very remarkable girl, Mr. Sylvester, a genius I suppose some would call her, a child of nature I prefer to say. Whatever there is to be learned in this town she

has learned. And in a place where nature speaks and good books abound that is not inconsiderable. I have taken pride in her talents I acknowledge, and have endeavored to do what I could to cultivate them to the best advantage. There is no girl in my school who can write so original a composition, nor is there one with a truer heart or more tractable disposition."

"You have then been her teacher as well as her friend, she owes you a double debt of gratitude."

A look hard to understand flashed over her homely face. "I have never thought of debt or gratitude in connection with Paula. The only effort which I have ever made in her behalf which cost me anything, is this one which threatens me with her loss." Then as if fearing she had said too much, set her firm lips still firmer and ignoring the subject of the child, astonished him by certain questions on the leading issues of the day that at once betrayed a truly virile mind.

"She is a study," thought he to himself, but meeting her on the ground she had taken, replied at once and to her evident satisfaction in the direct and simple manner that appeals the most forcibly to a strong if somewhat unpolished understanding, while the meek little Miss Abby glanced from one to the other with a humble awe more indicative of her appreciation for their superiority than of her comprehension of the subject.

But what with Miss Belinda's secret anxiety and Mr. Sylvester's unconscious listening for a step upon the stair, the conversation, brisk as it had opened, gradually languished, and ere long with a sort of clairvoyant understanding of her sister's wishes, Miss Abby arose and with her customary jerk left the room for Paula.

"The child is not timid but has an unaccountable aversion to entering the presence of strangers alone," Miss Belinda explained; but Mr. Sylvester did not hear her, for at that moment the door reopened and Miss Abby stepped in with the young girl thus heralded.

Edward Sylvester never forgot that moment, and indeed few men could have beheld the picture of extraordinary loveliness thus revealed, without a shock of surprise equal to the delight it inspired. She was not pretty; the very word was a misnomer, she was simply one of nature's most exquisite and undeniable beauties. From the crown of her ebon locks to the sole of her dainty foot, she was perfect as the most delicate coloring and the utmost harmony of contour could make her. And not in the conventional type either. There was an individuality in her style that was as fresh as it was uncommon. She was at once unique and faultless, something that can be said of few women however beautiful or alluring.

Mr. Sylvester had not expected this, as indeed how could he, and for a moment he could only gaze with a certain swelling of the heart at the blooming loveliness that in one instant had transformed the odd little parlor into a bower fit for the habitation of princes. But soon his natural self-possession returned, and rising with his most courteous bow, he greeted the blushing girl with words of simple welcome.

Instantly her eyes which had been hitherto kept bent upon the floor flashed upward to his face and a smile full of the wonder of an unlooked for, almost un hoped for delight, swept radiantly over her lips, and he saw with deep and sudden satisfaction that the hour which had made such an impression upon him, had not been forgotten by her; that his voice had recalled what his face failed to do, and that he was recognized.

"It is Mr. Sylvester, your cousin Ona's husband," Miss Belinda interposed in a matter-of-fact way, evidently attributing the emotion of the child to her astonishment at the imposing appearance of their guest.

"And it was *you* who married Ona!" she involuntarily murmured, blushing the next moment at this simple utterance of her thoughts.

"Yes, dear child," Mr. Sylvester hastened to say. "And so you remember me?" he presently added, smiling down upon her with a sense of new life that for the moment made every care and anxiety shrink into the background.

"Yes," she simply returned, taking the chair beside him with the unconscious grace of perfect self-forgetfulness. "It was the first time I had found any one to listen to my childish enthusiasms; it is natural such kindness should make its impression."

"Little Paula and I met long ago," quoth Mr. Sylvester turning to the somewhat astonished Miss Belinda. "It was before my marriage and she was then –"

"Just ten years old," finished Paula, seeing him cast her an inquiring glance.

"Very young for such a thoughtful little miss," he exclaimed. "And have those childish enthusiasms quite departed?" he continued, smiling upon her with gentle encouragement. "Do you no longer find a fairy-land in the view up the river?"

She flushed, casting a timid glance at her aunt, but meeting his eyes again seemed to forget everything and everybody in the inspiration which his presence afforded.

"I fear I must acknowledge that it is more a fairy-land to me than ever," she softly replied. "Knowledge does not always bring disillusion, and though I have learned one by one the names of the towns scattered along those misty banks, and though I know they are no less prosaic in their character than our own humdrum village, yet I cannot rid myself of the notion that those verdant slopes with their archway of clouds, hide the portals of Paradise, and that I have only to follow the birds in their flight up the river to find myself on the verge of a mystery, the banks at my feet can never disclose."

"May the gates of God's Paradise never recede as those would do, my child, if like the birds you attempted to pierce them."

"Paula is a dreamer," quoth Miss Belinda in a matter-of-fact tone, "but she is a good girl notwithstanding and can solve a geometrical problem with the best."

"And sew on the machine and make a very good pie," timidly put in Miss Abby.

"That is well," laughed Mr. Sylvester, observing that the poor child's head had fallen forward in maidenly shame at her aunts' eulogiums as well as at the length of the speech into which she had been betrayed. "It shows that her eyes can see what is at hand as well as what is beyond our reach." Then with a touch of his usual formal manner intended to restore her to herself, "Do you like study, Paula?"

In an instant her eyes flashed. "I more than like it; it feeds me. Knowledge has its vistas too," she added with an arch look, the first he had seen on her hitherto serious countenance. "I can never outgrow my recognition of the portals it discloses or the fairy-land it opens up to every inquiring eye."

"Even geometry," he ventured, more anxious to probe this fresh young mind than he had ever been to sound the opinions of the most notable men of the day.

"Even geometry," she smiled. "To be sure its portals are somewhat methodical in shape, allowing no scope to the fancy, but from its triangles and circles have been born the grandeurs of architecture, and upright on the threshold of its exact laws and undeviating calculations, I see an angel with a golden rod in his hand, measuring the heavens."

"Even a stone speaks to a poet," said Mr. Sylvester with a glance at Miss Belinda.

"But Paula is no poet," returned that lady with strict and impartial honesty. "She has never put a line on paper to my knowledge. Have you child?"

"No aunt, I would as soon imprison a falling sunbeam or try to catch the breeze that lifts my hair or kisses my cheek."

"You see," continued Mr. Sylvester still looking at Miss Belinda.

She answered with a doubtful shake of the head and an earnest glance at the girl as if she perceived something in that bright young soul, that even she had never observed before.

"Have you ever been away from home?" he now asked.

"Never, I know as little of the great world as a callow nestling. No, I should not say that, for the young bird has no Aunt Belinda to tell of the great cathedrals and the wonderful music she

has heard and the glorious pictures she has seen in her visits to the city. It is almost as good as travelling one's self to hear Aunt Belinda talk."

It was now the turn of the mature plain woman to blush, which she did under Mr. Sylvester's searching eye.

"You have then been in the habit of visiting New York?"

"I have been there twice," she returned evasively.

"Since my marriage?"

"Yes sir;" with a firm closing of her lips.

"I did not know you were there or I should have insisted upon your remaining at my house."

"Thank you," said she with a quick triumphant glance at her demure little shadow, who looked back in amaze and was about to speak when Miss Belinda proceeded. "My visits usually have been on business; I should not think of troubling Mrs. Sylvester." And then he knew that his wife had been aware of those visits if he had not.

But he refrained from testifying to his discovery. "You speak of music," said he, turning gently back to Paula. "Have you a taste for it? Would it make you happy to hear such music as your aunt tells about?"

"O yes, I can conceive nothing grander than to sit in a church whose every line is beauty and listen while the great organ utters its song of triumph or echoes in the wonderful way it does, the emotions you have tried to express and could not. I would give a whole week of my life on the hills, dear as it is, for one such hour, I think."

Mr. Sylvester smiled. "It is a rare kind of coin to offer for such a simple pleasure, but it may meet with its acceptance, nevertheless;" and in his look and in his voice there was an appearance of affectionate interest that completed the subjugation of the watchful Miss Belinda, who now became doubly assured that whatever neglect had been shown her by her niece was not due to that niece's husband.

Mr. Sylvester recognized the effect he had produced and hastened to complete it, feeling that the good opinion of Miss Belinda would be valuable to any man. "I have been a boy on these hills," said he, "and know what it is to long for what is beyond while enjoying what is present. You shall hear the organ my child." And stopped, wondering to himself over the new sweet interest he seemed to take in the prospect of pleasures which he had supposed himself to have long ago exhausted.

"Hear the organ, I? why that means – O what does it mean?" she inquired, turning with a look of beaming hope towards her aunt.

"You must ask Mr. Sylvester," that uncompromising lady replied, with a straightforward look at the fire.

And he with a smile told the blushing girl that according to his reading, mortals went blindfold into fairy-land; and she understood what he meant and was silent, whereupon he turned the conversation upon more common-place subjects.

For how could he tell her then of the intention that had awakened in his breast at the first glimpse of her grand young beauty. To make her his child, to bequeath to her the place of the babe that had perished in his arms three long years before – That meant to give Ona a care if not a rival in his affections, and Ona shrank from care, and was not a subject for rivalry. And the *if* which this implied weighed heavily on his heart as moment after moment flew by, and he felt again the reviving power of an unsullied mind and an aspiring nature.

X THE BARRED DOOR

"A school boy's tale; the wonder of an hour." – Byron.

"Did you know that your niece was gifted with rare beauty as well as talents?" asked Mr. Sylvester of Miss Belinda as a couple of hours or so later, they sat alone by the parlor fire, preparatory to his departure.

"No, that is," she hastily corrected herself, "I knew she was very pretty of course, prettier by far than any of her mates, but I did not suppose she was what you call a beauty, or at least would be so considered by a person accustomed to New York society."

"I do not know of a woman in New York who can boast of any such claims to transcendent loveliness. Such faces are rare outside of art, Miss Belinda; was Mrs. Fairchild a handsome woman?"

"She was my sister and if I may say so, my favorite sister, but she was no more agreeable to the eye than some others of her family," grimly returned the heavy browed spinster with a compression of her lips. "What beauty Paula has inherited came from her father. Her chief charm in my eyes, however, springs from her pure nature and the unselfish impulses of her heart."

"And in mine," rejoined he quietly. Then with a sudden change of tone as he realized the necessity of saying something definite to this woman in regard to his intentions toward the child, he remarked, "Her great and unusual talents and manifest disposition to learn, demand as you say, superior advantages to any she can have in a small country town like this, fruitful as it has already been to her under your wise and fostering care and such shall she have; but just when and how I cannot say till I have seen my wife and learned what her wishes are likely to be in regard to the subject."

"You are very kind, sir," returned Miss Belinda. "I have no doubt as to the good-will of your intentions, and the child shall be prepared at once for a change."

"And will *the child*," he exclaimed with a smile as Paula re-entered the room, "be so kind as to give me her company in the walk I must now take to the cars?"

"Of course," replied her aunt before the young girl could speak, "we owe you that much attention I am sure."

And so it was that when he came to retrace his way through the village with its heavy memories, he had a guardian spirit at his side that robbed them of their power to sadden and oppress.

"What shall I say for you to the grim, city streets when I get back?" inquired he as they hastened on over the snow covered road.

"Say to them from me? O you may give them my greeting," she responded half shyly, half confidently. Evidently for her he was one of those rare persons whose presence is perfect freedom and with whom she could not only think her best but speak it also. "I should like to make their acquaintance, but indeed they would have to do well to vie in attraction with these white roads girded by their silver-limbed trees. The very rush of life must seem oppressive. So many hopes, so many fears, so many interests jostling you at every step! Yet the thought is exhilarating too; don't you find it so?"

It was the first question she had asked him and he knew not how to reply. Her eyes were so confiding, he could not bear to shake her faith in his imagined superiority. Yet what thoughts had he ever cherished in walking the busy streets, save those connected with his own selfish hopes and fears, plans and operations? "I have no doubt," said he after a moment's pause, "that I have felt this

exhilaration of which you speak. Certainly the hurrying masses in Broadway awaken a far different sensation in a man, than this solitary stretch of country road."

"Yet the road has its companionships," she murmured. "In the city one thinks most of men, but in the country, of God. Its very solitude compels you."

"Compels *you*," he involuntarily answered. And shuddered as he said it, remembering days when he trod these very roads with anything but reverence in his heart for the Creator of the landscape before him. "Not every one has the inner vision, my child, to see the love and wisdom back of the works, or rather most men have a vision so short it does not reach so far. Yet I think I can understand what you mean and might even experience your emotions if my eyes had leisure to explore this space and my thoughts to rise out of their usual depressing atmosphere of care and anxiety. You did not think I was a busy man, he continued," observing her gaze of wonder. "You thought riches brought ease; if you ever come to think, 'most of men' you will learn that the wealthy man is the greatest worker, for his rest comes not night or day."

She shook her head with a sudden doubt. "It is a problem," she said, "which my knowledge of geometry does not help me to solve."

"No," assented he; "and one in which even your fanciful soul would fail to find any poetry. But stop, Paula; isn't this the place where I found you that day, and you showed me the view up the river?"

"Yes, and it was on that stone I sat; it has a milk-white cushion now; and there is where you stood, looking so tall and grand to my childish eyes! The gates are of pearl now," she said, pointing to the snow-covered slopes in the west. "I wish the sky had been clear to-night and you could have seen the effect of a rosy sunset falling over those domes of ice and snow."

"It would leave me less to expect when I come again," he responded almost gayly. "The next time we will have the sunset, Paula."

She smiled and they hastened on, presently finding themselves in the village streets. Suddenly she paused. "Small towns have their mysteries as well as great cities," said she; "we are not without ours, look."

He turned, followed with a glance the direction of her pointing finger and started in his sudden surprise. She had indicated to him the house whose ghostly and frowning front bore written across its grim gray boards, such an inscription of painful remembrance. "It is a solitary looking place, isn't it?" she went on, innocent of the pain she was inflicting. "No one lives there or ever will, I imagine. Do you see that board nailed across the front door?"

He forced himself to look. He did more, he fixed his eyes upon the desolate structure before him until the aspect of its huge unpainted walls with their long rows of sealed-up windows and high smokeless chimneys was impressed indelibly upon his mind. The large front door with its weird and solemn barrier was the last thing upon which his eye rested.

"Yes," said he, and involuntarily asked what it meant.

"We do not know exactly," she responded. "It was nailed across there by the men who followed Colonel Japha to the grave. Colonel Japha was the owner of the house," she proceeded, too interested to observe the shadow which the utterance of that name had invoked upon his brow. "He was a peculiar man I judge, and had suffered great wrongs they say; at all events his life was very solitary and sad, and on his deathbed he made his neighbors promise him that they would carry out his body through that door and then seal it up against any further ingress or egress forever. His wishes were respected, and from that day to this no one has ever entered that door."

"But the house!" stammered Mr. Sylvester in anything but his usual tone, "surely it has not been deserted all these years!"

"Ah," said she, "now we come to the greatest mystery of all." And laying her hand timidly on his arm, she drew his attention to the form of a decrepit old lady just then advancing towards them down the street "Do you see that aged figure?" she asked. "Every evening at this hour, winter and

summer, stormy weather or clear, she is seen to leave her home up the street and come down to this forsaken dwelling, open the worm-eaten gate before you, cross the otherwise untrodden garden and enter the house by a side door which she opens with a huge key she carries in her pocket. For just one hour by the clock she remains there, and then she is seen to issue in the falling dusk, with a countenance whose heavy dejection is in striking contrast to the expression of hope with which she invariably enters. Why she makes this pilgrimage and for what purpose she secludes herself for a stated time each day in this otherwise deserted mansion, no man knows nor is it possible to determine, for though she is a worthy woman and approachable enough on all other topics, on this she is absolutely mute."

Mr. Sylvester started and surveyed the woman as she passed with an anxious gaze. "I know her," he muttered; "she was a connection of – of the family, who inhabited this house." He could not speak the name.

"Yes, so they say, and the owner of this house, though she does not live here. Did you notice how she looked at me? She often does that, just as if she wanted to speak. But she always goes by and opens the gate as you see her now and takes out the big key and –"

"Come away," cried Mr. Sylvester with sudden impulse, seizing Paula by the hand and hurrying her down the street. "She is a walking goblin; you must have nothing to do with such uncanny folk." And endeavoring to turn off this irresistible display of feeling by a show of pleasantry he laughed aloud, but in a strained and unnatural way that made her eyes lift in unconscious amazement.

"You are infected by the atmosphere of unreality that pervades the spot," said she, "I do not wonder." And with the gentle perversity that sometimes affects the most thoughtful amongst us, she went on talking upon the unwelcome subject. "I know of some folks who invariably cross to the other side of the street at night, rather than go through the shadows of the two gaunt poplars which guard that house. Yet there has been no murder committed there or any great crime that I know of, unless the disobedience of a daughter who ran away with a man her father detested, could be denominated by so fearful a word."

The set gaze with which Mr. Sylvester surveyed the landscape before him quavered a trifle and then grew hard and cold. "And so," said he in a tone meant more for himself than her, "even your innocent ears have been assailed by the gossip about Miss Japha."

"Gossip! I have never thought of it as gossip," returned she, struck for the first time by the change in his appearance. "It all happened so long ago it seems more like some quaint and ancient tale than a story of one of our neighbors. Besides, the fact that a wilful girl ran away from the house of her father, with the man of her choice, is not such a dreadful one as it, though she never returned to its walls with her husband, and her father was so overwhelmed by the shock, he was never seen to smile again."

"No," said he, giving her a hurried glance of relief, "I only wondered at the tenacity of old stories to engage the popular ear. I had supposed even the remembrance of Jacqueline Japha would have been lost in the long silence that has followed that one disobedient act."

"And so it might, were it not for that closely shut house with the sinister bar across its chief entrance, inviting curiosity while it effectually precludes all investigation. With that token ever before our eyes of a dead man's implacable animosity, who can wonder that we sometimes ponder over the fate of her who was its object."

"And no intimations of that fate have been ever received in Grotewell. For all that is known to the contrary, Jacqueline Japha may have preceded her father to the tomb."

Paula bowed her head, amazed at the gloomy tone in which this emphatic assertion was made by one whose supposed ignorance she had been endeavoring to enlighten. "You knew her history before, then," observed she, "I beg your pardon."

"And it is granted," said he with a sudden throwing off of the shadow that had enveloped him. "You must not mind my sudden lapses into gloom. I was never a cheerful man, that is, not since I – since my early youth I should say. And the shadows which are short at your time of life grow long and chilly at mine. One thing can illumine them though, and that is a child's happy smile. You are a child to me; do not deny me a smile, then, before I go."

"Not one nor a dozen," cried she, giving him her hands in good-bye for they had arrived at the depot by this time and the sound of the approaching train was heard in the distance.

"God bless you!" said he, clasping those hands with a father's heartfelt tenderness. "God bless my little Paula and make her pillow soft till we meet again!" Then as the train came sweeping up the track, put on his brightest look and added, "If the fairy-godmother chances to visit you during my departure, don't hesitate to obey her commands, if you want to hear the famous organ peal."

"No, no," she cried. And with a final look and smile he stepped upon the train and in another moment was whirled away from that place of many memories and a solitary hope.

XI MISS STUYVESANT

"She smiled; but he could see arise
Her soul from far adown her eyes." – Mrs. Browning.

"She is a beauty; it is only right I should forewarn you of that."

"Dark or light?"

"Dark; that is her hair and eyes are almost oriental in their blackness, but her skin is fair, almost as dazzling as yours, Ona."

Mrs. Sylvester threw a careless glance in the long mirror before which she was slowly completing her toilet, and languidly smiled. But whether at this covert compliment to her greatest charm or at some passing fancy of her own, it would be difficult to decide. "The dark hair and eyes come from her father," remarked she in an abstracted way while she tried the effect of a bunch of snow-white roses at her waist with a backward toss of her proud blonde head. "His mother was a Greek. 'Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon,'" she exclaimed in a voice as nearly gay as her indolent nature would allow. For this lady of fashion was in one of her happiest moods. Her dress, a new one, fitted her to perfection and the vision mirrored in the glass before her was not lacking, so far as she could see in one charm that could captivate. "Do you think she could fasten a ribbon, or arrange a bow?" she further inquired. "I should like to have some one about me with a knack for helping a body in an emergency, if possible. Sarah is absolutely the destruction of any bit of ribbon she undertakes to handle. Look at that knot of black velvet over there for instance, wouldn't you think a raw Irish girl just from the other side would have known better than to tie it with half the wrong side showing?"

With the habit long ago acquired of glancing wherever her ivory finger chanced to point, the grave man of the world slowly turned his head full of the weightiest cares and oppressed by the burden of innumerable responsibilities, and surveyed the cluster of velvet bows thus indicated, with a mechanical knitting of the brows.

"I pay Sarah twenty-five dollars a month and that is the result," his wife proceeded. "Now if Paula –"

"Paula is not to come here as a waiting maid," her husband quickly interposed, a suspicion of color just showing itself for a moment on his cheek.

"If Paula," his wife went on, unheeding the interruption save by casting him a hurried glance over the shoulder of her own reflection in the glass, "had the taste in such matters of some other members of our family and could manage to lend me a helping hand now and then, why I could almost imagine I had my younger sister back with me again, who with her skill in making one look fit for the eyes of the world, was such a blessing to us in our old home."

"I have no doubt Paula could be taught to be equally efficient," her husband responded, carefully restraining any further show of impatience. "She is bright, I am certain, and ribbon-tying is not such a very difficult art, is it?"

"I don't know about that; by the way Sarah succeeds I should say it was about on a par with the science of algebra or – what is that horrid study they used to threaten to inflict me with at the academy whenever I complained of a headache? Oh I remember – conic sections."

"Well, well," laughed her husband, "she ought soon to be an expert in it then; Paula is a famous little mathematician."

A silence followed this response; Mrs. Sylvester was fitting in her ear-rings. "I suppose," said she when the operation was completed, "that the snow will prevent half the people from coming

to-night." It was a reception evening at the Sylvester mansion. "But so long as Mrs. Fitzgerald does not disappoint me, I do not care. What do you think of the setting of these diamonds?" she inquired, leaning forward to look at herself more closely, and slowly shaking her head till the rich gems sparkled like fire.

"It is good," came in short, quick tones from the lips of her husband.

"Well, I don't know, there might be a shade more of enamel on the edge of that ring. I shall speak to the jeweller about it to-morrow. But what were we talking about?" she dreamily asked, still turning her head from side to side before the mirror.

"We were talking about adopting your cousin in the place of our child who is dead," replied her husband with some severity, pausing in the middle of the floor which he was pacing, to honor her with a steady glance.

"O yes! Dear me! what an awkward clasp that man has given to these rings after all. You will have to fasten them for me." Then as he stepped forward with studied courtesy, yawned just a trifle and remarked, "No one could ever take the place of one's own child of course. If Geraldine had lived she would have been a blonde, her eyes were blue as sapphires."

He looked in his wife's face and his hands dropped. He thought of the day when those eyes, blue as sapphires indeed, flashed burning with death's own fever, from the little crib in the nursery, while with this same cool and self-satisfied countenance, the wife and mother before him had swept down the broad stairs to her carriage, murmuring apologetically as she gathered up her train, "O you needn't trouble yourself to look after her, she will do very well with Sarah."

She may have thought of it too, for the least little bit of real crimson found its way through the rouge on her cheek as she encountered the stern look of his eye, but she only turned a trifle more towards the glass, saying, "I forgot you do not admire the rôle of waiting maid. I will try and manage them myself, seeing that you have banished Sarah."

He exerted his self-control and again for the thousandth time buried that ghastly memory out of sight, actually forcing himself to smile as he gently took her hand from her ear and began deftly to fasten the rebellious ornaments.

"You mistake," said he, "love can ask any favor without hesitation. I do not object to waiting upon my own wife."

She gave him a little look which he obligingly took as a guerdon for this speech, and languidly held out her bracelets. As he stood clasping them on her arms, she quietly eyed him over from head to foot. "I don't know of a man who has your figure," said she with a certain tone of pride in her voice; "it is well you married a wife who does not look altogether inferior beside you." Then as he bowed with mock appreciation of the intended compliment, added with her usual inconsequence, "I dare say it would give me something to interest myself in. I don't suppose she has a decent thing to wear, and the fact of her being a dark beauty would lend quite a new impulse to my inventive faculty. Mrs. Walker has a daughter with black eyes, but dear me, what a guy she does make of her!"

With a sigh Mr. Sylvester turned to the window where he stood looking out at the heavy flakes of snow falling with slow and fluctuating movement between him and the row of brown stone houses in front. Paula considered as a milliner's block upon which to try the effect of clothes!

"Even Mrs. Fitzgerald with all her taste don't know how to dress her child," proceeded his wife, with a hurried, "Be still, Cherry!" to the importunate bird in the cage. "Now I should take as much pride in dressing any one under my charge as I would myself, provided the subject was likely to do credit to my efforts." And finding the bird incorrigible in his shrill singing, she moved over to the cage, where she stood balancing her white finger for the bird to peck at, with a pretty caressing motion of her lip, the little Geraldine of the wistful blue eyes, had never seen.

"You are welcome to do what you please in such matters," was her husband's reply. He was thinking again of that same little Geraldine; a fall of snow like the present always made him think of

her and her innocent query as to whether God threw down such big flakes to amuse little children. "I give you *carte blanche*," said he with sudden emphasis.

Mrs. Sylvester paused in her attentions to the bird to give him a sharp little look which might have aroused his surprise if he had been fortunate enough to see it. But his back was towards her, and there was nothing in the languidly careless tone with which she responded, to cause him to turn his head. "I see that you would really like to have me entertain the child; but – "

She paused, pursing up her lips to meet the chattering bird's caress, while her husband in his impatience drummed with his fingers on the pane.

– "I must see her before I decide upon the length of her visit," continued she, as weary with the sport she drew back to give herself a final look in the glass. "Will you please to hand me that shawl, Edward."

He turned with alacrity. In his relief he could have kissed the snowy neck held so erectly before him, as he drew around it the shawl he had hastily lifted from the chair at his side. But that would not have suited this calm and languid beauty who disliked any too overt tribute to her charms and saved her caresses for her bird. Besides it would look like gratitude, and gratitude would be misplaced towards a wife who had just indicated her acceptance of his offer to receive a relative of her own into his house.

"She might as well come at once," was her final remark, as satisfied at last with the lay of every ribbon she swept in finished elegance from the room. "Mrs. Kittredge's reception comes off a week from Thursday, and I should like to see how a dark beauty with a fair skin would look in that new shade of heliotrope."

And so the battle was over and the victory won; for Mrs. Sylvester for all her seeming indifference was never known to change a decision she had once made. As he realized the fact, as he meditated that ere long this very room which had been the scene of so much frivolity and the witness to so many secret heart-burnings, would reëcho to the tread of the pure and innocent child, whose mind had flights unknown to the slaves of fashion, and in whose heart lay impulses of goodness that would satisfy the long smothered cravings of his awakened nature, he experienced a feeling of relenting towards the wife who had not chosen to thwart him in this the strongest wish of his childless manhood, and crossing to her dressing table, he dropped among its treasures a costly ring which he had been induced to purchase that day from an old friend who had fallen into want. "She will wear it," murmured he to himself, "for its hue will make her hand look still whiter, and when I see it sparkle I will remember this hour and be patient." Had he known that she had yielded to this wish out of a certain vague feeling of compunction for the disappointments she had frequently occasioned him and would occasion him again, he might have added a tender thought to the rich and costly gift with which he had just endowed her.

"I expect a young cousin of mine to spend the winter with me and pursue her studies," were the first words that greeted his ears as an hour or so later he entered the parlor where his wife was entertaining what few guests had been anxious enough for a sight of Mrs. Sylvester's newly furnished drawing-room, to brave the now rapidly falling snow. "I hope that you and she will be friends."

Curious to see what sort of a companion his wife was thus somewhat prematurely providing for Paula, he hastily advanced towards the little group from which her voice had proceeded, and found himself face to face with a brown-haired girl whose appealing glance and somewhat infantile mouth were in striking contrast to the dignity with which she carried her small head and managed her whole somewhat petite person.

"Miss Stuyvesant! my husband!" came in musical tones from his wife, and somewhat surprised to hear a name that but a moment before had been the uppermost in his mind, he bowed with courtesy and then asked if he was so happy as to speak to a daughter of Thaddeus Stuyvesant.

"If it will give you especial pleasure I will say yes," responded the little miss with a smile that irradiated her whole face. "Do you know my father?"

"There are but few bankers in the city who have not that pleasure," replied he with an answering look of regard. "I am especially happy to meet his daughter in my house to-night."

There was something in his manner of saying this and in the short inquiring glance which at every opportunity he cast upon her bright young face with its nameless charm of mingled appeal and reserve, that astonished his wife.

"Miss Stuyvesant was in the carriage with Mrs. Fitzgerald," said that lady with a certain dignity she knew well how to assume. "I am afraid if it had not been for that circumstance we should not have enjoyed the pleasure of her presence." And with the rare tact of which she was certainly a mistress, as far as all social matters were concerned, she left the aspiring magnate of Wall Street to converse with the daughter of the man whom all New York bankers were expected to know, and hastened to join a group of ladies discussing ceramics before a huge placque of rarest *cloissone*.

Mr. Sylvester followed her with his eyes; he had never seen her look more vivacious; had the hope of seeing a young face at their board touched some secret chord in her nature as well as his? Was she more of a woman than he imagined, and would she be, though in the most superficial of ways, a mother to Paula? Flushed with the thought, he turned back to the little lady at his side. She was gazing in an intent and thoughtful way at an engraving of Dubufe's "Prodigal Son" that adorned the wall above her head. There was something in her face that made him ask:

"Is that a favorite picture of yours?"

She smiled and nodded her small and delicate head.

"Yes sir, it is indeed, but I was not looking at the picture so much as at the face of that dark-haired girl that sits in the centre, with that far-away expression in her eyes. Do you see what I mean? She is like none of the rest. Her form is before us, but her heart and her interest are in some distant clime or forsaken home to which the music murmured at her side recalls her. She has a soul above her surroundings, that girl; and her face is indescribably pathetic to me. In the recesses of her being she carries a memory or a regret that separates her from the world and makes certain moments of her life almost holy."

"You look deep," said Mr. Sylvester, gazing down upon the little lady's face with strongly awakened interest. "You see more perhaps than the painter intended."

"No, no; possibly more than the engraving expresses, but not more than the artist intended. I saw the original once, when as you remember it was on exhibition here. I was a wee thing, but I never forgot that girl's face. It spoke more than all the rest to me; perhaps because I so much honor reserve in one who holds in his breast a great pain or a great hope."

The eye that was resting upon her, softened indescribably. "You believe in great hopes," said he.

The little figure seemed to grow tall; and her face looked almost beautiful. "What would life be without them?" she answered.

"True," returned Mr. Sylvester; and entering into the conversation with unusual spirit, was astonished to find how young she was and yet how thoroughly bright and self-possessed.

"Lovely girls are cropping up around me in all directions," thought he; "I shall have to correct my judgment concerning our young ladies of fashion if I encounter many more as sensible and earnest-hearted as this." And for some reason his brow grew so light and his tone so cheerful that the ladies were attracted from all parts of the room to hear what the demure Miss Stuyvesant could have to say to the grave master of the house, to call forth such smiles of enjoyment upon his usually melancholy countenance.

Take it all together, the occasion though small was one of the pleasantest of the season, and so Mrs. Sylvester announced when the last carriage had driven away, and she and her husband stood

in the brilliantly lighted library, surveying a new cabinet of rare and antique workmanship which had been that day installed in the place of honor beneath my lady's picture.

"I thought you seemed to enjoy it, Ona," her husband remarked.

"O, it was an occasion of triumph to me," she murmured. "It is the first time a Stuyvesant has crossed our threshold, *mon cher*."

"Ha," he exclaimed, turning upon her a brisk displeased look. He was proud and considered no man his superior in a social sense. "Do you acknowledge yourself a parvenue that you rejoice at the entrance of any one special person into your doors?"

"I thought," she replied somewhat mortified, "that you betrayed unusual pleasure yourself at her introduction."

"That may be; I was glad to see her here, for her father is one of the most influential directors in the bank of which I shortly expect to be made president."

The nature of this disclosure was calculated to be especially gratifying to her, and effectually blotted out any remembrance of the break by which it had been introduced. After a few hasty inquiries, followed by a scene of quite honest mutual congratulation, the gratified wife left her husband to put out the lights himself or call Samuel as he might choose, and glided up stairs to delight the curious Sarah with the broken soliloquies and inconsequent self-communings which formed another of her peculiar habits.

As for her husband, he stood a few minutes where she left him, abstractedly eying the gorgeous vista that spread out before him down to the further mirror of the elaborate drawing-room, thinking perhaps with a certain degree of pride, of the swiftness with which he had risen to opulence and the certainty with which he had conquered position in the business as well as in the social world when he could speak of such a connection with Thaddeus Stuyvesant as a project already matured. Then with a hasty movement and a quick sigh which nothing in his prospects actual or apparent would seem to warrant, he proceeded to put out the lights, my lady's picture shining with less and less importunity as the flickering jets disappeared, till all was dark save for the faint glimmer that came in from the hall, a glimmer just sufficient to show the outlines of the various articles of furniture scattered about – and could it be the tall figure of the master himself standing in the centre of the room with his palms pressed against his forehead in an attitude of sorrow or despair? Yes, or whose that wild murmur, "Is it never given to man to forget!" Yet no, or who is this that calm and dignified, steps at this moment from the threshold? It must have been a dream, a phantasy. *This* is the master of the house who with sedate and regular step goes up flight after flight of the spiral staircase, and neither pauses or looks back till he reaches the top of the house where he takes out a key from his pocket, and opening a certain door, goes in and locks it behind him. It is his secret study or retreat, a room which no one is allowed to enter, the mystery of the house to the servants and something more than that to its inquisitive mistress. What he does there no man knows, but to-night if any one had been curious enough to listen, they would have heard nothing more ominous than the monotonous scratch of a pen. He was writing to Miss Belinda and the burden of his letter was that on a certain day he named, he was coming to take away Paula.

XII

MISS BELINDA MAKES CONDITIONS

"For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form, and doth the body make." – Spenser.

Miss Belinda was somewhat taken aback at the proposal of Mr. Sylvester to receive Paula into his own house. She had not anticipated any such result to her efforts; the utmost she had expected was a couple of years or so of instruction in some state Academy. Nor did she know whether she was altogether pleased at the turn affairs were taking. From all she had heard, her niece Ona was, to say the least, a frivolous woman, and Paula had a mind too noble to be subjected to the deteriorating influence of a shallow and puerile companionship. Then the child had great beauty; Mr. Sylvester who ought to be a judge in such matters had declared it so, and what might not the adulation of the thoughtless and the envy of the jealous, do towards belittling a nature as yet uncontaminated.

"We ought to think twice," she said to Miss Abby with some bitterness, who on the contrary never having thought once was full of the most childish hopes concerning a result which she considered with a certain secret complacency she would not have acknowledged for the world, had been very much furthered by her own wise recommendations to Mr. Sylvester in the beginning of his visit. Yet notwithstanding her doubts Miss Belinda allowed such preparations to be made as she considered necessary, and even lent her hand which was deft enough in its way, to the task of enlarging the child's small wardrobe. As for Paula, the thought of visiting the great city with the dear friend whose image had stood in her mind from early childhood as the impersonation of all that was noble, generous and protecting, was more than joyful; it was an inspiration. Not that she did not cling to the affectionate if somewhat quaint couple who had befriended her childhood and sacrificed their comfort to her culture and happiness. But the chord that lies deeper than gratitude had been struck, and fond as were her memories of the dear old home, the charm of that deep "My child," with its hint of fatherly affection, was more than her heart could stand; and no spot, no not the realms of fairy-land itself, looked so attractive to her fancy as that far fireside in an unknown home where she might sit with cousin Ona and alternately with her exert her wit to beguile the smile to his melancholy lips.

When therefore upon the stated day, Mr. Sylvester made his second appearance at the little cottage in Grotewell, it was to find Paula radiant, Miss Abby tearfully exultant and Miss Belinda – O anomaly of human nature – silent and severe. Attributing this however to her very natural regret at parting with Paula, he entered into all the arrangements for their departure on the following morning without a suspicion of the real state of her mind, nor was he undeceived until the day was nearly over and they sat down to have a few minutes of social conversation before the early tea.

They had been speaking on some local topic involving a question of right and wrong, and Mr. Sylvester's ears were yet thrilling to the deep ringing tones with which Paula uttered the words, "I do not see how any man can hesitate an instant when the voice of his conscience says no. I should think the very sunlight would daunt him at the first step of his foot across the forbidden line," when Miss Belinda suddenly spoke up and sending Paula out of the room on some trivial pretext, addressed Mr. Sylvester without reserve.

"I have something to say to you, sir, before you take from my home the child of my care and affection."

Could he have guessed what that something was that he should turn with such a flush of sudden anxiety to meet her determined gaze.

"The rules of our life here have been simple," continued she in a tone of voice which those who knew her well recognized as belonging to her uncompromising moods. "To do our duty, love God and serve our neighbor. Paula has been brought up to reverence those rules in simplicity and honor; what will your gay city life with its hollow devices for pleasure and its loose hold on the firm principles of life, do for this innocent soul, Mr. Sylvester?"

"The city," he said firmly but with a troubled undertone in his voice that was not unnoted by the watchful woman, "is a vast caldron of mingled good and evil. She will hear of more wrong doing, and be within the reach of more self-denying virtue, than if she had remained in this village alone with the nature that she so much loves. The tree of knowledge bears two kinds of fruit, Miss Belinda; would you therefore hinder the child from approaching its branches?"

"No, sir; I am not so weak as to keep a child in swaddling-clothes after the period of infancy is past, neither am I so reckless as to set her adrift on an unknown sea without a pilot to guide her. Your wife – " she paused and fixed an intent look upon the flames leaping before her. "Ona is my niece," she resumed in a lower tone of voice, "and I feel entitled to speak with freedom concerning her. Is she such a guide as I would choose for a young girl just entering a new sphere in life? From all I have heard, I should judge she was somewhat over-devoted to this world and its fashions."

Mr. Sylvester flushed painfully, but seeing that any softening of the truth would be wholly ineffectual with this woman, replied in a candid tone, "Ona is the same now as she was in the days of her girlhood. If she loves the world too well she is not without her excuse; from her birth it has strewn nothing but roses in her path."

"Humph!" came from the lips of the energetic spinster. Then with a second stern glance at the fire, continued, "Another question, Mr. Sylvester. Does your wife consent to receive my niece into her house, for the indefinite length of time which you mention, from interest in the girl herself or indeed from any motive I should judge worthy of Paula? It is a leading question I know, but this is no time for niceties of speech."

"Miss Belinda," replied he, and his voice was firm though his fingers slightly trembled where they rested upon the arms of his chair, "I will try and forget for a moment that Ona is my wife, and frankly confide to you that any such motive on her part, as would meet with your entire approval, must not be expected from a woman who has never fully recognized the solemn responsibilities of life. That she will be kind to Paula I have no doubt, that she may even learn to take an interest in her for her own sake, is also very possible, but that she will ever take your place towards her as guide or instructor, I neither anticipate nor would feel myself justified in leading you to."

The look which Miss Belinda cast him was anything but reassuring. "And yet," said she, "you will take away my darling and give her up to an influence that can not be for good, or your glance would not be so troubled or your lip so uncertain. You would set her young feet in a path where the very flowers are so thick they conceal its tendency and obscure its dangers. Mr. Sylvester you are a man who has seen life with naked eyes, and must recognize its responsibilities; dare you take this Paula, whom you have seen, out of the atmosphere of truth and purity in which she has been raised, and give her over to the enervating influences of folly and fashion? Will you assume the risk and brave the consequences?"

As though an electric shock had touched the nerve of his nature, Mr. Sylvester hastily rose and moved in a restless manner to the window. It was his favorite refuge in any time of sudden perplexity or doubt, and this was surely an occasion for both.

"Miss Belinda," he began and then paused, looking out on the hills of his boyhood, every one of which spoke to him at that moment with a force that almost sickened his heart and benumbed the faculties of his mind; "I recognize the love which leads you to speak in this way, and I bow before it, but – " here his tongue faltered again, that ready tongue whose quick and persuasive eloquence on public occasions had won for him the name of Silver-speech among his friends and admirers – "but there are others who love your Paula also, love her with a yearning that only the childless

can feel or the disappointed appreciate. I had hoped – " here he left the window and approached her side, "to do more for Paula than to give her the temporal benefit of a luxurious home and such instruction as her extraordinary talents demand. If Ona upon seeing and knowing the child had found she could love her, I had intended to ask you to yield her to us unreservedly and forever, in short to make her my child in place of the daughter I have lost. But now – " with a quick gesture he began pacing the floor and left the sentence unfinished.

Miss Belinda's eyes which were of a light grey, wholly without beauty but with strange flashes of expression in them, left the fire and fell upon his face, and a tear of real feeling gathered beneath her lids.

"I had no idea," said he, "that you cherished any such intention as that. If I had I might have worded my apprehensions differently. The yearning feeling of which you speak, I can easily understand, also the strength of the determination it must take on the part of a man like yourself, to give up a hope of this nature. Yet – " Seeing him pause in his hurried pacing and open his lips as if to speak, she deferentially stopped.

"Miss Belinda," said he, in the firm and steadfast way more in keeping with his features than his agitated manner of a moment before, "I cannot give it up. The injury it would do me is greater than the harm, which one of Paula's lofty nature would be apt to acquire in any atmosphere into which she might chance to be introduced. She is not a child, Miss Belinda, though we allude to her as such. The texture of those principles which you have instilled into her breast, is of no such weak material as to give way to the first petty breeze that blows. Paula's house will stand, while mine – "

He paused and gave way to a momentary struggle, but that over, he set his lips firmly together and the last vestige of irresolution vanished. Sitting down by her side, he turned his face upon her, and for the first time she realized the power which with one exception he had always exerted over the minds of others. "Miss Belinda," said he, "I am going to give you an evidence of my trust; I am going to leave with you the responsibility of Paula's future. She shall go with me, and learn, if she can, to love me and mine, but she shall also be under obligations to open her heart to you on all matters that concern her life and happiness in my house, and the day you see any falling off in her pure and upright spirit, you shall demand her return, and though it tears the heart from my breast, I will yield her up without question or parley as I am a gentleman and a Christian. Does that content you?"

"It certainly ought to, sir. No one could ask more, I am sure," returned the other in a voice somewhat unsteady for her.

"It is opening my house to the gaze of a stranger," said he, "for I desire you to command Paula to withhold nothing that seriously affects her; but my confidence in you is unbounded and I am sure that whatever you may learn in this way, will be held as sacred by you as though it were buried in a tomb."

"It certainly will, sir."

"As for the dearer hope which I have mentioned, time and the condition of things must decide for us. Meanwhile I shall strive to win a father's place in her heart, if only to build myself a refuge for the days that are to come. You see I speak frankly, Miss Belinda; will you give me some token that you are not altogether dissatisfied with the result of this conversation?"

With the straightforward if somewhat blunt action that characterized all her movements, she stretched out her hand, which he took with something more than his usual high-bred courtesy. "With you at the wheel," said she, "I think I may trust my darling, even to the whirl and follies of such a society as I know Ona loves. A man who can so command himself, ought to be a safe guide to pioneer others."

And the considerate gentleman bowed; but the frank smile that hailed her genial clasp had somehow vanished, and from the sudden cloud that at that moment swept over the roseate heavens, fell a shadow that left its impress on his lip long after the cloud itself had departed.

An hour or so had passed. The fire was burning brightly on the hearthstone, illumining with a steady glow the array of stuffed birds, worsted samplers and old-fashioned portraits with which the walls were adorned, but reserving its richest glow and fullest irradiation for the bended head of Paula, who seated on a little stool in the corner of the hearth, was watching the rise and fall of the flickering flames.

She had packed her little trunk, had said good-bye to all her neighboring friends and was now sitting on the old hearthstone, musing upon the new life that was about to open before her. It was a happy musing, as the smile that vaguely dimpled her cheeks and brightened her eyes beneath their long lashes, amply testified. As Mr. Sylvester watched her from the opposite side of the hearth where he was sitting alone with his thoughts, he felt his heart sink with apprehension at the fervor of anticipation with which she evidently looked forward to the life in the new home. "The young wings think to gain freedom," thought he, "when they are only destined to the confinement of a gilded cage."

He was so silent and looked so sad, Paula with a certain sort of sensitiveness to any change in the emotional atmosphere surrounding her, which was one of her chief characteristics, hastily looked up and meeting his eye fixed on her with that foreboding glance, softly arose and came and sat down by his side. "You look tired," murmured she; "the long ride after a day of business care has been too much for you."

It was the first word of sympathy with his often over-wearied mind and body, that had greeted his ears for years. It made his eyes moisten.

"I have been a little overworked," said he, "for the last two months, but I shall soon be myself again. What were you thinking of, Paula?"

"What was I thinking of?" repeated she, drawing her chair nearer to his in her loving confidence. "I was thinking what wonders of beauty and art lay in that great kernel which you call the city. I shall see lovely faces and noble forms. I shall wander through halls of music, the echo of whose songs may have come to me in the sob of the river or the sigh of the pines, but whose notes in all their beauty and power have never been heard by me even in my dreams. I shall look on great men and touch the garments of thoughtful women. I shall see life in its fullness as I have felt nature in its mightiness, and my heart will be satisfied at last."

Mr. Sylvester drew a deep breath and his eyes burned strangely in the glow of the fire-light. "You expect high things," said he; "did you ever consider that the life in a great city, with its ceaseless rush and constant rivalries, must be often strangely petty in despite of its artistic and social advantages?"

"All life has its petty side," said she, with a sweet arch look. "The eagle that cleaves the thunder-cloud, must sometimes stop to plume its wings. I should be sorry to lose the small things out of existence. Even we in the face of that great sunset appealing to us from the west, have to pile up the firewood on the hearth and set the table for supper."

"But fashion, Paula," he pursued, concealing his wonder at the maturity of mind evinced by this simple child of nature, "that inexorable power that rules the very souls of women who once step within the magic circle of her realm! have you never thought of her and the demands that she makes on the time and attention even of the worshippers of the good and the true?"

"Yes, sometimes," she returned with a repetition of her arch little smile, "when I put on a certain bonnet I have, which Aunt Abby modeled over from one of my grandmother's. Fashion is a sort of obstinate step-dame I imagine, whom it is less trouble to obey than to oppose. I don't believe I shall quarrel with Fashion if she will only promise to keep her hands off my soul."

"But if – " with a pause, "she asks your all, what then?"

"I shall consider that I am in a country of democratic principles," she laughed, "and beg to be excused from acceding to the tyrannical demands of any autocrat male or female."

"You have been listening to Miss Belinda," said he; "she is also opposed to all and any tyrannical measures." Then with a grave look from which all levity had fled, he leaned toward the young girl and gently asked, "Do you know that you are a very beautiful girl, Paula?"

She flushed, looked at him in some surprise and slowly drooped her head. "I have been told I looked like my father," said she, "and I know that means something very kind."

"My child," said he, with gentle insistence, "God has given you a great and wonderful gift, a treasure-casket of whose worth you scarcely realize the value. I tell you this myself, first because I prize your beauty as something quite sacred and pure, and secondly because you are going where you will hear words of adulation, whose folly and bluntness will often offend your ears, unless you carry in your soul some talisman to counteract their effect."

"I understand," said she, "I know what you mean. I will remember that the most engaging beauty is nothing without a pure mind and a good heart."

"And you will remember too," continued he, "that I blessed your innocent head to-night, not because it is circled by the roses of a youthful and fresh loveliness, but because of the pure mind and good heart I see shining in your eyes." And with a fond but solemn aspect he reached out his hand and laid it on her ebon locks.

She bowed her head upon her breast. "I will never forget," said she, and the fire-light fell with a softening glow on the tears that trembled from her eye-lashes.

XIII

THE END OF MY LADY'S PICTURE

"Heaven from all creatures tides the book of Fate." – Pope.

Mrs. Sylvester was spending an evening at home. This was something so unusual for this august lady of fashion to indulge in, that she found it difficult not to fall asleep in the huge crimson-backed chair in which she had chosen to ensconce herself. Not that she had desisted from making every effort known to mortal woman to keep herself awake and if possible amused till the expected travellers should arrive. She had played with her bird till the spoiled pet had himself protested, ducking his head under his wing and proceeding without ceremony to make up his little feather bed, as cunning Geraldine used to call the round, fluffy ball into which he rolled himself at night. More than that, she had looked over her ornaments and taken out such articles as she thought could be spared for Paula, to say nothing of playing a bar or so from the last operatic sensation, and laboriously cutting open the leaves of the new magazine. But it was all of no use, and the heavy white lids were slowly falling, when the bell rang and Mr. Bertram Mandeville was announced, or rather Bertram Sylvester as he now chose to be called.

It was a godsend to her as she politely informed him upon his entrance; and though in his secret heart he felt anything but God sent – he was not of a make to appreciate his uncle's wife at her very evident value – he consented to remain and assist her in disposing of the evening till Mr. Sylvester should return.

"He is going to bring a pretty girl with him," remarked she, in a tone of some interest, "a cousin of mine from Grotewell. I should like to have you see her."

"Thank you," replied he, his mind roaming off at the suggestion, into the region of a certain plain little music-room where the clock on the mantel ticked to the beating of his own heart. And for ten minutes Mrs. Sylvester had the pleasure of filling the room with a stream of easy talk, in which Grotewell, dark beauties, the coming Seventh Regiment reception, the last bit of gossip from London, and the exact situation of the Madison Bank formed the principal topics.

To the one last mentioned, it having taken the form of a question, he was forced to reply; but the simple locality having been learned, she rambled easily on, this time indulging him with a criticism upon the personal appearance of certain business gentlemen who visited the house, ending with the somewhat startling declaration:

"If Edward were not the fine appearing gentleman that he undoubtedly is, I should feel utterly out of place in these handsome parlors. Anything but to see an elegant and modern home, decorated with the costliest works of art, and filled with *bijouterie* of the most exquisite delicacy, presided over by a plain and common-place woman or a bald-headed and inferior-looking man. The contrast is too vivid; works of the highest art do not need such a startling comparison to bring out their beauty. Now if Edward stood in the throne-room of a palace, he would somehow make it seem to others as a handsome set off to his own face and figure."

This was all very wife-like if somewhat unnecessary, and Bertram could have listened to it with pleasure, if she had not cast the frequent and side-long glances at the mirror, which sufficiently betrayed the fact that she included herself in this complacent conclusion; as indeed she may have considered herself justified in doing, husband and wife being undoubtedly of one flesh. As it was, he maintained an immovable countenance, though he admired his uncle as much as she did, and the conversation gradually languished till the white somnolent lids of the lady again began to show certain premonitory signs of drooping, when suddenly they were both aroused by the well known click of a latch-key in the door, and in another moment Mr. Sylvester's voice was heard in the hall, saying, in tones whose cheery accents made his wife's eyes open in surprise —

"Welcome home, my dear."

"They have come," murmured Mrs. Sylvester rising with a look of undeniable expectation. Had Paula not been a beauty she would have remained seated.

"Yes, we have come," was heard in hearty tones from the door-way, and Mr. Sylvester with a proud look which Bertram long remembered, ushered into their presence a young girl whose simple cloak and bonnet in no wise prevented Mrs. Sylvester from recognizing the somewhat uncommon beauty she had been led to expect.

"Paula, this is your cousin Ona, and – Ah, Bertram, glad to see you – this is my only nephew, Mr. Sylvester."

The young girl, lost in the sudden glamour of numerous lights, shining upon splendors such as she may have dreamed of over the pages of Irving's *Alhambra*, but certainly had never before seen, blushed with very natural embarrassment, but yet managed to bestow a pretty enough greeting upon the elegant woman and handsome youth, while Ona after the first moment of almost involuntary hesitation, took in hers the two trembling hands of her youthful cousin and actually kissed her cheek.

"I am not given to caresses as you know," she afterwards explained in a somewhat apologetic tone to her husband; "and anything like an appeal for one on the part of a child or an inferior, I detest; but her simple way of holding out her hand disarmed me, and then such a face demands a certain amount of homage, does it not?" And her husband in his surprise, was forced to acknowledge to himself, that as closely as he had studied his wife's nature for ten years, there were certain crooks and turns in it which even he had never penetrated.

"You look dazzled," that lady exclaimed, gazing not unkindly into the young girl's face; "the sudden glare of so much gas-light has bewildered you."

"I do not think it is that," returned Paula with a frank and admiring look at the gorgeous room and the circle of pleasant faces about her. "Sudden lights I can bear, but I have come from a little cottage on the hillside and the magnificence of nature does not prepare you for the first sudden view of the splendors of art."

Mrs. Sylvester smiled and cast a side glance of amusement at Bertram. "You admire our new hangings I see," remarked she with an indulgence of the other's *näiveté* that greatly relieved her husband.

But in that instant a change had come across Paula; the simple country maid had assimilated herself with the surroundings, and with a sudden grace and dignity that were unstudied as they were charming, dropped her eyes from her cousin's portrait – that for some reason seemed to shine with more than its usual insistence – and calmly replied, "I admire all beautiful color; it is my birthright as a Walton, to do so, I suppose."

Mrs. Sylvester was a Walton also and therefore smiled; but her husband, who had marked with inward distrust, the sudden transformation in Paula, now stepped forward with a word or two of remark concerning his appetite, a prosaic allusion that led to the rapid disappearance of the ladies upstairs and a short but hurried conversation between the two gentlemen.

"I have brought you a sealed envelope from the office," said Bertram, who, in accordance with his uncle's advice, had already initiated himself into business by assuming the position of clerk in the office of the wealthy speculator.

"Ah," returned his uncle hastily opening it. "As I expected, a meeting has been held this day by the board of Directors of the Madison Bank, a vote was cast, my proxy did his duty and I am duly elected President. Bertram, we know what that means," smiled he, holding out his hand with an affectionate warmth greatly in advance of the emotion displayed by him on a former occasion.

"I hope so indeed," young Bertram responded. "An increase of fortune and honor for you, though you seem to have both in the fullest measure already, and a start in the new life for me to whom fortune and honor mean happiness."

A smile younger and more full of hope than any he had seen on his uncle's face for years, responded to this burst. "Bertram," said he, "since our conversation of a couple of weeks ago something has occurred which somewhat alters the opinions I then expressed. If you have patience equal to your energy, and a self-control that will not put to shame your unbounded trust in women, I think I can say God-speed to your serious undertaking, with something like a good heart. Women are not all frivolous and foolish-minded; there are some jewels of simple goodness and faith yet left in the world."

"Thank God for your conversion," returned his nephew smiling, "and if this lovely girl whom you have just introduced to me, is the cause of it, then thank God for her also."

His uncle bowed with a gravity almost solemn, but the ladies returning at this moment, he refrained from further reply. After supper, to which unusual meal Mr. Sylvester insisted upon his nephew remaining, the two gentlemen again drew apart.

"If you have decided upon buying the shares I have mentioned," said the former, "you had better get your money in a position to handle at once. I shall wish to present you to Mr. Stuyvesant to-morrow, and I should like to be able to mention you as a future stockholder in the bank."

"Mr. Stuyvesant!" exclaimed Bertram, ignoring the rest of the sentence.

"Yes," returned his uncle with a smile, "Thaddeus Stuyvesant is the next largest stockholder to myself in the Madison Bank, and his patronage is not an undesirable one."

"Indeed – I was not aware – excuse me, I should be happy," stammered the young man. "As for the money, it is all in Governments and is at your command whenever you please."

"That is good, I'll notify you when I'm ready for the transfer. And now come," said he, with a change from his deep business tone to the lighter one of ordinary social converse, "forget for a half hour that you have discarded the name of Mandeville, and give us an aria or a sonata from Mendelssohn before those hands have quite lost their cunning."

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