

Edward Roe

A Face Illumined



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A Face Illumined

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A Face Illumined

By Edward P. Roe

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Reviews

“The author does not, as is often the case, make the moral design an excuse for literary shortcomings. His characters are stamped with a strong individuality, and depicted with a naturalness that indicates a keen student of human nature and modern life.” — *Boston Traveller*

Preface

AS MAY BE GATHERED from the following pages, my title was obtained a number of years ago, and the story has since been taking form and color in my mind. What has become of the beautiful but discordant face I saw at the concert garden I do not know, but I trust that that the countenance it suggested, and its changes may not prove so vague and unsatisfactory as to be indistinct to the reader. It has looked upon the writer during the past year almost like the face of a living maiden, and I have felt, in a way that would be hard to explain, that I have had but little to do with its expressions, and that forces and influences over which I had no control were molding character.

The old garden, and the aged man who grew young within it, are not creations, but sacred memories.

That the book may tend to ennoble other faces than that of Ida Mayhew, is the earnest wish of

E. P. ROE.

Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, N. Y.

1. A Face

ALTHOUGH the sun was approaching the horizon, its slanting rays found a young artist still bending over his easel. That his shoulders are broad is apparent at a glance; that upon them is placed a shapely head, well thatched with crisp black hair, is also seen at once; that the head is not an empty one is proved by the picture on the easel, which is sufficiently advanced to show correct and spirited drawing. A brain that can direct the hand how to do one thing well, is like a general who has occupied a strategic point which will give him the victory if he follows up his advantage.

A knock at the door is not answered at once by the intent and preoccupied artist, but its sharp and impatient repetition secures the rather reluctant invitation,

“Come in,” and even as he spoke he bent forward to give another stroke.

“Six o’clock, and working still!” cried the intruder. “You will keep the paint market active, if you achieve nothing else as an artist.”

“Heigho! Ik, is that you?” said he of the palette, good-naturedly; and rising slowly he gave a lingering look at his work, then turned and greeted his friend with the quiet cordiality of long and familiar acquaintance. “What a marplot you are with your idle ways!” he added. “Sit down here and make yourself useful for once by doing nothing nothing for ten minutes. I am in just the mood and have just the light for a bit of work which perhaps I can never do as well again,” and the artist returned promptly to his picture.

In greeting his friend he had revealed that he was above middle height, that he had full black eyes that were not only good for seeing, but could also, if he chose, give great emphasis to his words, and at times be even more expressive. A thick mustache covered his lip, but the rest of his face was cleanly shaven, and was strong and decided in its outlines rather than handsome.

“They say a woman’s work is never done,” remarked Ik Stanton, dropping into the easiest chair in the studio, “and for this reason, were there no other, your muse is evidently of the feminine persuasion. I also admit

that she is a lady of great antiquity. Indeed I would place her nearer to the time when ‘Adam delved and Eve span’ than to the classic age.”

“My dear Ik,” responded the artist, “I am often at a loss to know whether I love or despise you most. If a little of the whirr of our great grandam’s spinning wheel would only get into your brain the world might hear from you. You are a man of unbounded stomach and unbounded heart, and so you have won all there is of me except my head, and that disapproves of you.”

“A fig for the world! what good will it do me or it to have it hear from me? you ambitious fellows are already making such a din that the poor old world is half ready for Bedlam; and would go stark mad were it not for us quiet, easy-going people, who have time for a good dinner and a snack between meals. You’ve got a genius that’s like a windmill in a trade wind, always in motion; you are worth more money than I shall ever have, but you are the greatest drudge in the studio building, and work as many hours as a house-painter.”

“When your brain once gets in motion, Ik, fiction will be its natural product. You must admit that I have not painted many pictures.”

“That is one of the things I complain of; I, your bosom friend and familiar, your, I might add, guardian angel—I, who have so often saved your life by quenching the flame of your consuming genius with a hearty dinner, have been able to obtain one picture only from you, and as one might draw a tooth. Your pictures are like old maid’s children—they must be so perfect that they can’t exist at all. But come, the ten minutes are up. Here’s the programme for the evening—a drive in the Park and a little dinner at a cool restaurant near Thomas’s Garden, and then the concert. That prince of musical caterers has made a fine selection for to-night, and, with the cigar stand on one side of us and the orchestra on the other, we are certain to kill a couple of hours that will die like swans.”

“You mention the cigar-stand first.”

“Why not? Smoke is more real than empty sound.”

“Are you not equally empty, Ik, save after dinner? How have the preceding hours of this long day been killed?”

“Like boas. They have enfolded me with a weary weight.”

“The snakes in your comparison are larger than your pun, and the pun, rather than yourself, suggests a constrictor’s squeeze.”

“Come, you are only abusing me to gain time, and you may gain too much. My horses have more mettle than their master, and may carry off my trap and groom to parts unknown, while you are wasting paint and words. You are like the animals at the Park, that are good-natured only after they are fed. So shut up your old paint shop, and come along; we will shorten our ride and lengthen our dinner.”

With mutual chaffing and laughter the young men at last went down to where a liveried coachman and a pair of handsome bays were in waiting. Taking the high front seat and gathering up the reins, Ik Stanton, with his friend Harold Van Berg at his side, bowled away towards the Park at a rapid pace.

Harold Van Berg was, in truth, something of a paradox. He was an artist, and yet was rich; he had inherited large wealth, and yet had formed habits of careful industry. The majority of his young acquaintances, who had been launched from homes like his own, were known only as sons of their fathers, and degenerate sons at that. Van Berg was already winning a place among men on the ground of what he was and could do himself.

It were hard to say which was the stronger motive, his ambition or the love of his art; but it seemed certain that between the two, such talent as he had been endowed with would be developed quite thoroughly. And he did possess decided talent, if not genius. But his artistic gift accorded with his character, and was controlled by judgment, correct taste, and intellectuality rather than by strong and erratic impulses. His aims were definite and decided rather than vague and diffusive; but his standards were so high that, thus far, he had scarcely attempted more than studies that were like the musician's scales by which he seeks to acquire a skill in touch that shall enable him to render justly the works of the great composers.

His family had praised his work unstintedly, and honestly thought it wonderful; he had also been deluged with that kind of flattery which relaxes the rules of criticism in favor of the wealthy. Thus it was not strange that the young fellow, at one time, believed that he was born to greatness by a kindly decree of fate. But as his horizon widened he was taught better. His mind, fortunately, grew faster than his vanity, and as he compared his crude but promising work with that of mature genius, he was not stricken with that most helpless phase of blindness—the inability to see the superiority of others to one's self. Every day, therefore, of study and observation was now chastening Harold Van Berg and preparing him to build his future success

on the solid ground of positive merit as compared with that of other and gifted artists.

Van Berg's taste and talent led him to select, as his specialty, the human form and countenance, and he chiefly delighted in those faces which were expressive of some striking or subtle characteristic of the indwelling mind. He would never be content to paint surfaces correctly, giving to features merely their exact proportions. Whether the face were historical, ideal, or a portrait, the controlling trait or traits of the spirit within must shine through, or else he regarded the picture as scarcely half finished.

A more sincere idolator than Van Berg, in his worship of beauty, never existed; but it was the beauty of a complete man or a complete woman. Even in his early youth he had not been so sensuous as to be captivated by that opaque fragment of a woman—an attractive form devoid of a mind. Indeed with the exception of a few boyish follies, his art had been his mistress thus far, and it was beginning to absorb both heart and brain.

With what a quiet pulse—with what a complacent sense of security we often meet those seemingly trivial events which may change the whole character of our lives! The ride had been taken, the dinner enjoyed, and the two friends were seated in the large cool hallway off the concert garden, where they could smoke without offense. The unrivalled leader, Thomas, had just lifted his baton—that magic wand whose graceful yet mysterious motion evokes with equal ease, seemingly, the thunder of a storm, the song of a bird, the horrid din of an inferno, or a harmony so pure and lofty as to suggest heavenly strains. One of Beethoven's exquisite symphonies was to be rendered, and Van Berg threw away his half-burned cigar, settled himself in his chair and glanced around with a congratulatory air, as if to say, "Now we are to have one of those pleasures which fills the cup of life to overflowing."

Oh, that casual glance! It was one of those things that we might justly call "little." Could anything have been more trivial, slight, and apparently inconsequential than this half involuntary act? Indeed it was too aimless even to have been prompted by a conscious effort of the will. But this book is one of the least results of that momentary sweep of the eye. Another was, that Van Berg did not enjoy the symphony at all, and was soon in a very bad humor. That casual glance had revealed, not far away, a face that with his passion for beauty, at once riveted his attention. His slight start and faint exclamation, caused Ik Stanton to look around also, and then, with a

mischievous and observant twinkle in his eyes, the bon vivant resumed his cigar, which no symphony could exorcise from his mouth.

At a table just within the main audience room, there sat a young lady and gentleman. Even Van berg, who made it his business to discover and study beauty, was soon compelled to admit to himself that he had never seen finer features than were possessed by this fair young stranger. Her nose was straight, her upper lip was short, and might have been modelled from Cupid's bow; her chin did not form a perfect oval after the cold and severe Grecian type, but was slightly firm and prominent, receding with decided yet exquisite curves to the full white throat. Her cheeks had a transparent fairness, in which the color came and went instead of lingering in any conventional place and manner; her hair was too light to be called brown and too dark to be golden, but was shaded like that on which the sunlight falls in one of Bougereau's pictures of "Mother and Child;" and it rippled away from a broad low brow in natural waves, half hiding the small, shell-like ears.

Van Berg at first thought her eyes to be her finest feature, but he soon regarded them as the worst, and for the same reason, as he speedily discovered, that the face, each feature of which seemed perfect, became, after brief study, so unsatisfactory as to cause positive annoyance. To a passing glance they were large, dark, beautiful eyes, but they lost steadily under thoughtful scrutiny. A flashing gem may seem real at first, but as its meretricious rays are analyzed, they lose their charm because revealing a stone not only worthless worse than worthless, since it mocks us with a false resemblance, thus raising hopes only to disappoint them. The other features remained beautiful and satisfactory to Van Berg's furtive observation because further removed from the informing mind, and therefore more justly capable of admiration upon their own merits; but the eyes are too near akin to the animating spirit not to suffer from the relationship, should the spirit be essentially defective.

That the beautiful face was but a transparent mask of a deformed, dwarfed, contemptible little soul was speedily made evident. The cream and a silly flirtation with her empty-headed attendant—a pallid youth who parted his hair like a girl and had not other parts worth naming—absorbed her wholly, and the exquisite symphony was no more to her than an annoying din which made it difficult to hear her companion's compliments that were as sweet, heavy, and stale as Mailard's chocolates, left a year on

the shelves. Their mutual giggle and chatter at last became so obtrusive that an old and music-loving German turned his broad face towards them, and hissed out the word "Hist!" with such vindictive force as to suggest that all the winds had suddenly broken loose from the cave of Aeolus.

Ik Stanton, who had been watching Van Berg's perturbed, lowering face, and the weak comedy at the adjacent table, was obviously much amused, although he took pains to appear blind to it all and kept his back, as far as possible, towards the young lady.

The German's "hist" had been so fierce as to be almost like a rap from a policeman's club, and there was an enforced and temporary suspension of the inane chatter. The attendant youth tried to assume the incensed and threatening look with which an ancient gallant would have laid his hand on the hilt of his sword. But some animals and men only become absurd when they try to appear formidable. It was ludicrous to see him weakly frowning at the sturdy Teuton who had already forgotten his existence as completely as he might that of a buzzing mosquito he had exterminated with a slap.

The young girl's face grew even less satisfactory as it became more quiet. A muddy pool, rippled by a breeze, will sparkle quite brilliantly while in motion; but when quiet it is seen the more plainly to be only a shallow pool. At first the beautiful features expressed only petty resentment at the public rebuke. As this faintly lurid light faded out and left the countenance in its normal state it became more heavy and earthy in its expression than Van Berg would have deemed possible, and it ever remained a mystery to him how features so delicate, beautiful, and essentially feminine could combine to show so clearly that the indwelling nature was largely alloyed with clay. There was not that dewy freshness in the fair young face which one might expect to see in the early morning of existence. The Lord from heaven breathed the breath of life into the first fair woman; but this girl might seem to have been the natural product of evolution, and her soul to be as truly of the earth as her body.

It was evident that she had been made familiar too early and thoroughly with conventional and fashionable society, and, although this fraction of the world is seldom without its gloves, its touch nevertheless had soiled her nature. Her face did not express any active or malignant principle of evil; but a close observer, like Van Berg, in whom the man was in the ascendant over the animal, could detect the absence of the serene, maidenly purity of expression, characteristic of those girls who have obtained their ideas of life

from good mothers, rather than from French novels, French plays, and a phase of society that borrows its inspiration from fashionable Paris.

With the ending of the symphony the chatting and flirting at the table began again, to Van Berg's increased disgust. Indeed, he was so irritated that he could no longer control himself, and rose abruptly, saying to his companion:

“Come, let us walk outside.”

His sudden movement drew the young lady's attention, but by this time he had only his broad shoulders turned towards her. She saw Ik Stanton looking at her, however, with a face full of mischief, and she recognized him with a nod and a smile.

He, with the familiarity that indicated relationship, but with a motion too slight to be noticed by others, threw her a kiss from the tips of his fingers, as one might toss a sugar-plum to a child, and then followed his friend.

2. Ida Mayhew

WHAT IS THE MATTER, Van? You remind me of a certain horned beast that has seen a red flag," said Ik Stanton, linking his arm in that of Van Berg's.

"An apt illustration. I have been baited and irritated for the last twenty minutes."

"I thought you enjoyed Beethoven's music, and surely Thomas rendered it divinely to-night."

"That is one of the chief of my grievances. I haven't been able to hear a note," was the wrathful response.

"That's strange," said Stanton with mock gravity. "Were I not afraid you would take it amiss I would hint that your ears are of goodly size. How comes it that they have so suddenly failed you?"

"Having seen your dinner you have no eyes for anything else. If you had, you would have seen a face near us."

"I saw a score of faces near us. A German had one with the area of an acre."

"Was he the one who said, 'hist,' like a blast from the North?"

"From a porpoise rather."

"Did you observe the girl towards whom his gusty rebuke was directed?"

"Yes, an inoffensive young lady."

"Inoffensive, indeed!" interrupted Van Berg. "She has put me into purgatory."

"You do seem quite ablaze. Well, you are not the first one that she has put there. But really, Van, I did not know that you were so inflammable."

"If you had any of the instincts of an artist you would know that I am inflamed with no gentler feeling than anger."

"Why! what has the poor child done to you?"

"She is not a child. She knows too much about some things."

"I've no doubt she is better than either you or I," said Stanton, sharply.

"That fact would be far from proving her a saint."

“What the dickens makes you so vindictive against the girl?”

“Because she has the features of an angel and the face of a fool. What business has a woman to mock and disappoint one so! When I first saw her I thought I had discovered a prize—a new revelation of beauty; but a moment later she looked so ineffably silly that I felt as if I had bitten into an apple of Sodom. Of course the girl is nothing to me. I never saw her before and hope I may never see her again; but her features were so perfect that I could not help looking at them, and the more I looked the more annoyed I became to find that, instead of being blended together into a divine face by the mind within, they were the reluctant slaves of as picayune a soul as ever maintained its microscopic existence in a human body. It is exasperating to think what that face might be, and to see what it is. How can nature make such absurd blunders? The idea of building so fair a temple for such an ugly little divinity!”

“I thought you artists were satisfied with flesh and blood women, if only put together in a way pleasing to your fastidious eyes.”

“If nature had designed that women should consist only of flesh and blood women, if only put together in a way pleasing to your fastidious eyes.”

“If nature had designed that women should consist only of flesh and blood, one would have to be content; but no one save the ‘unspeakable Turk,’ believes in such a woman, or wants her. Who admires such a fragment of a woman save the man that is as yet undeveloped beyond the animal? My mother is my friend, my companion, my inspiration. The idea of yonder silly creature being the companion of a MAN.”

“Good evening, Coz,” said a voice that was a trifle shrill and loud for a public place, and looking up, the friends saw the subject of their conversation, who, with her spindling attendant was also taking a promenade.

Stanton raised his hat with a smile, while Van Berg touched his but coldly.

“I wish to speak with you,” she said in passing.

“I will join you soon,” Stanton answered.

“So this lady is your cousin?” remarked Van Berg.

“She is,” said Stanton laughing.

“You will do me the justice to remember that I spoke in ignorance of the fact. If I were you I would give her some cousinly advice.”

“Bless you! I have, but it’s like pouring water on a duck’s back. For one sensible word I can say to her she gets a thousand compliments from rich and empty-headed young fools, like the one now with her, who will eventually be worth half a million in his own name. I was interested to see how her face would strike you, and I imagine that your estimate has hit pretty close upon the truth, for in my judgment she is the prettiest and silliest girl in New York. She has recently returned from a year’s absence abroad, and I was in hopes that she would find something to remember besides her own handsome face, but I imagine she has seen little else than it and the admiring glances which everywhere follow her. Take us as we average, Van, Mr. Darwin has not got us very far along yet, and if the face of a woman suits us we are apt to stare at it as far as such politeness as we possess permits, without giving much thought to her intellectual endowments. When it comes to companionship, however, I agree with you. Heaven help the man who is tied to such a woman for life. Still, in the fashionable crowd my cousin trains with, this makes little difference. The husband goes his way and the wife hers, and they are not long in getting a good ways apart. But come, let me introduce you, I have always thought the little fool had some fine gold mingled with her dross, and you are such a skilful analyst that perhaps you will discover it.”

“No, I thank you,” said Van Berg, with a slight expression of disgust. “I could not speak civilly to a lady that I had just seen giggling and flirting through one of Beethoven’s finest symphonies.”

“Well well,” said Stanton laughing, “I am rather glad to find one man who is not drawn to her pretty face like a moth to a candle. I will join you again by and by.”

Van Berg sat down in one of the little stalls that stood open to the main promenade, and saw his friend thread his way among the moving figures, and address his cousin. As she turned to speak with Stanton, the artist received again that vivid impression of beauty, which her face ever caused before time was given for closer scrutiny. Indeed from his somewhat distant point of observation, and in the less searching light, the fatal flaw could scarcely be detected. Her affected tones and silly words could not be heard, and he saw only dark lustrous eyes lighting up features that were almost a revelation even to him with his artistic familiarity with beauty.

“If I could always keep her at about that distance,” he muttered, “and arrange the lights and shadows in which to view her face, I could not ask

for a better study, for she would give me a basis of perfect beauty, and I could add any expression of characteristic that I desired.” And now he feasted his eyes as a compensation, in part, for the annoyance she had caused him in the glare of the audience room.

He soon saw a frown lower upon her hitherto laughing face like the shadow of a passing cloud, and it was evident that something had been said that was not agreeable to her vanity.

A moment or two after Stanton had joined the young lady her escort for the evening had excused himself for a brief time, and had left the cousins together. She had then asked, “I say, Ik, who was that gentleman you were talking with?”

“He’s an old friend of mine.”

“He’s not an OLD friend of any one. He is young and quite good-looking, or rather he has a certain ‘distingue’ air that makes one look at him twice. Who is he?”

“He is an artist, and if he lives and works as he is now doing, through an ordinary lifetime, he will indeed be distinguished. In fact, he stands high already.”

“How nice,” she exclaimed.

“He has another characteristic, which you will appreciate far more than anything he will ever accomplish with his brush—he is very rich.”

“Why! he’s perfectly splendid. Whoever heard of such a strange, rare creature! I’ve flirted with lots of poor artists, but never with a rich one. Bring him to me, and introduce him at once.”

“He is not one that you can flirt with, like the attenuated youth who has just meandered to the barroom.”

“Why not?”

“If you had eyes for anything save your own pretty face, and the public stare, you would have seen that my friend is not a ‘creature,’ but a man.”

“Come, Cousin Ik,” she replied in more natural tones, “too much of your house is made of glass for you to throw stones. Flirting and frolicking are as good any day as eating, smoking, and dawdling.”

Stanton bit his lip, but retorted, “I don’t profess to be a bit better than you are, Coz; but I at least have the sense to appreciate those who are my superiors.”

“So have I, when I find them; I am beginning to think, however, that you men are very much alike. All you ask is a pretty face, for you all think that

you have brains enough for two. But bring your paragon and introduce him, that I may share in your gaping admiration.”

“You would, indeed, my dear Coz, yawn over his conversation, for you couldn’t understand half of it. I think we had better remain where we are till your shadow returns with his eyes and nose slightly inflamed. He is aware of at least one method of becoming a spirited youth, it seems.”

“A man who is worth half a million is usually regarded as rather substantial,” she retorted.

“Yes, but in this case the money-bags outweigh the man too ridiculously. For heaven’s sake, Coz, do not make a spectacle of yourself by marrying this attenuation, or society will assert there was a regularly drawn bill of sale.”

“I assure you that I do not intend to put myself under any man’s thumb for a long time to come. I am having too good a time; and that reminds me that I would enjoy meeting your friend much more than listening to your cynical speeches. Did I not know that you were like my little King Charles—all bark rather than bite—I wouldn’t stand them; and I won’t any longer, to-night. So go and bring your great embryo artist, or he will become one of the old masters before I see him.”

“I fear I must give you a wee bit of bite this time. I have offered to introduce him and he declines the honor.”

“How is that?” she asked, flushing with anger.

“I will quote his words exactly, and then you can interpret them as you think best. He said, ‘I could not speak civilly to a lady that I had just seen giggling and flirting through one of Beethoven’s finest symphonies.’”

The young girl’s face looked anything but amiable in response to this speech; but, after a moment, she tossed her head, and replied:

“‘N’importe’—there are plenty who can use not only civil words but complimentary ones.”

“Yes, and the mischief of it is that you will listen to them and to no others. What sort of muscle can one make who lives only on sugar-plums?”

“They agree with me better than the vinegar drops you and your unmannerly friend delight in. I don’t believe he ever painted anything better than a wooden squaw for one of your beloved cigar-shops—welcome back Mr. Minty. You have been away an unconscionably long time.”

“Thanks for the compliment of being missed. I have tried to make amends by ordering a ‘petit souper’ for three, for I was sure your cousin

would join us. It will be brought to one of yonder stalls, where, while we enjoy it, we can both see and hear.”

Surmising that the viands would consist of the choicest delicacies of the season, Stanton readily accepted the invitation, and it so happened that the cloth was laid for the party in the stall next to that in which Van Berg was quietly enjoying a cigar and a frugal glass of lager. They took their places quite unaware of his proximity, and he listened with considerable interest to the tones and words of the fair stranger who had so unexpectedly taken possession of his thoughts. Were it not for a slight shrillness and loudness at times, and the fashionable affectation of the day, her voice would have been sweet and girlish enough. As it was, it suggested an instrument tuned to a false key and consequently discordant with all true and womanly harmonies. Her conversation with young Minty was as insipid as himself, but occasionally Stanton’s cynical banter evoked something like repartee and wit.

In the course of her talk she said: “By the way, Ik, mother and I start for the country next week. We are to spend the summer at the Lake House, which is up the Hudson somewhere—you know where better than I. If you will bring your bays and a light wagon I shall be very glad to see you there; otherwise I shall welcome you—well—as my cousin.”

“If I come I will surely bring my bays, and possibly may invite you to drive with me.”

“Oh, I will save you all trouble in that respect by inviting myself, when so inclined.”

The orchestra was now about to give a selection that Van Berg wished to hear to better advantage than he could in his present position; therefore, unobserved by the party on the other side of the thin partition, he returned to his old seat in the main hallway. Not very long after, Stanton, with his cousin and Mr. Minty, entered from the promenade, and again Van Berg received the same vivid impression of beauty, and, with many others, could not withdraw his eyes from the exquisite features that were slightly flushed with champagne and excitement. But, as before, this impression passed quickly, and the face again became as exasperating to the artist as the visage of the Venus of Milo would be should some vandal hand pencil upon it a leer or a smirk. A heavy frown was gathering upon his brow when the young lady, happening to turn suddenly, caught and fully recognized his lowering expression. It accorded only too well with her cousin’s words in

regard to Van Berg's estimate of herself, and greatly increased her resentment towards the one who had already wounded her vanity—the most vulnerable and sensitive trait in her character. The flush that deepened so suddenly upon her face was unmistakably that of anger. She promptly turned her back upon her critic, nor did she look towards him again until the close of the evening. That his words and manner rankled in her memory, however, was proved by a slightly preoccupied manner, followed by fits of gayety not altogether natural, and chiefly by the fact that she could not leave the place without a swift glance at the disturbing cause of her wanted self-approval. But Van Berg took pains to manifest his indifference by standing with his back towards her when she knew that he must be aware of her departure, from her slightly ostentatious leave-taking of her cousin, in which, of course, the spoiled beauty had no other object than to attract attention to herself.

As Van Berg, with his friend, was passing out a few minutes later, he asked rather abruptly, showing that he also was not so indifferent as he had pretended to be:

“What is your cousin's name, Stanton?”

“Her name is as pretty as herself—Ida Mayhew, and it is worse than a disquieting ghost in a good many heads and hearts that I know of. Indeed its owner has robbed men that I thought sensible, not only of their peace, but, I should say, of their wits also. I had one friend of whom I thought a great deal, and it was pitiable to see the abject state to which the heartless little minx reduced him. I am glad to find that her witchery has no spell for you, and that you detect just what she is through her disguise of beauty. ‘Entre nous,’ Van, I will tell you a secret. I was once over ears in love with her myself, but my cousinly relationship enabled me to see her so often and intimately that she cured me of my folly on homeopathic principles. ‘*Similia similibus curantur.*’ Even the blindness of love could not fail to discover that when one subtracted vanity, coquetry, and her striking external beauty from Ida Mayhew, but little was left, and that little not a heavenly compound. Those who know her least, and who add to her beauty many ideal perfections, are the ones that rave about her most. I doubt whether she ever had a heart; if so, it was frittered away long ago in her numberless flirtations. But with all her folly she has ever had the sense to keep within the conventionalities of her own fashionable ‘coterie,’ which is the only world she knows anything about, and whose unwritten laws are her only

creed and religion. Her disappointed suitors can justly charge her with cruelty, silliness, ignorance, and immeasurable vanity, but never with indiscretion. She has to perfection the American girl's ability to take care of herself, and no man will see twice to take a liberty beyond that which etiquette permits. I have now given you in brief the true character of Ida Mayhew. It is no secret, for all who come to know her well, arrive at the same opinion. When I saw you had observed her this evening for the first time, I was quite interested in watching the impression she would make upon you, and I am very glad that your judgment has been both good and prompt; for I slightly feared that your love of beauty might make you blind to everything else."

Stanton's concluding words were as incense to Van Berg, for he prided himself in no slight degree on his even pulse and sensible heart, that, thus far, had given him so little trouble; and he therefore replied, with a certain tinge of complacency and consciousness of security:

"You know me well enough, Ik, to be aware that I am becoming almost a monomaniac in my art. A woman's face is to me little more than a picture which I analyze from an artistic stand-point. A MERELY PRETTY face is like a line of verse of musical rhythm, but without sense or meaning. This is bad and provoking enough; but when the most exquisite features give expression only to some of the meanest and unworthiest qualities that can infest a woman's soul, one is exasperated almost beyond endurance. At least I am, for I am offended in my strongest instincts. Think of employing stately Homeric words and measure in describing a belle's toilet table with its rouge-pots, false hair, and other abominations! Much worse is it, in my estimation, that the features of a goddess should tell us only of such moral vermin as vanity, silliness, and the egotism of a poor little self that thinks of nothing, and knows nothing save its own small cravings. Pardon me, Ik; I am not speaking of your cousin but in the abstract. In regard to that young lady, as you saw, I was very much struck with the face. Indeed, to tell the honest truth, I never saw so much beauty spoiled before, and the fact has put me in so bad a humor that you, no doubt, are glad I have reached my corner and so must say good-night."

"Ida Mayhew can realize all such abstractions," muttered Ik Stanton, as he walked on alone.

The reader will be apt to surmise, however, that some resentment, resulting from his former and unrequited sentiment towards the girl, gave

an unjust bias to his judgment.

3. An Artist's Freak

VAN BERG'S night-key admitted him to a beautiful home, which he now had wholly to himself, since his parents and sister had sailed for Europe early in the spring, intending to spend the summer abroad. The young man had already traveled and studied for years in the lands naturally attractive to an artist, and it was now his purpose to familiarize himself more thoroughly with the scenery of his own country.

On reaching his own apartment he took down a prosy book, that he might read himself into that condition of drowsiness which would render sleep possible; but sleep would not come, and the sentences were like the passers-by in the street, whom we see but do not note, and for whose coming and going we know not the reasons. Between himself and the page he saw continually the exquisite features and the exasperating face of Ida May hew. At last he threw aside the book, lighted a cigar, and gave himself up to the reveries to which this beautiful, but discordant visage so strongly predisposed him. Its perfection in one respect, its strongly marked imperfection in another, both appealed equally to his artistic and thoughtful mind. At one moment it would appear before him with an ideal loveliness such as had never blessed the eye of his fancy even; but while he yet looked the features would distort themselves into the vivid expression of some contemptible trait, so like what he had seen in reality, during the evening, that, in uncontrollable irritation, he would start up and pace the floor.

His uncurbed imagination conjured up all kinds of weird and grotesque imagery. He found himself commiserating the girl's features as if they were high-toned captives held in degrading bondage by a spiteful little monster, that delighted to put them to low and menial uses. To one of his temperament such beauty as he had just witnessed, controlled by, and ministering to, some of the meanest and pettiest of human vices, was like Mary Magdalene when held in thralldom by seven devils.

A cool and matter-of-fact person could scarcely under* stand Van Berg's annoyance and perturbation. If a true artist were compelled to see before

him a portrait that required only a few skilful touches in order to become a perfect likeness, and yet could not give those touches, the picture would become a constant vexation; and the better the picture, the nearer it approached the truth, the deeper would be the irritation that all should be spoiled through defects for which there was no necessity.

In the face that persistently haunted him Van Berg saw a beauty that might fulfill his best ideal; and he also saw just why it did not and never could, until its defects were remedied. He felt a sense of personal loss that he should have discovered a gem so nearly perfect and yet marred by so fatal a flaw.

The next day it was still the same. The face of Ida Mayhew interposed itself before everything that he sought to do or see. Whether it were true or not, it appeared to him that in all his wanderings and observations he had never seen features so capable of fulfilling his highest conception of beauty did they but express the higher qualities and emotions of the soul. He also felt that never before had he seen a face that would seem to him so hideous in its perversion.

He threw down his brush and palette in despair and again gave himself up to his fancies. He then sketched in outline the beautiful face as expressing joy, hope, courage, thought or love, but was provoked to find that he ever obtained the best likeness when portraying the vanity, silliness, or petulance which had been the only characteristics he had seen.

He now grew metaphysical and tried to analyze the girl's mind. He sought to grope mentally his way back into the recesses of the soul, which had looked, acted, and spoken the previous evening. A strange little place he imagined it, and oddly furnished. It occurred to him that it bore a resemblance to her dressing-room, and was full of queer feminine mysteries and artificial ideas that had been created by conventional society rather than inspired by nature.

He asked himself, "Can it be that here is a character in which the elements of a true and good woman do not exist? Has she no heart, no mind, no conscience worthy of the name? At her age she cannot have lost these qualities. Have they never been awakened? Do they exist to that degree that they can be aroused into controlling activity? I suppose there can be pretty idiots. As people are born blind or scrofulous, so I suppose others can be born devoid of heart or conscience, inheriting from a degenerate ancestry sundry mean and vile propensities in their places.

Human nature is a scale that runs both up and down, and it is astonishing how far the extremes can be apart.

“How high is it possible for the same individual to rise in this scale? I imagine we are all prone to judge of people as if they were finished pictures, and to think that the defects our first scrutiny discovers will remain for all time. It is in real life much as in fiction. From first to last a villain is a villain, as if he had been created one. The heroine is a moss rose-bud by equal and unchanging necessity. Is this girl a fool, and will she remain one by any innate compulsion? By Jove! I would like to see her again in the searching light of day. I would like to follow her career sufficiently long, to discover whether nature has been guilty of the grotesque crime of associating inseparably with that fine form and those exquisite features, a hideous little mind that must go on intensifying its dwarfed deformity, until death snuffs it out. If this be true, the beautiful little monster that is bothering me so suggests a knotty problem to wiser heads than mine.”

Somewhat later his musings led him to indulge in a broad laugh.

“Possibly,” he said aloud, “she is a modern and fashionable Undine, and has never yet received a woman’s soul. The good Lord deliver me from trying to awaken it, as did the knight of old in the story, by swelling the long list of her victims. I can scarcely imagine a more pitiable and abject creature than a man (once sane and sensible) in thralldom to such a tantalizing semblance of a woman. She would no more appreciate his devotion than the jackdaw the pearl necklace it pecked at.

“I fear my Undine theory won’t answer. Stanton says she has no heart, and her face and manner confirm his words. But now I think of it, the original Undine lived a long time ago — in the age of primeval simplicity, when even cool blooded water nymphs had hearts. One is induced to think, in our age, that this organ will eventually disappear with the other characteristics of ancient and undeveloped man, and that the brain, or what stands for it, will become all in all. In the first instance the woman’s soul came in through the heart; but I suppose that in the case of a modern Undine it could enter most readily through the head. I wonder if there is something like an unawakened mind, sleeping under that broad low brow that mocks one with its fair intellectual outline. I wonder if it would be possible to set her thinking, and so eventually render her capable of receiving a woman’s soul. As it is now she seems to possess only certain disagreeable feminine propensities. One might engage in such an

experiment as a philosopher rather than a lover; or, what is more to my purpose, as an artist.

"By Jove I I would half like to make the attempt; it would give zest to one's summer vacation. Well, what is to hinder? Now I think of it she remarked that she was to spend the season at the Lake House, not far from the Hudson, a place well suited to my purposes. There are the wild highlands on one side, and a soft pastoral country on the other. I could there find abundant opportunity for varied studies in scenery, and at the same time beguile my idle hours at the hotel with this face of marvelous capabilities and possibilities. The features already exist, and would be beautiful if the girl were dead, and they could be no longer distorted by the small vices of the spirit back of them. They might become transcendently beautiful, could she in very truth receive the soul of a true and thoughtful woman — a soul such as makes my mother beautiful in her plain old age.

"I'm inclined to follow this odd fancy. That girl is a *vara avis* such as has never flown across my path before. I shall have a quarrel with nature all my life if I must believe she can fashion a face capable of meaning so much and yet actually meaning so little, and that little disgusting."

After a few moments of deep thought, he again started to his feet and commenced pacing his studio.

"Suppose," he soliloquized, "I attempt a novel bit of artistic work as my summer recreation. Suppose I take the face of this stranger instead of a piece of canvas and try to illumine it with thought, with womanly character and intelligence. If I fail, as I probably shall, no harm will be done. If her silliness and vanity are ingrained and essential parts of her nature, she shall learn that there is at least one man who can see her as she is, and whose heart is not wax on which to stamp her pretty and senseless image. If I only partially succeed, if I discern she has a mind, but so feeble that it can only half reclaim her from her weakness and folly, still something will be accomplished. Her features are so beautiful, that should they come to express even the glimmerings of that which is admirable, the face will be in part redeemed. But if by some happy miracle, as in the instance of the original Undine, a mind can be awakened that will gradually prepare a place for the soul of a true woman, I shall accomplish the best work of my life, even estimated from an artistic point of view. Possibly, for my reward, she will permit me to paint her portrait as a souvenir of our summer's acquaintance."

It did not take Van Berg long to complete his arrangements for leaving town. He wrote a line to his friend Stanton, saying that he proposed spending a few weeks in the vicinity of the Highlands on the Hudson, and that he could not say when he would be at his rooms or at home again. The afternoon of the following day found him a passenger on a fleet steamboat, and fully bent upon carrying out his odd artistic freak.

4. A Parthian Arrow

As, in the quiet June evening, Harold Van Berg glided through the shadows of the Highlands, there came a slight change over his spirit of philosophical and artistic experiment. The season comported with his early manhood, and the witching hour and the scenery were not conducive to cold philosophy. He who prided himself on his steady pulse and a devotion to art so absorbing that it even prompted his impulses and gave character to his recreation, was led to feel, on this occasion, that his mistress was vague and shadowy, and to half wish for that companionship which the most self-reliant natures have craved at times, ever since man first felt, and God knew, that it was "not good for him to be alone." If he could turn from the beauty of the sun-tipped hills and rocks and the gloaming shadows to an appreciative and sympathetic face, such as he could at least imagine the visage of Ida Mayhew might become, would not his enjoyment of the beauty he saw be doubly enhanced? In his deepest consciousness he was compelled to admit that it would. He caught a glimpse of the truth that he would never attain in his highest manhood until he had allied himself to a womanhood which he should come to believe supremely true and beautiful.

The ringing of the bell announced his landing, and in the hurry and bustle of looking after his luggage and obtaining a ticket which he had forgotten to procure, he speedily became again, in the world's estimation, and perhaps in his own, a practical, sensible man. An hour or two's ride among the hills brought him at last to the Lake House, where he selected a room that had a fine prospect of the mountains, the far distant river, and the adjacent open country, engaging it only for a brief time so that he might depart when he chose, in case the object of his pursuit should not appear, or he should weary of the effort, or despair of its success.

A few days passed, but the face which had so haunted his fancy presented no actual appearance. The scenery, however, was beautiful, the weather so perfect, and he enjoyed his rambles among the hills and his excursions on the water so thoroughly that he was already growing slightly

forgetful of his purpose and satisfied that he could enjoy himself a few weeks without the zest of artistically redeeming the face of Ida Mayhew. But one day, while at dinner, he overheard some gossip concerning a “great belle” who was to come that evening, and he at once surmised that it was the fair stranger he had seen at the concert.

At the time, therefore, of the arrival of the evening stage he observantly puffed his cigar in a corner of the piazza, and was soon rewarded by seeing the object of his contemplated experiment step out of the vehicle, with the airy grace and confidence of one who regards each new abiding-place as a scene of coming pleasures and conquests, and who feels sure every glance toward her is one of admiration. There were eyes, however, that noted disapprovingly her jaunty self-assurance and self-assertion, and when she met those eyes her complacency seemed disturbed at once, for she flushed and promptly turned her back upon them. In fact, from the time she had first seen Van Berg’s frowning face it had been a disagreeable memory, and now here it was again and frowning still. Although he sat at a distance from the landing-place, her eyes seemed drawn towards his as if by some fascination, and she already had the feeling that whenever he was present she would be conscious of his cool, critical observation.

Van Berg had scarcely time to note a rather stout and overdressed person emerge from the stage, how was evidently the young lady’s mother, when Ik Stanton, with his bays and a light country wagon, dashed up to the main entrance. Stanton was an element in the artistic problem that Van Berg had not bargained for, and what influence he would have, friendly or adverse, only time could show.

While Stanton was accompanying his aunt and cousin to the register, as the gentleman of the party, the young lady said to him:

“That horrid artist friend of yours is here. I wish he hadn’t come. Did you tell him we were coming here?”

“No, ’pon my honor.”

“I have believe you did. If so I’ll never forgive you, for the very sight of him spoils everything.”

“Come now, Coz, be reasonable. From all the indications I have seen, Van Berg is the last man to follow you here or anywhere else, even though he knew of your prospective movements. He is here, as scores of others are, for his own pleasure. So follow your mother to your room, smooth your ruffled plumage and come down to supper.”

Even Miss Mayhew's egotism could find no fault with so reasonable an explanation, and she went pouting up the stairway in anything but a complacent mood.

Stanton stepped out upon the piazza to greet his friend, saying:

"Why, Van, it is an unexpected pleasure to find you here."

"I was equally and quite as agreeably surprised to see you drive to the door. If your cousin had not come I might have helped you exercise your bays. I am doing some sketching in the vicinity."

"My cousin shall not keep you from many an idle hour behind the bays—that is, if you will not carry your antipathy so far as to cut me on account of my relationship."

"I'm not conscious of any antipathy for Miss Mayhew," replied Van Berg, with a slight shrug.

"Oh, only indifference! Well, if you will both maintain that attitude there will be no trouble about the bays or anything else. I'll smoke with you after supper."

"She evidently has an antipathy for me," mused Van Berg. "Stanton, no doubt, has told her of my uncomplimentary remarks, and possibly of the fact that I declined an introduction. That's awkward, for if I should now ask to be presented to her, she would very naturally decline, and so we might drift into something as closely resembling a quarrel as is possible in the case of two people who have never spoken to each other."

He concluded that it would be best to leave to chance the occasion which should place them on speaking terms, and tried to persuade himself that her unpromising attitude towards him was not wholly unfavorable to his purpose. He never could hope to accomplish anything without at first piquing her pride and wounding her vanity. His only fear was that this had been done too effectually, and that from first to last she would simply detest him.

In his preoccupation he forgot that the supper hour was passing, but at last started hastily for his room. As he rapidly turned a sharp corner he nearly ran into two ladies who were coming from an opposite direction, and looking up saw Mrs. Mayhew and the flushed, resentful face of her daughter. In spite of himself our even-pulsed philosopher flushed also, but instantly removing his hat he ejaculated:

"I beg your pardon," and passed on.

As Ida joined her cousin at the supper-table she whispered exultantly:

“He has spoken to me.”

“Who has spoken to you?”

“Your artist-bear.”

“How did that happen?”

“Well, he nearly ran over me—horrid thing! I suppose that’s another of his peculiar ways.”

“Did he embrace you?”

“Embrace me! Good heavens, what an escape I have had! So this too is characteristic of your friend?”

“You said he was a bear. If so, he should have given you a hug on the first opportunity.”

“He didn’t have an opportunity, and he never will.”

“Poor fellow! It will make him sick if I tell him so. Well, since it is another case of beauty and the beast, what did the beast say?”

“He said that it was very proper he should say to me after all his hatefulness. He said, ‘I beg your pardon.’”

“And then I suppose you kissed and made up.”

“Hush, you horrid thing. I noticed him no more than I would a chair that I might have stumbled over.”

“Thus displaying that sweet trait of yours—Charity. But I thought it was he that stumbled over you?”

“A musty, miserable pun! It was he, and I’m delighted it so happened, that the first time he ever spoke to me he had to ask my pardon.”

“Well, well! I’m glad it so happened, too, and that the ice is broken between you, for Van Berg is a good friend of mine, and it would be confoundedly disagreeable to have you two lowering at each other across a bloody chasm of dark, revengeful thoughts.”

“The ice isn’t broken at all. He has begged my pardon as he ought to do a hundred times; but I haven’t granted it, and I never will. What’s more, I’ll never speak to him in all my life; never, never!”

“Swear it by the ‘inconstant moon’!”

“Hush, here he comes. Ah, ‘peste!’ his table is right opposite ours.”

“Who is that tall and rather distinguished-looking gentleman that just entered?” asked Mrs. Mayhew, suddenly emerging from a pre-occupation with her supper which a good appetite had induced.

“He IS distinguished, or will be. He’s a particular friend of Ida’s, and is as rich as Croesus.”

“Three items in his favor,” said Mrs. Mayhew complacently; “but Ida has so many friends, or beaux, rather, that I can’t keep track of them. Her friends speedily become furnace-like lovers, or else escape for their lives into the dim and remote region of mere bowing acquaintanceship. I once tried to keep a list of the various and variegated gentlemen with red whiskers and black whiskers, with whiskers sandy, brown, and occasionally almost white, but borrowing a golden hue from their purses, that appeared and disappeared so rapidly, as to almost make me dizzy. I was about as bewildered as the poor Indian who sought to take the census of London by notching a stick for every passer-by he met. And now before we are through supper on the first evening of our arrival, another appears, who is evidently an eligible ‘parti’ and twice as good as the minx deserves; but in a few days he, too, will vanish into thin air, and another and different style of man will take his place. Mark my words, Ida, you will be through the woods before long, and I expect you will take up with the crookedest of crooked sticks on the farther side,” and the voluble Mrs. Mayhew resumed her supper with a zest which this dismal prospect did not by any means impair.

“If I were in search of a crabbed, crooked stick, I would not have to look farther than yonder table,” said the young lady, petulantly. “What you suppose about that dabbler in paint is about as far from the truth as your sketch of those who are my friends. That man never was my friend, and never shall be. I don’t want you to get acquainted with him or speak to him. You must not introduce him to me, for if you do, I shall be rude to him.”

“Hoity-toity! what’s the matter?”

“I don’t like him. Only Ik thinks he’s wonderful. He has probably blinded our cousin to his faults by painting a flattering likeness of the vain youth here.”

“But in suggesting another portrait that was not altogether pleasing, he sinned beyond hope,” whispered Stanton.

Ida bit her lip and frowned, recalling the obnoxious artist’s portrait of herself as giggling and flirting through one of Beethoven’s symphonies; and she said spitefully:

“He can never hope for anything from me.”

“Poor, hopeless wretch!” groaned Stanton. “How can he sip his tea yonder so complacently oblivious of his doom?”

“Mother, I’m in earnest,” resumed the daughter. “I have reasons for disliking that man, and I do not wish the annoyance of his acquaintance.”

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Mayhew; “as long as the wind blows from that cool quarter, we can keep cool till it changes. If I mistake not, he is the same gentleman who met us in the corridor. I’m sure he has fine manners.”

“If it is fine manners in a man to nearly run over two ladies, he is perfect. But I am sick of hearing about him, and especially of seeing him. I insist, Ik, that you have our table changed to yonder corner, and then arrange it so that I can sit with my back towards him.”

“I am your Caliban, but would hint, my amiable Coz, that you should not bite off your own pretty nose in spite. Must all your kin join in this bitter feud? May I not smoke with my ancient familiar?”

“Oh, be off, and if you and your friend disappear like your cigars, the world will survive.”

“I fear it is because my friend will never dissolve in sighs that you are so willing he should end in smoke.”

Having winged this Parthian arrow over his shoulder, Stanton strolled out on the piazza whither Van Berg had preceded him.

5. Spite

MISS MAYHEW apparently had not given a single glance to the artist, as he sat opposite to her and but a little out of earshot. Indeed, so well did she simulate unconsciousness of his presence, that were it not for an occasional glance from Mrs. Mayhew he might have thought himself unnoticed; but something in that lady's manner, as caught by occasional glances, led him to suspect that he was the subject of their conversation.

But Ida's indifference was, in truth, only seeming; for although she never looked directly at him, she subjected his image, which was constantly flitting across the retina of her eye, to the closest scrutiny, and no act or expression of his escaped her. She was piqued by the fact that he showed no disturbed consciousness of her presence, and that his glance was occasionally as free and natural towards her as towards any other guest of the house. His bearing annoyed her excessively, for it seemed an easy and quiet assertion of indifference and superiority—two manifestations that were to her as objectionable as unusual. Neither in looks nor manner did she appear very agreeable during the brief time she spent in the public parlors. The guests of the house, even to the ladies who foresaw an eclipse of their own charms, were compelled to admit that she was very pretty; but it was a general remark that her face did not make or leave a pleasant impression.

Van Berg surmised that Stanton's disposition to tease and banter would lead him to repeat and, perhaps, distort, anything he might say concerning the young lady, so he made no reference whatever to the Mayhews, but took pains to give the impression that he was deeply interested in the scenery.

"I shall probably be off with my sketch-book before you are up," he said; "for if I remember correctly, you are up with the lark only when you have been up over-night."

"You are the greater sinner of the two," yawned Stanton; "for if I occasionally keep unseasonable hours at night, you do so habitually in the morning. Either you are not as brilliant as usual this evening, or else the

country air makes me drowsy. Good-night. We will take a ride tomorrow, and you can sketch five miles of fence if you find that you cannot resist your mania for work.”

Perhaps Stanton HAD found his friend slightly preoccupied, for, in spite of the constraint he had put upon himself to appear as usual, this second and closer view of the face which had taken so strong a hold upon his fancy did not dissipate his first impressions. Indeed, they were deepened rather, for he saw again and more clearly the same marvelous capabilities in the features, and also their exasperating failure to make a beautiful face.

He dreamed over his project some little time after his friend had retired, and the conclusion of his reverie was:

“I must soon make some progress in my experiment or else decamp, for that girl’s contradictory face is a constant incentive to profanity.”

After seeing Mrs. Mayhew, however, he felt that justice required him to admit that the daughter was a natural and logical sequence; and in the mother he saw an element more hopelessly inartistic and disheartening than anything in the girl herself; for even if the latter could be changed, would not the shadow of the stout and dressy mother ever fall athwart the picture?

Van Berg retired with the feeling that his project of illuminating a face by awakening a mind that, as yet, had slept, did not promise very brilliantly.

Miss Mayhew tried to persuade herself that it was a relief not to see the critical artist at breakfast, nor to meet him as she strolled from the parlors to the piazza and thence to the croquet-ground, where she listlessly declined to take part in a game.

There was, in truth, great need that her mind should be awakened and her whole nature radically changed, if it were a possible thing,—a need shown by the fact the fair June morning, with its fragrance and beauty, could not light up her face with its own freshness and gladness. The various notes of the birds were only sounds; the landscape, seen for the first time, was like the map of Switzerland, that, in the days of her geography lessons, gave her as vivid an idea of the country as a dry sermon does of heaven. Although her ears and eyes were so pretty, she was, in the deepest and truest sense of the word, deaf and blind. The lack of some petty and congenial excitement made time hang heavily on her hands and clouded her face with ‘ennui.’”

Even her cousin had failed her, for he was down at the stables, making arrangements for the care of his bays and his carriage. Thus from very

idleness she fell to nursing her small spite against the man whose voice had made such harsh discord with the honeyed chorus of flattery to which she was accustomed. She wished that he would appear, and that in some way she might show how little she cared for him or his opinion; but as he did not, she at last lounged to her room and sought to kill a few hours with a novel.

Her wounded pride, however, induced her to dress quite elaborately for dinner; for she had faith in no better way of asserting her personality than that afforded by the toilet. She would teach him, by the admiration she excited in others, how mistaken he had been in his estimate, and her vanity whispered that even he could not look upon her beauty for any length of time without being won by it as so many others had been.

The change of seats having been effected, she scarcely thought it necessary to turn her back upon him while sitting at such a dim distance. Indeed she was inclined to regret the change, for now her toilet and little airs, which she imagined to be so pretty, would be lost upon him.

It would seem that they were, for Van Berg ate his dinner as quietly, and chatted as unconcernedly to those about him as if she had no existence. Never had a man ignored her so completely before, and she felt that she could never forgive him.

After the event of the day was over, and the guests were circling and eddying through the halls and parlors and out on the piazza, Ida still had the annoyance of observing that Van Berg was utterly oblivious of her as far as she could perceive. He spoke here and there with the ease and freedom of one familiar with society, and she saw more eyes following his tall form approvingly than were turned towards herself. Few gentlemen remained at the house during the week, and Miss Mayhew was not a favorite with her own sex. Those who most closely resembled her in character envied rather than admired her, and those who were better endowed and developed found fault even with her beauty from a moral point of view, as Van Berg had on artistic grounds. She consoled herself, however, with the thought that it was Saturday, and that the evening boat and trains would bring a number of gentlemen, among whom she told Stanton, exultantly, that she had "some friends"—moths rather whose wings were in danger of being singed.

As the afternoon was not sultry, Stanton had said to his friend that they could enjoy their cigars and a ride at the same time, and that he would drive around for him in a few minutes. Ida overheard the remark, and, quietly

slipping off to her room, returned with her hat and shawl. As her cousin approached she hastened down the steps, past Van Berg, exclaiming:

“Oh, thank you, Ik! How good of you! I was dying for a ride. Don’t trouble yourself. I can get in without aid,” and she sprang lightly into the buggy before her cousin could utter a word.

He turned with a look of comic dismay and deprecation to his friend, who stood laughing on the steps. Ida, also, could not resist her inclination to catch a glimpse of the artist’s chagrin and disappointment, but she was provoked beyond measure to find him acting as if Stanton were the victim rather than himself. As the sweep of the road again brought them in view of the piazza, this impression was confirmed by seeing Van Berg stroll carelessly away, complacently puffing his cigar as if he had already dismissed her from his mind.

“Really,” grumbled Stanton, “I never had beauty and happiness thrust upon me so unexpectedly before.”

“Very well then,” retorted Ida; “stop your horses and thrust me out into the road. I’d rather go back, even if I have to walk.”

“Oh, no! there is to be no going back for two hours or more. I once cured a horse of running away by making him run long after he wanted to stop.”

“You seem to be learning your friend’s hateful manners.”

“I asked you this morning if you would take a drive, and you declined.”

“I changed my mind.”

“Very abruptly, indeed, it seemed. Since you took so much trouble to annoy my friend, it’s a pity you failed.”

“I don’t believe I failed. He’s probably as cross as you are about it, only he can keep it to himself.”

“Dove-like creatiah! thanks. Will you please drive while I light a cigar?”

“I don’t like any one to smoke as near me as you are.”

“If your theory in regard to Van Berg is correct, none of us will enjoy what we like this afternoon. Of course I never smoke without a lady’s permission, but unless quieted by a cigar, I am a very reckless driver,” and he enforced his words by a sharp crack of the whip, which sent the horses off like the wind.

“Oh, stop them; smoke; do anything hateful you wish, so you don’t break my neck. I will never ride with you again, and I wish I had never come to this horrid place; and if your sneering painter does not leave soon, I will.”

“I’m afraid Van would survive, and you only suffer from your spite. But come, since you have so sweetly permitted me to smoke, I’ll make your penance as light as possible, and then we will consider matters even between us,” and away they bowled up breezy hills and down into shady valleys, Stanton stolidly smoking, and Ida nursing her petty wrath. Two flitting ghosts hastening to escape from the light of day, could not have seen less, or have felt less sympathy with the warm beautiful scenes through which they were passing. There is no insulation so perfect as that of small, selfish natures preoccupied with a pique.

When, late in the afternoon, her cousin, with mock politeness, assisted her to alight at the entrance of the hotel, Ida was compelled to feel that she had indeed been the chief victim of her own spite. but, with the usual logic of human nature, she never thought of blaming herself, and her resentment was chiefly directed against the man whose every word and glance, although he was but a stranger, had seemed to possess a power to annoy and wound from the first. She felt an almost venomous desire to retaliate; but he appeared invulnerable in his quiet and easy superiority, while she, who expected, as a matter of course, that all masculine thoughts should follow her admiringly, had been compelled to see that his critical eyes had detected that in her which had awakened his contempt.

“I’ll teach him this evening, when my gentlemen friends arrive, how ridiculous are his airs,” she muttered, as she went to her room and sought to enhance her beauty by all the arts of which she was the mistress. “I’ll show him that there are plenty who can see what he cannot, or will not. Because he is an artist, he need not think he can face me out of the knowledge of my beauty, the existence of which I have been assured of by so many eyes and tongues ever since I can remember.”

When she came down to await the arrival of the stages and carriages, she was indeed radiant with all the beauty of which she was then capable. Her neck and shoulders, with their exquisite lines and curves, were more suggestively revealed than hidden by a slight drapery of gauze-like illusion, and her white rounded arms were bare. She trod with the light airy grace of youth, and yet with the assured manner of one who is looking forward to the familiar experiences of a reigning belle.

Van Berg, from his quiet corner of observation, was compelled to admit that, seen at her present distance, she almost embodied his best dreams, and might do so wholly were there less of the fashionable art of the hour, and

more of nature in her appearance. But he knew well that if she came nearer, and spoke so as to reveal herself, the fatal defect in her beauty would be as apparent as a black line running athwart the sculptured face of a Greek goddess. The only question with him was, did the ominous deformity lie so near the surface that it could be refined away, or was it ingrained into the very material of her nature, thus forming an essential part of herself? He feared that the latter might be true, or that the remedy was far beyond his skill or power; but every glance he caught of the girl, as with her mother she paced the farther end of the piazza, deepened his regret, as an artist, that so much beauty should be in degrading bondage to a seeming fool.

6. Reckless Words and Deeds

LIGHT CARRIAGES now began to wheel rapidly up to the entrance, and were followed soon by the lumbering and heavily-laden stages. Joyous greetings and merry repartee made the scene pleasant to witness even by one who, like Van Berg, had no part in it. Stanton, who at this moment joined him, drew his special attention to a thin and under-sized gentleman somewhat past middle age, who mounted the steps with a tread that was as inelastic as his face was devoid of animation.

“There is poor Uncle Mayhew,” remarked the young man indifferently. “I suppose I must go and speak to him.”

“Mr. Mayhew?” said Van Berg, in some surprise. “You have not spoken of him before. I was not aware that there was any such person in existence.”

“You are not to blame for that,” replied Stanton with a shrug. “You might have been one of the friends of the family and scarcely have learned the fact. Indeed, poor man, he only about half exists, for he has been so long overshadowed by his fashionable wife and daughter, that he is but a sickly plant of a man.”

Van Berg saw that the greeting received by Mr. Mayhew from his wife and daughter was very undemonstrative to say the least, and that then the gentleman quickly disappeared, as if fearing that he might be in the way.

“From my very limited means of judging,” Van Berg remarked, “I cannot see anything more objectionable in the head of the family than in the other members.”

“Your phrase, ‘head of the family,’ as applied to Mr. Mayhew, makes me smile. His name figures at the head of the large family bills, but scarcely elsewhere with much prominence. You will soon learn, if you remain here, that Mr. Mayhew imbibes rather more than is good for him, so I may as well mention the disagreeable fact at once. But to do the poor man justice, I suppose he drinks to keep his spirits up to the ordinary level, rather than from any hope of becoming a little jolly occasionally. Why my aunt married him I scarcely know; and yet I have often thought that he might be a very

different did she not so quench him by a manner all her own. As it is, his life seems to consist of toiling and moiling all the week, and of stolidly and joylessly soaking himself into semi-stupidity on Sunday. If this wretched state of affairs could be kept secret I would not mention it even to you, my intimate friend; but, since it continues no secret wherever they happen to remain for any length of time, I would rather tell you the exact truth at once, than permit you to guess at it through distorted rumors. As you artists occasionally express yourselves concerning pictures, so I suppose you will think that this family, with all its wealth is quite lacking in tone.”

“Well, Stanton, I must admit that I find myself chiefly inclined towards the subdued and neutral-tinted Mr. Mayhew. If you have a chance I wish you would introduce me to him.”

“Are you in earnest?”

“Certainly.”

“Then I’ll ask him to smoke with us after supper. Well, Van, I congratulate you again that your correct and cultivated taste enabled you to see the fatal flaw in my cousin’s beauty. If you had been bewitched by her, and had insisted on imagining (as so many others have done) that her faultless features were the reflex of what she is or could become in mind and character, I might have had a good deal of trouble with you; for you are a mulish fellow when you get a purpose in your head. I don’t care how badly singed the average run of moths become. You may see two or three fluttering around to-night, if you care to look on, but I wish no friend of mine to make sport, at serious cost to himself, for yonder incorrigible coquette, if she is my cousin. But after what you have seen and now know, you would be safe enough, even if predisposed to folly. The little minx! but I punished her well for her spite this afternoon.”

“O most prudent Ulysses! you have indeed filled my ears with wax. I thank you all the same as if my danger were greater.”

“Well, view them all with such charity as you can. I hope you were not very much annoyed by the loss of your ride. The young lady will not be in a hurry to play such a trick again. I’ll join you after supper in this your favorite and out-of-the-way corner.”

“Was beauty ever environed within and without by such desperately prosaic and inartistic surroundings?” mused Van Berg. “It glistens like a lost jewel in an ash-barrel; or, more correctly, it is like an exquisite flower that nature has perversely made the outcome of a rank and poisonous vine. Of

course the flower is poisonous also, and as soon as its first delicate bloom is over, will grow as rank and repulsive as the vine that bears it. Like produces like; and with such parentage, what hope is there for her? I am glad no one suspects my absurd project; for every hour convinces me of its impracticability. The ancient Undine was a myth, and my modern Undine might be called a white lie, but one that will grow darker every day. At a distance she presents the semblance of a very fair woman, but I have been unable to detect a single element yet that will prevent her from developing into an old and ugly hag, in spite of all that art and costume can do for her.”

After supper Stanton brought Mr. Mayhew to Van Berg’s retired nook, and the artist gave the hand of the weary, listless man such a cordial pressure as to cause him a slight surprise, but after satisfying his faint interest by a brief glance, he turned the back of his chair towards all the gay company, although it contained his wife and daughter, puffed mechanically at his cigar, and looked vacantly into space. Before the evening was over, however, Van berg had drawn from him several quite animated remarks, and secured the promise that he would join him and Stanton in a ramble immediately after breakfast the following morning.

Nor had the young man been oblivious of the daughter who now seemed in her native element. From his dusky point of observation he caught frequent glimpses of her, now whirling through a waltz in the parlor, now talking and laughing in a rather pronounced way from the midst of a group of gentlemen, and again coquettishly stealing off with one of them through the moonlit walks. Her manner, whether assumed or real, was that of extravagant gaiety. Occasionally she seemed to glance towards their obscure corner, but neither she nor her mother came to seek the man who had been toiling all the week to maintain their idle luxury.

As Mrs. Mayhew and her daughter were preparing for dinner on the following day, Mr. Mayhew entered with a brisker step than usual.

“Why, father, where have you been?” Ida asked, surprised by the fact that he had not been drinking and dozing in his room all the morning.

“I have been shown a glimpse of something that I have not seen for many years.”

“Indeed, and what is that?”

“Beauty that seemed beautiful.”

“That’s a compliment to us,” remarked Mrs. Mayhew, acidly.

“I mean the kind of beauty which does one good and makes a man wish that he were a man.”

“Do you mean an unmarried man?” said his wife with a discordant laugh.

“Probably your own wishes suggested that speech, madam,” replied the husband, bitterly.

“And pray, where did you find so much beauty?” said Mrs. Mayhew, ignoring his last remark.

“On a breezy hill-side. It’s a kind of beauty, too, that one can enjoy without paying numberless bills for its enhancement. I refer to that of the scenery.”

“Oh,” remarked Mrs. Mayhew, indifferently; “it would have been more to your credit if you had gone to church instead of tramping around the fields.”

“I think the fields have done more for me than church for you.”

“Why so?” was the sharp response.

“They have at least kept me from indulging in one bad habit. I am sober.”

“They do not keep you from making ill-natured remarks,” said Mrs. Mayhew, sailing out of the room fully bedizened for the solemnity of dinner.

“You say you were ‘shown’ all this beauty,” remarked Ida, who was giving the finishing touches to her toilet before a large mirror, and by whom the frequent bickerings of her parents were scarcely noted. “Who officiated as showman?”

“A man who understands the beauties of a landscape so well that he could make them visible even to my dim eyes, and attractive to my deadened and besotted nature. I’d give all the world if I could be young, strong, and hopeful like him, again. It was good of him—yes, good of him, to try to cheer a stranger with pleasant thoughts and sights. I suppose you are acquainted with Mr. Van Berg, since he is a friend of Ik’s?”

“No, I’m not,” was the sharp reply; “nor do I wish to be.”

“Why not?” asked Mr. Mayhew in some surprise.

“It’s sufficient that I don’t like him.”

“He’s not your style, I suppose you mean to say?”

“Indeed he is not.”

“So much worse for your style, Ida.”

She was sweeping petulantly from the room when her father added with a depth of feeling very unlike his wonted apathy: "O, Ida, it were better that all three of us had never been born than to live as we do! Your life and your mother's is froth, and mine is mud. How I hated it all this bright June morning, as Mr. Van Berg gave me a glimpse into another and better world!"

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Van Berg presumed to criticise my mode of life?" Ida asked with a darkening face.

"Oh, no, no! How small and egotistical all your ideas are! He never mentioned you, and probably never thought of you. He only took a little pains that a tired and dispirited man might see and feel the eternal beauty and freshness of nature, as one might give, in passing, a cup of water to a traveler."

"I don't see what reason you have for feeling and appearing so forlornly, thus asking for sympathy from strangers, as it were, and causing it to seem as if we were making a martyr of you. As for this artist, with his superior airs, I detest him. He never loses a chance to annoy and mortify me. I've no doubt he hoped you would come home and tell us, as you have, how much better he was than——"

"There, there, quit that kind of talk or I'll be drunk in half an hour." said her father, harshly. "If you had the heart of a woman, let alone that of a daughter, you would thank the man who had unwittingly kept me from making a beast of myself for one day at least. Go down to your dinner, I'm in no mood for eating."

She went without a word, but with a more severe compunction of conscience than she had ever felt before in her life. Her father's face and words smote her with a keen reproach, piercing the thick armor of her vanity and selfishness. She saw, for a moment, how unnatural and unlovely she must appear to him, in spite of her beauty, and the thought crossed her mind:

"Mr. Van Berg despises me because he sees me in the same light. How I hate his cold, critical eyes!"

Even at his far remove Van Berg could see that she was ill at ease during the dinner hour. There would be times of forced and unnatural gayety, followed by a sudden cloud upon the brow and an abstracted air, as if her thoughts had naught to do with the chattering group around her. It would

also appear that her appetite was flagging unusually, and once or twice he thought she darted an angry look towards him.

As if something were burdening her mind, she at last left the table hastily, before the others were through with their dessert.

As may be surmised, she sought her father's room. Receiving no response to her knock, she entered and saw at a glance the confirmation of her fears. Her father sat in an arm-chair with his head upon his breast. A brandy bottle stood on the table beside him. At the sound of her step he looked up for a moment with heavy eyes, and mumbled:

“He ain't of your style, is he? Nor of mine, either. Froth and mud!”

Ida gave a sudden stamp of rage and disgust, and whirled from the room.

Van Berg happened to see her as she descended to the main hall-way, and her face was so repulsive as to suggest to him the lines from Shakespeare:

“In nature there's no blemish, but the mind; None can be called deformed, but the unkind; Virtue is beauty; but the beauteous—evil Are empty trunks, o'er flourished by the devil.”

That afternoon and evening her reckless levity and open coquetry secured unfavorable comment not only from the artist, but from others far more indifferent, whose attention she half compelled by a manner that did not suggest spring violets.

Van Berg was disgusted. He was less versed in human nature than art, and did not recognize in the forced and obtrusive gayety the effort to stifle the voice of an aroused conscience. Even to her blunted sense of right it seemed a hateful and disgraceful truth that a stranger had helped her father towards manhood, and that she had destroyed the transient and salutary influence. Her complacency had been disturbed from the time her cousin had repeated Van Berg's remark, “I could not speak civilly to a lady that I had just seen giggling and flirting through one of Beethoven's finest symphonies;” and now, through an unexpected chain of circumstances, she had, for the first time in her life, reached a point of self-disgust and self-loathing. Such a moral condition is evil's opportunity when a disposition towards penitence or reform is either absent or resisted. The thought, therefore, of her father's drunkenness that day, and of herself as the immediate cause, made her so wretched and reckless that she tried to forget her miserable self in excitement, as he had in lethargy. Even her mother chided her, asking if she did not “remember the day.”

“Indeed, I shall have occasion to remember it,” was her ambiguous answer; “but Mondays in the country are always blue, and I’ll do my repenting then. If I were a good Catholic I’d hunt up a priest tomorrow.”

“I’ll be your father-confessor today,” said a black-eyed young man, twirling his mustache.

“You, Mr. Sibely? You would lead me into more naughtiness than you would help me out of, twice over. For my confessor I would choose an ancient man who had had his dinner. What a comfortable belief it is, to be sure! All one has to do is to buzz one’s sins through a grating (that is like an indefinite number of key-holes) to a dozing old gentleman inside, and then away with a heart like a feather, to load up again. I’d bless the man who could convert me to a Papist.”

But she hated the man who had made her feel the need of absolution, and who seemed an inseparable part of all her disagreeable experiences. Although he appeared to avoid any locality in which she remained, she observed his eyes turned towards her more than once before the day closed, and it exasperated her almost beyond all endurance to believe that their expression was only that of contempt.

She might have been a little better pleased, perhaps, if she had known that she made the artist almost as uncomfortable as herself. Never before had there seemed to him so great a contrast between her beauty and herself, her features and her face. The latter could not fail to excite his increased disgust, while the former was so great that he found himself becoming resolutely bent on redeeming them from what seemed a horrid profanation. In accordance with one of his characteristics, the more difficult the project seemed, the more obstinately fixed became his purpose to discover whether she had a mind of sufficient calibre to transform her into what she might be, in contrast with what she was. The more he saw of her the more his interest as an artist, and, indirectly, as a student of character, was deepened. If she had no mind worth naming he would give the problem up to the solution of time, which, however, promised nothing but a gradual fading away of all beauty, and the intensifying of inward deformity until fully reproduced in outward ugliness.

7. Another Feminine Problem

EARLY ON MONDAY MORNING, Mr. Mayhew hastened from the breakfast-table to the stage. His wife and daughter were not down to see him off, and he seemed desirous of shunning all recognition. With the exception that that his eyes were heavy and bloodshot from his debauch, his face had the same dreary, apathetic expression which Van Berg had noted on his arrival. And so he went back to his city office, where, fortunately for him, mechanical routine brought golden rewards, since he was in no state for business enterprise.

From his appearance, Van Berg could not help surmising what had been his condition the previous day. Indeed Stanton, with a contemptuous shrug, had the same as said on Sabbath evening, that his uncle had “dropped into the old slough.” Although neither of the young men knew how great an impetus Ida had given her father towards such degradation, they both felt that if his wife and daughter had had the tact to detect and appreciate his better mood, produced by the morning ramble, they might have sustained him, and given him at least one day that he could remember without shame and discouragement.

Van Berg found something pathetic in Mr. Mayhew’s weary and disheartened manner. It was like that of a soldier who has suffered defeat, but who goes on with his routine in a mechanical, spiritless manner, because there is nothing else to do. He seemed to have no hope, nor even a thought of retrieving the past and of reasserting his own manhood. Accustomed as the young artist had ever been to a household in which affection, allied to high-bred courtesy and mutual respect, made even homely daily life noble and beautiful, he could not look on the discordant Mayhew family with the charity, or the indifference, of those who have seen more of the wrong side of life. Had there been only poor, besmirched Mr. Mayhew, and stout, dressy, voluble Mrs. Mayhew, he would never have glanced towards them the second time; but his artist’s eyes had fallen on the contradictory being that linked them together. Morally and mentally she

seemed one with her parent stock; but her beauty, in some of its aspects, was so marvelous, that the desire to redeem it from its hateful and grotesque associations grew stronger every hour.

Instead, therefore, of going off upon solitary rambles, as he had done hitherto, he mingled more frequently in the amusements of the guests of the house, with the hope he would thus be brought so often in contact with the subject of his experiment, that her pique would wear away sufficiently to permit them to meet on something like friendly terms.

As far as the other guests were concerned, he had not trouble. They welcomed him to croquet, to walking and boating excursions, and to their evening games and promenades. Such of the ladies as danced were pleased to secure him as a partner. Indeed, from the dearth of gentlemen during the week, he soon found himself more in demand than he cared to be, and saw that even the landlord was beginning to rely upon him to keep up a state of pleasurable effervescence among his patrons. His languid friend, Stanton, was not a little surprised, and at last remarked:

“Why, Van, what has come over you? I never saw you in the role of a society fellow before!”

But his unwonted courtesies seemed wholly in vain. He propitiated and won all save one, and that one was the sole object of his effort. While all others smiled, her face remained cold and averted. Indeed she took such pains to ignore and avoid him, that it was generally recognized that there was a difference between them, and of course there was an endless amount of gossiping surmise. As the hostility seemed wholly on the lady’s side, Van Berg appeared to the better advantage, and Ida was all the more provoked as she recognized the fact.

She now began to wish that she had taken a different course. As Van Berg pursued his present tactics, her feminine intuition was not so dull but that she was led to believe he wished to make her acquaintance. Of course there was, to her mind, but one explanation of this fact—he was becoming fascinated, like so many others.

“If I were only on speaking and flirting terms,” she thought (the two relations were about synonymous in her estimation), “I might draw him on to a point which would give me a chance of punishing him far more than is now possible by sullenly keeping aloof. As it is, it looks to these people here as if he had jilted me instead of I him, and that I am sulking over it.”

But she had entangled herself in the snarl of her own previous words and manner. She had charged her mother and cousin to permit no overtures of peace; and once or twice, when mine host, in his good-natured, off-hand manner, had sought to introduce them, she had been so blind and deaf to his purpose as to appear positively rude. Her repugnance to the artist had become a generally recognized fact; and she had built up such a barrier that she could not break it down without asking for more help than was agreeable to her pride. But she chafed inwardly at her false position, and at the increasing popularity of the object of her spite.

Even her mother at last formed his acquaintance; and, as the artist listened to the garrulous lady for half an hour with scarcely an interruption, she pronounced him one of the most entertaining of men.

As Mrs. Mayhew was chanting his praises that evening, Ida broke out petulantly:

“Was there ever such a gad-fly as this artist! He pesters me from morning till night.”

“Pesters you! I never saw a lady so severely let alone as you are by him. Whatever is the cause of your spite it seems to harm only yourself, and I should judge from your remark that it disturbs you much more than you would have it appear—certainly far more than it does him.”

There was no soothing balm in these words, as may well be supposed; and yet the impression grew upon Ida that the artist would be friendly if he could; and the belief strengthened with him also that she took far too much pains to manifest what she would have others think to be mere indifference and dislike, and he intercepted besides, with increasing frequency, furtive glances towards himself. So much ice had accumulated between them, however that neither knew how it was to be broken.

One day, about the middle of the week, Van Berg found a stranger seated opposite to him at the dinner table. His first impression was, that the lady was not very young and that her features were quite plain; but before the meal was over he concluded that her face was decidedly interesting, and that the suggestion of age had been made by maturity of character and the impress which some real and deep experience gives to the countenance, rather than by the trace of years.

While yet a stranger, the expression of her blue eyes, as she glanced around, was so kindly that she at once won the good-will of all who encountered them. This genial, friendly light in her eyes seemed a marked

characteristic. It was so different from the obtrusive, forward manner with which some seek to make acquaintances, that it would not have suggested a departure from modest reserve, even to the most cynical. It rather indicated a heart aglow with gentle feeling and genial good-will, like a maple-wood fire on a hospitality hearth, that warms all who come within the sphere of its influence.

Van Berg was naturally reserved, and slow to make new acquaintances. But before he had stolen many glances of the face opposite him he began to wish for the privilege of speaking to her—a wish that was increased by the fact that they were alone at the table, the other guests who usually occupied the chairs not having returned from their morning drive. She did not look at him in particular, nor appear to be in the least struck by his “distingue” air, as Ida had been before she was blinded by prejudice; but she looked out upon the world at large with such a friendly aspect that he was sure she had something pleasant to say. He was therefore well pleased when at last the landlord bustled up in his brusque way and said:

“Mr. Van Berg, permit me to make you acquainted with Miss Burton. She has had the faith to put herself under my charge for a few weeks, and I shall reward her by sharing the responsibility with you, who seem blessed with the benevolent desire of giving us all a good time,” and then he bustled off to look after some other matter which required his attention during the critical hour of dinner.

Miss Burton acknowledged the young man’s bow without a trace of affectation or reserve.

“I shall try not to prove a burden to either of you,” she said, with a smile.

“I have already discovered that you will not be,” said Van Berg, “and was wishing for an introduction.”

“I hope your wishes may always find so ready a fulfillment.”

“That’s a kindly wish, Miss Burton, but a vain one.”

“Were we misanthropical people, Mr. Van Berg, we might sigh, ‘and such are human wishes generally.’”

“One is often tempted to do that anyway, even when not especially prone to look askance at fortune.”

“There is an easy way of escaping that temptation.”

“How?”

“Do not form many wishes.”

“Have you very few wishes?”

With a slight and piquant motion of her head she replied, "I was only giving a bit of trite advice. It's asking a great deal to require that one should both preach and practice."

"I think you are possessed by one wish which swallows up most others," said Van Berg, a little abruptly.

A visible pallor overspread her face, and she drew back perceptibly as one might shrink from a blow.

"You know how strong first impressions are," resumed Van Berg hastily, "and the thought has passed through my mind that you might be so preoccupied in wishing good things for others as to quite forget yourself."

"If one could be completely occupied in that way," she said, with a faint smile which suggested rather than revealed a vista of her past experience, "one might have little occasion to wish for anything for self. But, Mr. Van Berg, only we poor unreasoning women put much faith in first impressions; and you know how often they mislead even us, who are supposed to have safe instincts."

"Do they often mislead you?"

"Indeed, sir," she replied, with a merry twinkle in her eye, "I think you must have learned the questions in the catechism, if not the answers."

Van Berg bit his lip. Here was a suggestion of a thorn in the sweetbrier he believed he had discovered.

"Now see how far I am astray," she resumed with a frankness which had in it no trace of familiarity. "It is my impression you are a lawyer."

At this Van Berg laughed outright and said: "You are indeed mistaken. I have no connection with the influential class whose business it is to make and evade the laws. I am only one among the humble masses who aim to obey them. But perhaps you think your intuition goes deeper than surface facts and that I OUGHT to have been a cross-questioner."

"I am quite sure my intuition is correct in thinking that you would not be very cross about it."

"Perhaps not, if disarmed by so smiling a face as yours."

The others, who had been delayed by a longer ride than usual, now entered and took the vacant chairs around the table. Van Berg felt sufficiently acquainted with them to introduce Miss Burton, for he was curious to observe whether she would make the same impression on them as he had been conscious of himself.

They bowed with the quiet, well-bred manner of society people, but were at first inclined to pay little heed to the plainly dressed and rather plain appearing young stranger. As one and another, however, glanced towards her, something about her seemed to linger in their memories and cause them to look again. The lady next to her offered a commonplace remark, chiefly out of politeness, and received so pleasant a reply in return that she turned her thoughts as well as her eyes to see who it really was that had made it. Then another spoke, and the response led her to speak again and again; and soon the entire party were describing their drive and living over its pleasantest features; and before the meal ended they were all gathered, metaphorically, around the mystical, maple-wood fire that burned on the hearth of a nature that seemed so hospitable and kindly as to have no other mission than to cheer and entertain.

“Who is that little brown thrush of a woman that you were so taken with at dinner?” asked Stanton, as they were enjoying a quiet smoke in their favorite corner of the piazza.

“Good for you, Stanton. I never knew you to be so appreciative before. Your term quite accurately describes her. She is both shy and reserved, but not diffident or awkward in the least. Indeed her manner might strike some as being peculiarly frank. But there is something back of it all; for young as she undoubtedly is, her face suggests to me some deep and unusual experience.”

“Jupiter Ammon! What an abyss of mystery, surmise, and metaphysics you fell into while I was eating my dinner! I used the phrase ‘brown thrush,’ only in reference to her dress and general homeliness.”

“Oh, I beg your pardon! I take all back about your nice appreciation of character. I now grasp the whole truth—your attention wandered sufficiently from your dinner to observe that she wore a brown dress, and the one fact about the thrush that has impressed you is that it is brown. ‘Here be truths’ which leave nothing more to be said.”

“You imaginative fellows are often ridiculously astray on the other tack, and see a thousand-fold more than exists. But it’s a pity you could not read all there was in this young woman’s face, for it was certainly PLAIN enough. At this rate you will be asking our burly landlord to unbosom himself, insisting that he has a ‘silent sorrow’ tucked away somewhere under his ample waistcoat.”

“His troubles, like yours, are banished by the dinner hour. I recognize your feeble witticism about her plain face, and forgive you because I thought it plain also at first, but when she came to speak and smile it ceased to be plain. I do not say she has had trouble, but she has had some experience in her past history which neither you nor I could understand.”

“Quite likely; the measles, for instance, which I never had to my knowledge. Possibly she has had a lover who was not long in finding a prettier face, and so left her, but not so disconsolate that she could not smile bewilderingly upon you.”

“Come now, Stanton, I’ll forewarn and forearm you. I confidently predict that the voice of this brown thrush will lure you out of a life which, to put it mildly, is a trifle matter-of-fact and material. You have glanced at her, but you have not seen her yet. Mark my words; your appetite will flag before many weeks pass.”

“I wish I could pin you down to a large wager on this absurdity.”

“I agree to paint you a picture if my prediction fails.”

“And to finish it within a natural lifetime?” said Stanton, with much animation.

“To finish as promptly as good work can be done.”

“Pardon me, Van. You had too much wine for dinner; I don’t want to take advantage of you.”

“I did not have any.”

“In order to carry out this transaction honestly, am I expected to make conscious and patient effort to come under the influence of this maiden in brown, who has had some mysterious complaint in the past, about which ‘neither you, nor I, nor anybody knows,’ as the poet saith: or, like the ancient mariner, will she ‘hold me with her glittering eye?’”

“You have only to jog on in your old ways until she wakes you up and makes a man of you.”

“I surely am dreaming; for never did the level-headed Van Berg talk such arrant nonsense before. If she seems to you such a marvel, why don’t you open your own mouth and let the ripe cherry drop into it.”

“One reason will answer, were there no others—she wouldn’t drop. If you ever win her, my boy, you will have to bestir yourself.”

“I’d rather win the picture. Let me see—I know the very place in my room where I shall hang it.”

“You are a little premature. That chicken is not yet hatched, and you may feel like hanging yourself in the place of the picture before the summer is over.”

“Let me wrap your head in ice-water, Van. There’s mine host—O, Mr. Burleigh!” he cried to the landlord, who at that moment happened to cross the piazza; “please step here. My friend Mr. Van Berg has been strangely fascinated by the stranger in brown whom you, with some deep and malicious design, placed opposite to him at the table. What are her antecedents, and who are her uncles? I take a friendly interest in this young man. Indeed, I’m sort of a guardian angel to him, having saved his life many a time.”

“Saved his life!” ejaculated the landlord. “How?”

“By quenching his consuming genius with good dinners. But come—solve for me this riddle in brown. My friend usually gives but little heed to the feminine conundrums that smilingly ask to be answered, but for some occult reason he is in a state of sleepless interest over this one, and I know that his waistcoat is selling with gratitude to me for having the courage to ask these questions.”

“He is speaking several words for himself to one for me,” said Van Berg; “and yet I admit that her face and manner struck me very pleasantly.”

“Well, she has a pleasant little phiz, now hasn’t she, Mr. Van Berg? I don’t wonder Mr. Stanton was taken by her, for I was myself. It’s but little I can tell you, save that she is a teacher in one of the New England female colleges, and that she brings letters to me from the most respectable parties, who introduce her as a lady in the best sense of the word. Further than that nothing was written, nor do I know anything concerning her. But any one who can’t see that she’s a perfect lady is no judge of the article.”

“I will stake any amount on that, basing my belief only on the first impression of one interview,” added Van Berg, decidedly.

“You now see how deeply my friend is impressed,” said Stanton, with a satirical smile. “Thanks, Mr. Burleigh; we will not detain you any longer.”

When alone again, he resumed, with an expression of disgust:

“A ‘New England FEMALE college!’ How aptly he words it. If there’s any region on the face of the earth that I detest, it’s New England; and if there is one type of women that I’d shun as I would ‘ever angry bears,’ it’s a New England school-ma’am.”

“‘But if thy flight lay toward the raging sea’ of a restless, all-absorbing passion, ‘Thou’dst meet the bear I’ the mouth,’ as you will try to in this case. You will be ready to barter your ears for a kiss before very long.”

“It will be after they have grown prodigiously long and hairy in some transformation scene like that in which the immortal Bottom was the victim.”

“Your illustration tells against you, for it was only after his appropriate transformation that Bottom saw the fairy queen; but in your case the desire to ‘munch’ will be banned.”

“Come, Van, we have had enough chaff on this topic, already worn threadbare. I now know all about the mysterious complaint, the impress of which on the face of the school-ma’am has so dazed you. It’s a New England female college—a place where they give a razor-like edge to the wits of Yankee women, already too sharp, and develop in attenuated maidens the hatchet faces of their sires. You may as well set about that picture at once, whenever you feel in the mood for work.”

“I admit that I have been speaking nonsense, and yet you may find many grains of truth in my chaff, nevertheless.”

“But is my picture to end in chaff?”

“I will stand by my promise. If I lose, perhaps I’ll paint you the school-ma’am’s portrait.”

“Then we would both lose, for I would have no earthly use for that.”

“Well, I will paint what you wish, within reason.”

“I’m content, and with good reason, for never did I have such absurd good luck before.”

“Ha! look yonder—quick!”

Both the young men started to their feet, but before they could spring forward, the event, which had so suddenly aroused them, was an accomplished fact.

Both drew a long breath of relief as they looked at each other, and Van Berg remarked, with some emphasis:

“Act first, scene first, and it does not open like a comedy either.”

8. Glimpses of Tragedy

STANTON THREW AWAY his half-burned cigar—an act which proved him strongly moved—and strode rapidly towards the main entrance near which a little group had already gathered, and among the others, Ida Mayhew. Not a hair of anybody's head was hurt, but an event had almost occurred which would have more than satisfied Stanton's spite against 'Yankee school-ma'ams,' and would also have made him very miserable for months to come.

He had ordered his bays to the farther end of the piazza where they were smoking, as he proposed to take Van Berg out for a drive. His coachmen liked to wheel around the corner of the hotel and past the main entrance in a dashing showy style, and thus far had suffered no rebuke from his master for this habit. But on this occasion a careless nursery maid, neglectful of her charge, had left a little child to toddle to the center of the carriage drive and there it had stood, balancing itself with the uncertain footing characteristic of first steps. Even if it could have seen the rapidly approaching carriage that was hidden by the angle of the building, its baby feet could not have carried it out of harm's way in time, and it is more than probable that its inexperience would have prevented any sense of danger.

But help was at hand in the person of one who never seemed so preoccupied with self as to lose an opportunity to serve others.

Two of the ladies, who had casually formed Miss Burton's acquaintance at dinner, still lingered in the door-way to talk with her, wondering in the mean time why they remained so long, and meaning to break away every moment, but the expression of the young lady's eyes was so pleasant, and her manner, more than anything she said, so like spring sunshine that they were still standing in the door-way when the rumble and rush of the carriage was heard. The others did not notice these sounds, but Miss Burton, whose eyes had been following the child with an amused interest, suddenly broke off in the midst of a sentence, listened a second, then swiftly springing down the steps, darted towards the child.

Quick as she had been it seemed as if she would be too late, for, with cries of horror, the startled ladies on the piazza saw the horses coming so rapidly that it appeared that both the maiden and the child must be trampled under their feet. And so they would have been, had Miss Burton sought to snatch up the child and return, but with rare presence of mind she carried the child across the carriage track to its farther side, thus making the most of the impetus with which she had rushed to the rescue.

The exclamations of the ladies drew many eyes to the scene, and all held their breath as the horses dashed past, the driver vainly endeavoring to pull them up in time. Having passed, even Stanton was compelled to admit that the “school-ma’am” appeared to very great advantage as she stood panting, and with heightened color, holding in her arms the laughing child that seemed to think that the whole excitement was created for its amusement. She was about to restore the child to its nurse quietly, who now came bustling up with many protestations, when she was arrested by a loud voice exclaiming:

“Don’t let that hateful creature touch my child again—give him to me,” and a lady, who had been drawn to the scene by the outcry, ran down the steps, and snatching the child, almost devoured him with kisses. Then, turning to the trembling nurse, she said harshly:

“Begone; I never wish to see your face again. Had it not been for this lady, my child would have been killed through your carelessness. Excuse me, Miss—Miss—”

“Miss Burton,” said the young lady quietly.

“Excuse my show of feeling; but you can’t realize the service you have done us. Bertie is our only child, and we just idolize him. I’m so agitated, I must go to my room.”

When the lady had disappeared, Miss Burton turned to the sobbing nurse and said:

“Will you promise me to be careful in the future if I intercede for you?”

“Dade, Miss, an’ I will.”

“Come to me, then, after supper. In the mean time remain where your mistress can summon you should she need your services, or be inclined to forgive you of her own accord,” and leaving the crude and offending jumble of humanity much comforted, she returned to the piazza again.

Of course many pressed around her with congratulations and words of commendation. Van Berg was much interested in observing how she would

receive this sudden gush of mingled honest praise and extravagant flattery, for he recognized that the occasion would prove a searching and delicate test of character for which there was no time to prepare. She did not listen to their words with deprecatory smirk, nor with the pained expression of those sensitive souls to whom hearty words and demonstrations are like rough winds; nor was there a trace of exultation and self-complacency in her bearing. Van Berg thought that her manner was peculiarly her own, for she looked into the faces around her with frank gladness, and her unconsciousness of herself can be, perhaps, best suggested by her own words.

“How fortunate it was,” she said, “that I stood where I did, and happened to be looking at the child. If somebody had not been at hand it might have gone hard with the little fellow. Not that I think he would have been killed, but he might have been maimed or disfigured in a way that would have caused him pain and mortification all his life.”

“Miss Burton, I take my hat to you,” said Van Berg, laughing. “Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you all appreciate the force of Miss Burton’s phrase, ‘somebody,’ since it implies that any one of us would have shown like courage and presence of mind if we had only been ‘at hand,’ or had stood where she did. Really Miss Burton, you are like smiling fortune, and ‘thrust upon’ us ‘greatness’ and heroism.”

“Mr. Van Berg, you are laughing at me, and your quotation suggests that other Shakespearean words are in your mind—to wit, ‘much ado about nothing.’ Now if YOU had had the opportunity you would have achieved the rescue in a way that would have been heroic and striking. Instead of scrambling out of the way with the child, like a timid woman, you would have rushed upon the horses, seized them by their heads, thrown them back upon their haunches, and while posing in that masterful attitude, you would have called out in stentorian tones—‘Remove the child.’”

All laughed at this unexpected sally, and no one enjoyed it more than Stanton, who, a little before, had been excessively angry at his coachman, and, like the mother of the child, had summarily dismissed the poor fellow from his service. Quite forgetful of his uncomplimentary words concerning “Yankee school-ma’ams” in general, and this one in particular, he now stood near, and was regarding her not only with approval but with admiration. Her ready reply to Van Berg pleased him exceedingly, especially as the rising color in the face of his self-possessed friend

indicated a palpable hit. But the artist was equal to the occasion, and quickly replied as one who had felt a slight spur.

“I fear you are in part correct, Miss Burton. Instead of deftly saving the child and taking both it and myself out of harm’s way, after your quiet womanly fashion, I should, no doubt, have ‘rushed upon the horses and seized them by their heads.’ But I fear your striking tableau, in which I appeared to such advantage, would have been wholly wanting. I could not have stopped the horses in time; the child would have been run over and killed; the big, fat coroner would have come and sat on it and have made us all, who witnessed the scene, swear over the matter; the poor mother would have gone to the lunatic asylum; the father would have committed suicide; the nursery maid would have—obtained another place and been the death of an indefinite number of other innocent babies; and last, but not least, I should have been dragged and trampled upon, my legs and arms broken, and perhaps my head, and so you would all have had to take care of me—and you know a cross bear is a pleasanter subject than a sick man.”

“Oh, what a chapter of horrors!” exclaimed several ladies in chorus.

“Nevertheless, we would have been equal to the occasion, even if you had been so dreadfully fractured,” said Miss Burton. “We all would have become your devoted nurses, and each one of us would have had a separate and infallible remedy, which, out of courtesy, you would have been compelled to use.”

“Oh, bless my soul!” exclaimed Van Berg; “I have had a greater escape than the child. In being ‘at hand’ as you express it, Miss Burton, I am beginning to feel that you have saved me from death by torture.”

“What a compliment to us!” said Miss Burton, appealing to the ladies; “he regards our ministrations as equivalent to death by torture.”

“Oh, pardon me, I referred to the numberless ‘separate and infallible remedies,’ the very thought of which curdles my blood.”

“I cannot help thinking that my friend’s prospects would have been very dismal,” put in Stanton; “for with broken legs and arms and head he would have been very badly fractured indeed to begin with, and then some one of his fair nurses might have broken his heart.”

“My friend probably thinks, from a direful experience,” said Van Berg, “that this would be worse than all the other fractures put together; and perhaps it would. An additional cause for gratitude, Miss Burton, that you, and not I, were ‘at hand.’”

“My reasons for gratitude to Miss Burton,” said Stanton, “do not rest on what undoubtedly would have happened had my friend attempted the rescue, but on what has happened; and if Mr. Van Berg will introduce me I will cordially express my thanks.”

“With all my heart. Miss Burton, permit me to present to you Mr. Stanton, whose only fault is a slight monomania for New England and her institutions.”

The lady recognized Stanton with her wonted smiling and pleasant manner, which seemed so frank and open, but behind which some present eventually learned the real woman was hiding, and said:

“I am inclined to think that Mr. Van Berg’s English, like Hebrew, reads backwards. I warn you Mr. Stanton, not to express any indebtedness to me, or I shall straightway exhibit one of the Yankee traits which you undoubtedly detest, and attempt a bargain.”

“Although assured that I shall get the worst of this bargain, I shall nevertheless heartily thank you that you were not only ‘at hand,’ but that you acted so promptly and courageously that the child was saved. What pleasure could I have taken with my horses if their feet had trampled that little boy?”

“I see my opportunity,” replied Miss Burton, with a decisive little nod. “Your afternoon drives might have been marred by unpleasant thoughts as one’s sleep is sometimes disturbed by bad dreams. You have no idea what a delight it is to the average New England mind, Mr. Stanton, to secure the vantage ground in a bargain. In view of your own voluntary admissions, you can scarcely do otherwise than let me have my own way.”

With the exception of the two or three who had formed Miss Burton’s acquaintance at dinner, those who at first had gathered around her had by this time dwindled away. Ida Mayhew sat near in an open window of the parlor, ostensibly reading a novel, but in reality observant of all that occurred. Both she and Van Berg had been amused by the fact that Stanton, usually so languid and nonchalant, had been for once thoroughly aroused. Between anger at his coachmen, alarm for the child, and interest in its preserver, he was quite shaken out of his wonted equanimity, which was composed equally of indolent good-nature, self-complacency, and a disposition to satirize the busy, earnest world around him. It was apparent that he was somewhat nonplussed by Miss Burton’s manner and words, and those who knew him well enjoyed his perplexity, although at a loss

themselves to imagine what object Miss Burton could have in view. Half unconsciously Van Berg turned his smiling, interested face towards Ida Mayhew, who was regarding her cousin with a similar expression, but the moment she caught the artist's eyes she coldly dropped her own to her book again.

"Well, Miss Burton," said Stanton, with a slightly embarrassed laugh, "I admit that I am cornered, so you can make your own terms."

"They shall be grievous, I assure you. Do you see that rueful face in your carriage yonder?"

"That of my coachman? Bad luck to his ill-omened visage! Yes."

"No need of wishing bad luck to any poor creature—it will come only too soon without. In view of the indebtedness—which you have so gracefully acknowledged—to one of that trading and thrifty race that never loses an opportunity to turn, if not a penny more or less honest, why, something else, to their advantage, I stipulate that you give your dependent there another chance. I heard you dismiss him from your service a short time since, and he evidently does not wish to go. His disconsolate face troubles me; so please banish his dismal looks, and he'll be more careful hereafter."

"And have you had time to see and think about him?" said Stanton, with a little surprise in his tone. "You shall banish his dismal looks yourself. Barney," he called, "drive close to the piazza here. This lady has probably saved you from arrest, and she now intercedes in your behalf. In compliance with her request, I will keep you in my service, but I wish you to thank her and not me."

Barney took off his hat and ejaculated: "May yees shadder niver grow less, me leddy, an' may the Powers grant that yees bright eyes may see no trouble o' their own, bain they're so quick to see a poor man's bad luck."

The smiling manner with which she acknowledged his good wishes seemed to warm the man all over, and he looked as if transformed as he drove back to his stand.

"How is this, Miss Burton?" said Stanton. "I feel as if I had had the best of this bargain."

"That impression is wholly due to my Yankee shrewdness; and now, having gained my point," she added, with a graceful inclination, "I will not keep you from your drive any longer."

“My conscience will not permit me to complete this transaction until I have assured you that my horses and carriage are at your service at any time.”

“Be careful; I may take advantage of you again.”

“Please do so,” replied Stanton, lifting his hat; and then he went to his carriage more surprised at himself than at anything else that had occurred. Miss Burton returned to the doorway and quietly resumed the conversation that had been interrupted by the peril of the child.

Van Berg was about to follow his friend, but an acquaintance coming up the steps, detained him a few moments.

“Oh, Harold, come!” cried Stanton, impatiently.

Miss Burton started violently. The sentence upon her lips was never finished, and her face became ashen in color. She looked at Van Berg with a strange expression as he, unconscious of her agitation, answered:

“Yes, I’m coming,” and moved away.

“My dear Miss Burton,” said the lady with whom she was speaking, “you are ill; you look ready to faint. This excitement has been a greater strain upon you than you have realized.”

“Perhaps I had better go to my room,” faltered the young lady; and she fled with a precipitancy that her companion could not understand.

Ida Mayhew also witnessed this unexpected bit of mystery, and it puzzled her not a little. She had left the parlor and was standing in the hallway when her cousin’s voice summoned his friend after his familiar fashion. Why should this stranger look at Mr. Van Berg as if the sound of his Christian name were a mortal wound? Or was that a mere coincidence—and in reaction from excitement and unwonted effort had she suddenly taken ill? For a wonder, she thought more about Miss Burton than herself that afternoon. She had decided from the first that she did not like this newcomer. That point had been settled by the fact that the artist’s first impressions concerning her had evidently been favorable, and she remembered that his earliest glances and words in regard to herself had been anything but complimentary.

9. Unexpectedly Thrown Together

"I SUPPOSE you are satisfied by this time, Stanton," began Van Berg, as they drove away, "that I was very safe in offering you that picture on the conditions named, and that you have not the ghost of a chance of obtaining it."

"Nonsense," replied Stanton. "The picture is practically won already. I admit that Miss Burton is an exception to all her species; and, now that I have seen her, I prove how little I am under the influence of prejudice by acknowledging the fact, and by giving her credit for her courage and agreeable manners. But how absurd to imagine that this plain little stranger can ever be to me more than she is today—a summer acquaintance at a summer resort! She will soon drop from our memories and leave no more trace than these rustling leaves overhead after they have fulfilled their brief purpose."

"Here's a symptom already," cried Van Berg. "My matter-of-fact friend is already in the subtle current, and unconsciously drops into sentiment, and expresses himself in poetic trope. I foresee that the 'rustling leaves' will end in a rustling wedding-robe and gorgeous apparel; for when you cage the 'brown thrush' you will have the bad taste to insist on a change of plumage."

"I begin to understand you at last," retorted Stanton. "You have been smitten yourself, and this is your strategy to conceal the fact. The trouble is that you have overdone the matter, and revealed your transfixed heart long before I should have suspected the wound. Had you not better commence on the picture soon, for this matter may disable you for a season?"

"I won't swear that I will not become your rival, for our little heroine interests me hugely. There is something back of her smiling face. Her manner seems like crystal in its frankness, and yet I think few in the house will ever become better acquainted with her than they are today."

“I shall take more than a languid interest in watching you progress with this smiling sphinx,” said Stanton, “and in the mean time shall gloat over my picture.”

“Well, Barney,” said Van Berg, as they drove up to the stables on their return, “you did have a streak of good luck this afternoon. I hope you are grateful to the lady who secured it for you.”

“Faix, sur, an’ I niver seed the likes o’ her afore. The smilin’ look she gave me jist warmed the very core o’ me heart, and her swate eyes seemed to say, ‘Nary a bit o’ ill-luck would ye have again, Barney, had I me way.’ What’s more, she’s a goin’ to intercade for the nurse-maid. They nadn’t tell me that all the heretics will stay in purgatory.”

“Look here, Stanton, were I a theologian I’d make a note of that. Miss Burton has discovered a logic that routs superstition.”

Van Berg quite longed for the supper hour, that he might resume conversation with the interesting stranger, and he was promptly in his place at the table. But she did not appear. The lady with whom she had been conversing, remarked:

“She was taken suddenly ill, just as you and your friend drove away this afternoon. Learning from Mr. Burleigh that she is here alone and without friends, I knocked at her door before I came down, and asked if I could do anything for her. She said that she would be better in the morning, and that all she needed was perfect quiet. It’s strange how suddenly she was taken ill! She seemed perfectly well one moment, and then she fled to her room as if the ghost were in pursuit. I suppose it was reaction from excitement; or she may have some form of heart disease.”

“Are heart difficulties so serious as that with ladies?” asked Van Berg with a smile.

“I never had acute symptoms of any kind,” the lady replied. “Indeed I think I am a trifle cold and matter-of-fact in my disposition, but I began to thaw so perceptibly under Miss Burton’s influence that I became quite interested in her. I think I deserve some credit for saving the child also, for it was I who kept her talking in the doorway. Most people are a weariness to me, and I was surprised to find so marked an exception.”

It must not be supposed that Van Berg’s interest in the new arrival had led him to forget the motive which had brought him to the Lake House. This would not be in accordance with his character, and as far as possible, he had been closely observant of Miss Mayhew during the scenes of the

afternoon. He had been rewarded by discovering, for the first time, that she was at least capable of a good and generous impulse, for her face had been expressive of genuine admiration and gladness when she saw Miss Burton with the rescued child in her arms after the carriage swept by. In this expression he obtained a clearer hint than he had ever before received of the beauty that might be her constant possession could the mean and marring traits of her character be exchanged for qualities in harmony with her perfect features. But while this gleam, this flash of ideal beauty increased his desire for success in his experiment, the young lady's bearing towards him was as discouraging as ever. If he had not been at Miss Burton's side, he believed that she would have come forward and offered her congratulations as had several other ladies. It would seem that her vanity had been so severely wounded she would never forgive him, and he determined he would no longer make a martyr of himself by playing the agreeable to all in the hotel in the hope that, by pouring so much oil on the waters, even her asperity might be removed. He half believed that she recognized his effort to form her acquaintance, and found a malicious pleasure in thwarting him. Therefore, he decided to take his sketch-book and go off upon the hills in the morning, thus enjoying a little respite from his apparently philanthropic labors.

Before he left the breakfast table the following day, Miss Burton appeared. He thought he detected an ominous redness about her eyes, as well as the pallor which would be the natural result of illness; but she seemed to have recovered her spirits, and the rather quiet and self-absorbed little group that had hitherto seriously devoted themselves to steak and coffee, speedily brightened up under her pleasantries. Indeed she kept them lingering so long that the Mayhews and Stanton passed out before them, the latter casting a wistful glance at the cheerful party, for he had been having a stupid time.

When, much later than he expected, he started on his brief sketching excursion he found that his mind was kindled and aglow with pleasant thoughts, and that the summer landscape had been made sunnier by the sunny face he had just left.

But as he plodded his way back late in the afternoon, the sunbeams, no longer genial, became oppressive, and he was glad to hail one of the hotel stages that was returning from a neighboring village.

The vehicle already contained two adult passengers. One was a stout, red-faced woman with a baby and an indefinite number of parcels, and the other was—Ida Mayhew, who was returning from a brief shopping excursion.

As the latter saw Van Berg enter she colored, bit her lip, half frowned, and looked steadfastly away from him. Thus the stage lumbered on with its oddly assorted inmates, that, although belonging to the same human family, seemed to have as little in common as if each had come from a different planet. That Miss Mayhew looked so resolutely away from him was rather to Van Berg's advantage, for it gave him a chance to compare her exquisite profile with the expanse, slightly diversified, of the broad red face opposite.

The stout woman held her baby as if it were a bundle, and stared straight before her. As far as Van Berg could observe, not a trace of an idea or a change of expression flitted across the wide area of her sultry visage, and he found himself speculating as to whether the minds of these two women differed as greatly as their outward appearance. Indeed he questioned whether one had any more mind than the other, and was inclined to think that despite their widely separated spheres of life they were equally dwarfed.

While he was thus amusing himself with the contrasts, physical and metaphysical, which the two passengers opposite him presented, the stout woman suddenly looked out of the window at her side, and then, in a tone that would startle the quietest nerves, shouted to the driver:

“Hold on!”

Miss Mayhew half rose from her seat and looked around with something like dismay; but as she only encountered Van Berg's slightly humorous expression, she colored more deeply than before, and recalled her eyes to the farther angle of the stage with a fixedness and rigidity as great as if it had contained the head of Medusa.

Meantime the driver drew up to a small cottage by the road-side, and scrambled down from his seat that he might assist the stout woman with her accumulation of bundles. She handed him out the baby, preferring to look after the more precious parcels herself. Van Berg politely held the door open for her; but just as she was squeezing through the stage entrance with her arms full and had her foot on the last step, her cottage door flew open with something to the effect of an explosion, and out burst three or four children with a perfect din of cries and shouts. Two vociferous dogs joined

in the sudden uproar; the hitherto drowsy horses started as if a bomb-shell had dropped under their noses, and speedily broke into a mad gallop, leaving the stout woman prostrate upon her bundles in the road, and the driver helplessly holding her baby.

Miss Mayhew's cold rigidity vanished at once. Indeed dignity was impossible in the swaying, bounding vehicle. There was a momentary effort to ignore her companion, and then terror overcame all scruples. Turning her white face towards him, she exclaimed:

“Are we not in great danger?”

“I admit I would rather be in my chair on Mr. Burleigh's piazza. With your permission, I will come to your end of the stage and speak to the horses through the open window.”

“Oh, come—do anything under heaven to stop these horrid beasts.”

Van Berg edged his way up a little past Miss Mayhew, and began speaking to the frightened horses in firm, quiet tones. At first they paid no heed to him, and as the stage made a sudden and desperate lurch, the young lady commenced to scream.

“If you do that you will insure the breaking of both our necks,” said Van Berg, sharply. “If you will keep quiet I think I can stop them. See, we have quite a stretch of level road beyond us, before we come to a hill. Give me a chance to quiet them.”

The terror-stricken girl kept still for a moment, and then started up, saying

“I shall spring out.”

“No, Miss Mayhew, you must not do that,” said Van Berg, decidedly. “You must be greatly injured, and you would with almost certainty be disfigured for life if you sprang out upon the stony road. You could not help falling on your face.”

“Oh, horrible!” she exclaimed.

At the next heavy lurch of the stage she half-rose again to carry out her rash purpose, but the artist seized her hand and held her in her place, at the same time speaking kindly and firmly to the horses. They now began to heed his voice, and to recover from their panic.

“See, Miss Mayhew,” he said, “you have only to control yourself a few moments longer, and our danger is over.”

“Oh, do stop them, quick,” she gasped, clinging to his hand as if he were her only hope, “and I'll never forget your kind—oh, merciful heaven!”

At this favorable moment, when the horses were fast coming under control, a spiteful cur came tearing out after them, renewing their panic with tenfold intensity. As the dog barked on one side they sheered off on the other, until they plunged down the side of the road. The stage was nearly overturned, and then it stopped with a sudden and heavy thump. Miss Mayhew was precipitated into Mr. Van Berg's arms, and she clung to him for a moment in a paroxysm of terror. His wits had not so far deserted him but that he perceived that the stage had struck against a tree, that the horses had broken away, and that he and his companion were perfectly safe. If the whole truth must be told, it cannot be said that he endured the young lady's embrace with only cold and stoical philosophy. He found it wholly novel and not a painful experience. Indeed he was conscious of a temptation to delay the information of their escape, but a second's thought taught him that he must at once employ all his tact in the delicate and difficult task of reconciling the frightened girl to herself and her own conduct; otherwise her pride, and also her sense of delicacy, would now receive a new and far deeper wound, and a more hopeless estrangement follow. He therefore promptly lifted her up, and placed her limp form on the opposite seat.

"I assure you we are now perfectly safe, Miss Mayhew," he said; "and let me congratulate you that your self-control prevented you from leaving the stage, for if you had done so you would undoubtedly have been greatly injured."

"Where—where are—the horses?" she faltered.

"I really do not know! They have disappeared. The stage struck a tree, and the brutes broke away. They will probably gallop home to the alarm and excitement of every one about the hotel. Pray compose yourself. The house is not far away, and we can soon reach it if you are not very much hurt."

"Are you sure the danger is all over?"

"Yes; this is now not the slightest chance of a tragedy."

There must have been a faint twinkle in his eye, for she exclaimed, passionately:

"The whole thing has been a comedy to you, and I half believe you brought it all about to annoy me."

"You do me great injustice, Miss Mayhew," said Van Berg, warmly.

"Here we are sitting in this horrid old stage by the roadside," she resumed, in tones of strong vexation. "Was there ever anything more absurd

and ridiculous than it has all been! I am mortified beyond expression, and suppose I shall never hear the last of it,” and she burst into a hysterical passion of tears.

“Miss Mayhew,” said Van Berg hastily, “you certainly must realize that we have passed through very great peril together, and if you think me capable of saying a word about this episode that is not to your credit, you were never more mistaken in your life.”

At this assurance she became more calm.

“I know you dislike me most heartily,” Van Berg continued; “but you have less reason to do so than you think—”

“I have good reason to dislike you. You despise me; and now that I have been such a coward you are comparing me with Miss Burton who acted so differently yesterday.”

“I have not even thought of Miss Burton,” protested Van Berg, at the same time conscious, now that her name had been recalled to his memory, that she would have acted a much better part. “I am only sincerely glad that our necks were not broken, and I hope that you have not suffered any severe bruises. As to my despising you, if you will honor me with your acquaintance you may discover that you are greatly in error.”

“Then you truly think that we have been in danger?” she asked, wiping her eyes.

“Most assuredly. When you come to think the matter over calmly, you will realize that we were in very great danger. I think the affair has ended most happily rather than absurdly.”

“Really, sir, when I remember how the ‘affair,’ as you term it, actually did end, I feel as if I never wished to see you again.”

“Miss Mayhew, I appeal to your generosity. Was I to blame for that which was so disagreeable to you? Surely you will not be so unfair as to punish me for what neither you nor I could help. I think fate means we shall be friends, and has employed this unexpected episode to break the ice between us. If you are now sufficiently composed I will assist you to alight, in order that the driver, who is approaching, may be relieved of all fears on our account.”

“Oh, certainly. As it is, I suppose he will have a ridiculous story to tell.”

“There is nothing that he, or the others who are following him can tell, save that the horses ran away and that we most fortunately escaped all injury. Ah! I see that you are a little lame. Please take my arm; the hotel is

but a quarter of a mile away. Or perhaps you would prefer that I should send the driver for a carriage. You could wait in yonder cottage, or here, in the shade of the trees.”

“I am not very lame, and if I were I would not mind it. My wish is that the horrid affair may occasion as little remark as possible. I can reach my room by a side entrance, and so come quietly down to dinner. I suppose that I must take your arm since I cannot walk very well without it.”

They therefore turned their backs on the breathless driver and his eager questions, and proceeded slowly towards the hotel. After a brief examination of the shattered stage, the man ran panting past them in search of his horses; and they were again left alone.

10. Phrases too Suggestive

FOR A FEW MOMENTS Miss Mayhew and Van Berg walked on in silence, each very doubtful of the other. At last the artist began:

“I am well aware, Miss Mayhew, that this unexpected episode and this enforced companionship give me no rights whatever. I do not propose to annoy you, after seeing you safely to the hotel, by assuming that we are acquainted, nor do I intend to subject myself to the mortification of being informed publicly, by your manner, that we are not on speaking terms. I would be glad to have this question settled now. I ask your pardon for anything that I may have said or done to hurt your feelings, and having thus gone more than half-way it would be ungenerous on your part not to respond in like spirit.”

“You apologize, then?”

“No; I ask your pardon for anything that may have hurt your feelings.”

“You have said very disagreeable things about me, Mr. Van Berg.”

“I did not know you then.”

“I do not think you have changed your opinion of me in the least.”

“I evidently have a much higher opinion of you than you of me, and I am seeking your acquaintance with a persistence such as I never manifested in the case of any other lady. Thus the odds are all in your favor. Having been so unexpectedly thrown together——”

“‘Thrown together,’ indeed—Mr. Van Berg, you ARE mocking me,” and her eyes again filled with tears of vexation.

“I assure you I am not,” said Van Berg earnestly. “I could not be so mean as to twit you with an accident which you could not help, and with an act which was wholly involuntary on your part. Can we not both let by-gones by by-gones and commence anew?”

Miss Mayhew bit her lip and hesitated a few moments.

“I think that will be the better way,” she said. “We will both let by-gones, especially this ridiculous episode in the stage. I’ll put you on your good behavior.”

“Thank you, Miss Mayhew. I would take our late risk twenty times for such a result.”

“I would not take it again on any account whatever. Please refer to it no more. I declare, there comes Cousin Ik and Mr. Burleigh to meet us. Was one’s fortune ever so exasperating! Ik will tease me out of all comfort for weeks to come.”

“Say little and leave all to my discretion,” said Van Berg, reassuringly; “and, by the way, you might limp a little more decidedly,” which she immediately did.

“My dear Miss Mayhew, I trust you are not seriously hurt,” began Mr. Burleigh while still several yards off.

Stanton’s face was a study as he approached. Indeed he seemed half ready to explode with suppressed merriment, but before he could speak a warning glance from Van Berg checked him.

“Miss Mayhew might have been seriously and possibly fatally injured,” said the artist gravely, “had it not been for her self-control. Although it seemed that the stage would be dashed to pieces every moment, I told her that in my judgment it would be safer to remain within it than to spring out upon the hard and stony road, and I am very glad that the final event confirmed my opinion.”

As they were by this time near to the hotel, others who had been alarmed by seeing the horses tearing up to the stable door, now hastily joined them; and last, but not least, Mrs. Mayhew came panting upon the scene. Van Berg felt the hand of the young lady trembling in nervous apprehension upon his arm, from which, in her embarrassment, she forgot to remove it. But the artist did not fail her, and in answer to Mr. Burleigh’s eager questions as to the cause of the accident, explained all so plausibly, and in such a matter-of-fact manner as left little more even to be surmised. His brief and prosaic history of the affair concluded with the following implied tribute to his companion, which still further relieved her from fear of ridicule:

“Miss Mayhew,” he said, “instead of jumping out, after the frantic terror-blinded manner of most people, remained in the stage and so has escaped, I trust, with nothing worse than a slight lameness caused by the violent motion of the vehicle. I will now resign her to your care, Mr. Stanton, and I am glad to believe that the occasion will require the services of the wheelwright and harness-maker only, and not those of a surgeon,” and

lifting his hat to Mrs. Mayhew and her daughter he bowed himself off the scene.

Ida, leaning on the arm of her cousin, limped appropriately to her room, whither she had her dinner sent to her, more for the purpose of gaining time to compose her nerves than for any other reason.

The impression that she had behaved courageously in peril was rapidly increased as the story was repeated by one and another, and she received several congratulatory visits in the afternoon from her lady acquaintances; and when she came down to supper she found that she was even a greater heroine than Miss Burton had been. In answer to many sympathetic inquiries, she said that she "felt as well as ever," and she tried to prove it by her gayety and careful toilet.

But she was decidedly ill at ease. Her old self-complacency was ebbing away faster than ever. From the time that it had first been disturbed by the artist's frown in the concert garden, she had been conscious of a secret and growing self-dissatisfaction.

It seemed to be this stranger's mission to break the spell vanity and flattery had woven about her. The congratulations she was now receiving were secured by a fraudulent impression, if not by actual falsehood, and she permitted this impression to remain and grow. The one, who above all others she most feared and disliked, knew this. In smilingly accepting the compliments showered upon her from all sides she felt that she must appear to him as if receiving stolen goods, and she believed that in his heart he despised her more thoroughly than ever.

To the degree that he caused her disquietude and secret humiliation, her desire to retaliate increased, and she resolved, before the day closed, to use her beauty as a weapon to inflict upon him the severest wound possible. If it were within the power of her art she would bring him to her feet and keep him there until she could, in the most decided and public manner, spurn his abject homage. She would have no scruple in doing this in any case, but, in this instance, success would give her the keenest satisfaction.

His very desire for her acquaintance, as she understood it, was humiliating, and, in a certain sense, demoralizing. Her other suitors had imagined that she had good traits back of her beauty, and hitherto she had been carelessly content to believe that she could display such traits in abundance should the occasion require them. Here was one, however, who, while despising the woman, was apparently seeking her for the sake of her

beauty merely; and her woman's soul, warped and dwarfed as it was, resented an homage that was seemingly sensuous and superficial, and would, of necessity, be transient. In her ignorance of Van Berg's motives, and in the utter impossibility of surmising them, she could scarcely come to any other conclusion; and she determined to punish him to the utmost extent of her ability.

Thus it came to pass that Miss Mayhew had designs against Van Berg that were not quite as amiable as those of the artist in regard to herself.

Stanton, in a low tone, remarked to her at the supper table, "Now that fate has throw you and Van Berg together in such a remarkable manner" (the young lady colored deeply at this unfortunate expression and looked at him keenly), "I trust that you will yield gracefully to destiny and treat him with ordinary courtesy when you meet. Otherwise you may occasion surmises that will not be agreeable to you."

"Has he been telling you anything about this morning?" she asked quickly.

"Nothing more than he said in your presence. Why, was there anything more to tell?"

"Certainly not, but he made ill-natured remarks about me once—that is, you said he did—and why should he not again?"

"Well, he has not. I think he spoke very handsomely of you this morning. I hope he didn't exaggerate your good behavior."

"If you prefer to believe ill of me you are welcome to do so. For my part, I believe you exaggerate what Mr. Van Berg said at the concert, and that he never meant to be so rude. As far as I can judge, he has shown no such unmannerly disposition since coming here."

"Indeed, you are right. I think his disposition has compared favorably with your own."

"Well," she replied, with a peculiar smile, "we are on speaking terms for the present."

"That smile bodes no good-will towards my friend, but for once you will find a man who will not fall helplessly in love with your mere beauty."

"If you will glance at yonder table you can see that Miss Burton has already so absorbed him that he has eyes for no one else."

"They have jolly good times at that table. I wish we were there."

"Indeed! are you bewitched also? I can't see what it is that people find so attractive in that plain-looking girl."

“Well, for one thing, she has a mind. Beauty without mind is like salad without dressing.”

“And do you mean to say that I have no mind?” Ida asked, with a sudden flush.

“My dear Coz, we were speaking solely of Miss Burton. Indeed, I think you have a very decided will of your own.”

“I understand you. Well, in what other respects is Miss Burton my superior?”

“I doubt if Miss Burton ever thinks of herself as superior to any one, and that’s another very amiable trait in her.”

“Can you not sum up her perfections a little more rapidly? Life is short,” remarked Ida, acidly.

“Come, Coz, let me get you some sweet-oil before you finish your supper. You know you are the handsomest girl in the State, and that’s distinction enough for one woman. To you, Miss Burton is only a plain school-teacher. Why should you envy her?”

“I do not envy her, nor can I see why people are so carried away with her.”

“It IS remarkable to see what an impression she has made in two brief days. Of course her courage in saving the child served as a general and favorable introduction, but it does not by any means explain her growing popularity. For some reason or other those about her always seem to be having a good time. See how animated and pleased is the expression of all the faces at her table yonder. It was the same on the croquet-ground this morning. She effervesced like champagne, and before we knew it we were all in a state of exhilaration and the morning had gone.”

“I hate these bold, forward women who are quick to become acquainted with every one. A man of this type is bad enough, but a woman is unendurable.”

“I agree with you in the abstract most heartily; but the only bold thing that I have seen Miss Burton do was to run under the feet of my horses. You might as well call a ray of sunshine bold and forward; and people like sunshine when it is as nicely tempered as her manner is. I confess that when I first learned who she was, and before I had met her personally, I was greatly prejudiced against her, but one would have to be a churl indeed to remain proof against her genial good-nature. For my part I intend to enjoy it, as I do all the other good things the gods throw in my way.”

“The gods would indeed be careless to leave any good things within your reach, unless they were meant for you,” snapped Ida.

“Good for you, Coz; your ride with Van Berg has already brightened you up. There is no telling what you might not become if you would only associate with men who had sufficient brains not to grow spooney over your pretty face.”

As Ida and her mother passed out on the piazza, Van Berg joined them and said:

“I am glad to see that you have so fully recovered, Miss Mayhew. You prove again that you possess good strong nerves.”

“Thank you,” said the young lady, laconically, and with a sudden accession of color.

“Mr. Van Berg,” began Mrs. Mayhew with great animation, “I’m excessively thankful that you happened to be on the road, and that the stage overtook you this morning. It was so fortunate that I almost think it providential. How dreadful it would have been if Ida had been alone in such frightful peril! I cannot tell you also how delighted I am that my daughter behaved so beautifully. Indeed, I must confess that I am agreeably surprised, for Ida was never famous for her courage. Your own manner must have inspired confidence in her; and now that you have been so fortunately THROWN TOGETHER, I trust you may be better friends in the future.”

Miss Mayhew’s rising color deepened into an intense scarlet, and, as she turned away to hide her confusion, she could not forbear shooting a wrathful glance at the artist. He had sufficient self-control not to change a muscle, or to appear in the slightest degree aware of the embarrassment caused by her mother’s words, and especially the use of the phrase—grown to be most hateful from its associations—that so vividly recalled to the incensed maiden the anomalous position in which she found herself at the end of her perilous morning ride.

“You ladies differ favorably from us men,” said Van Berg, quietly. “You rise to meet an emergency by an innate quality of your sex, whereas, in our case, if our native strength is not equal to the occasion we fall below it as a matter of course.”

“Oh, that accounts for Ida’s coming off with such flying colors—she rose to meet the emergency. I hope, however, she will EMBRACE no more such opportunities of showing her courage—why! Ida, what IS the matter?”

what have I said?" but the young lady, with face inflamed, vanished in the direction of her room.

"Well, this IS strange," remarked the lady with a sharp glance of inquiry at the artist, who still managed to maintain an expression of lamb-like innocence. "I do believe the poor child is ill, and, now I think of it, she has not acted like herself for several days;" and she sought her daughter with hasty steps.

But the young lady did not go to her room, being well aware that her mother would soon follow for the explanation which she could not give. Therefore, taking a side corridor, she joined some acquaintances on another piazza.

11. A "Tableau Vivant."

"MISS MAYHEW, will you please step here?" said a very fashionably dressed lady.

Turning, Ida saw near her the mother of the child that had been rescued the previous day. She, with her husband, had been talking very earnestly to Mr. Burleigh, the proprietor of the house, who seemed in rather a dubious state of mind over some proposition of theirs.

"Miss Mayhew, we want your opinion in regard to a certain matter," began the lady volubly. "Of course I and my husband feel very grateful to the young woman who saved our child from your cousin's horses yesterday. Indeed, my husband feels so deeply indebted that he wishes to make some return and I have suggested that he present her with a check for five hundred dollars. I learn from Mr. Burleigh that she is a teacher, and therefore, of course, she must be poor. Now, in my view, if my husband or some other gentleman should present this check in the parlor, with an appropriate little speech, it would be a nice acknowledgment of her act. Don't you think so?"

"I do not think I am qualified to give an opinion," said Ida, "as I have no acquaintance with the lady whatever."

"I'm sure it will be just the thing to do," said the lady, becoming more infatuated with her project every moment. "Do you think your cousin would be willing to make the speech?"

At this suggestion Ida laughed outright. "The idea," she said, "of my cousin making a speech of any kind, or in any circumstances!"

"Now I think of it," persisted the lady, "Miss Burton and Mr. Van Berg sit at the same table, and he seems better acquainted with her than any of the gentlemen. He's the one to make the speech, only I do not feel that I know him well enough to ask him. Do you, Miss Mayhew?"

"Indeed I do not," said the young lady, decisively; "I am the last one in the house to ask any favors of Mr. Van Berg."

"Well, then, Mr. Burleigh can explain everything and ask him."

“Really now, Mrs. Chints”—for such was the lady’s name—“I don’t quite believe that Mr. Van Berg would approve of giving Miss Burton money in public, and before anything further is done I would like to ask his judgment. It all may be eminently proper, as you say, and I would not like to stand in the way of the young lady’s receiving so handsome a present, and would not for the world if I thought it would be agreeable to her; but there is something about her that—”

“I have it,” interrupted the positive-minded lady, unheeding and scarcely hearing Mr. Burleigh’s dubious circumlocution, and she put her finger to her forehead for a moment in an affected stage-like manner, as if her ideas of the “eternal fitness of things” had been obtained from the sensational drama. “I have it: the child himself shall hand her the gift from his own little hand, and you, Mr. Chints, can say all that need be said. It will be a pretty scene, a ‘tableau vivant.’ Mr. Chints, come with me before the young woman leaves her present favorable position near the parlor door. Mr. Burleigh, your scruples are sentimental and groundless. Of course the young woman will be delighted to receive in one evening as much, and perhaps more, than her whole year’s salary amounts to. Come, Mr. Chints, Mr. Burleigh, if you wish, you may group some of your friends near;” and away she rustled, sweeping the floor with her silken train.

Mr. Chints lumbered after her with a perplexed and martyr-like expression. He was a mighty man in Washington Market, but in a matter like this he was as helpless as a stranded whale. The gift of five hundred dollars did not trouble him in the least; he could soon make that up; but taking part in a “tableau vivant” under the auspices of his dramatic wife was like being impaled.

“Well,” said Mr. Burleigh, shaking his head, “I wash my hands of the whole matter. Five hundred dollars is a snug sum, but I doubt if that little woman takes it. I’m more afraid she’ll be offended and hurt. What do you think, Miss Mayhew?”

“I’ve no opinion to offer, Mr. Burleigh. These people are all comparative strangers to me. Mrs. Chints is determined to have her own way, and nothing that you or I can say would make any difference. My rule is to let people alone, and if they get into scrapes it sometimes does them good;” and she left him that she might witness the Chints’ tableau.

“That’s just the difference between you and Miss Burton,” muttered Mr. Burleigh, nodding his head significantly after her. “She’d help a fellow

out of a scrape and you'd help him into one. Well, if the old saying's true, 'Handsome is that handsome does,' the little school-teacher would be the girl for me were I looking for my mate."

On her way to the entrance of the main parlor, Ida stopped a moment at an open window near the corner where Stanton and Van Berg were smoking.

"Cousin Ik," she said, 'sotto voce.'

He rose and joined her.

"If you wish to see a rich scene, hover near the entrance of the main parlor."

"What do you mean?"

"I've learned that Mr. and Mrs. Chints, and possibly your favorite new performer, Miss Burton, are going to act a little comedy together: come and see;" and she vanished.

"Van," said Stanton in a vexed tone, "there's some mischief on foot;" and he mentioned what his cousin had said, adding: "Can Ida have been putting that brassy Mrs. Chints up to some absurd performance that will hurt Miss Burton's feelings?"

They rose and sauntered down the piazza, Van Berg trying to imagine what was about to take place and how he could shield the young lady from any annoyance.

She sat inside the entrance of the main parlor facing the open windows, and a little group had gathered around her, including the ladies who sat at her table, with whom she had already become a favorite. Ida had demurely entered by one of the open windows and was apparently reading a novel under one of the gas jets not far away. Groups of people were chatting near or were seated around card-tables; others were quietly promenading in the hall-ways and on the piazza. There was not an indication of any expected or unexpected "scene." Only Ida's conscious, observant expression and the absence of Mrs. Chints foreboded mischief.

"What enormity can that odious family be about to perpetrate?" whispered Stanton.

"I cannot surmise," answered Van Berg; "something in reference to the rescue of her child, I suppose. I wish I could thwart them, for Miss Burton's position will place her full in the public eye, and I do not wish her to be the victim of their vulgarity."

After a little further hesitation and thought he stepped in, and approaching Miss Burton, said:

“Pardon me for interrupting you, but I wish to show you something on the piazza that will interest you.”

She rose to follow him, but before she could take a step Mrs. Chints swept in on the arm of her husband, followed by the nurse—who had been retained at Miss Burton’s intercession—bearing in her arms the little boy, that stared at the lights and people with the round eyes of childish wonder.

Every one looked up in surprise at the sudden appearance of the little group, that suggested a christening more than anything else.

Planting themselves before Miss Burton, thus barring all egress, Mr. Chints fumbled a moment in his pocket and drew out an envelope, and with a loud, prefatory “Ahem!” began:

“My dear Miss Burton—that is the way Mrs. Chints says I should address you, thought it strikes me as a trifle familiar and affectionate; but I mean no harm—we’re under pecul—very great obligations to YOU. We learn—my wife has—that you are engaged—engaged—in—I mean that you—teach. I’m sure that’s a lawful calling—I mean a laudable one, and no one can deny that it’s useful. In my view it’s to your credit that you are engaged—in—that you teach. I work myself, and always mean to. In fact I enjoy it more than making speeches. But feeling that we were under wonderful obligations to YOU, and learning—my wife did—that you were dependent on—on your own labor, we thought that if this little fellow that you saved so handsomely should hand you this check for five hundred dollars it wouldn’t be amiss.” And here, according to rehearsal, the nurse with great parade handed the child to Mrs. Chints, who now, with much ‘empressement,’ advanced to a position immediately before Miss Burton; meanwhile the poor, perspiring Mr. Chints put the envelope into the child’s chubby hand, saying:

“Give it to the lady, Augustus.”

But the small Augustus, on the contrary, stared at the lady and put the envelope in his mouth, to the great mortification of Mrs. Chints, who had been so preoccupied with the Chints side of the affair, and the impression they were making on the extemporized audience, that she had no eyes for Miss Burton.

And that young lady’s face was, in truth, a study. An expression of surprise was followed quickly by one of resentment. Even Stanton was

obliged to admit that for a moment the little “school-ma’am” looked formidable. But as Mr. Chints floundered on in his speech, as some poor wretch who could not swim might struggle to get out of the deep water into which he had been thrown, the expression of her face softened, and one might imagine the thought passing through her mind—“They don’t know any better;” and when, at last, the child, instead of carrying out the climax that Mrs. Chints had intended, began vigorously to munch the envelope containing the precious check, there was even a twinkle of humor in the young lady’s eyes. But she responded gravely:

“Mr. Chints, I was at first inclined to resent this scene, but time has been given me to perceive that neither you nor your wife wish to hurt my feelings, and that you are in part, at least, actuated by feelings of gratitude for the service that I was so fortunate as to render you. But I fear you do not quite understand me. You are right in one respect, however. I do labor for my own livelihood, and it is a source of the deepest satisfaction to me that I can live from my own work and not from gifts. If your hearts prompt this large donation, there are hundreds of poor little waifs in the city to whom this money will bring a little of the care and comfort which blesses your child. As for myself, this is all the reward that I wish or can receive,” and she stooped and kissed the child on both cheeks. Then taking Van Berg’s arm, she gladly escaped to the cool and dusky piazza.

Mr. Chints looked at Mrs. Chints in dismay. Mrs. Chints handed the baby to the nurse, and beat an undramatic and hasty retreat, her husband following in a dazed sort of manner, treading on her train at every other step.

As Van Berg passed out of the parlor, he saw Ida Mayhew vanishing from its farther side, with Stanton in close pursuit. When Miss Burton ended the disagreeable affair by kissing the child, there had been a slight murmur of applause. Significant smiles and a rising hum of voices descanting on the affair in a way not at all complimentary to the crestfallen Chints family, followed the disappearances of all the actors in the unexpected scene.

12. Miss Mayhew is Puzzled

“MISS BURTON,” said Van Berg, as soon as they were alone, “I wish I could have saved you from this disagreeable experience. I tried to do so, but was not quick enough. I much blame my slow wits that I was not more prompt.”

“I wish it might have been prevented,” she replied, “for their sakes as well as my own.”

“I have no compunctions on their account whatever,” said Van Berg, “and feel that you let them off much too kindly. I think, however, that they and all others here will understand you much better hereafter. I cannot express too strongly to you how thoroughly our brief acquaintance has taught me to respect you, and if you will permit me to give an earnest meaning to Mr. Burleigh’s jesting offer to share with me the responsibility of your care, I will esteem it an honor.”

“I sincerely thank you, Mr. Van Berg, and should I ever need the services of a gentleman,”—she laid a slight emphasis upon the term—“I shall, without any hesitancy, turn to you. But I have long since learned to be my own protectress, as, after all, one must be, situated as I am.”

“You seem to have the ability, not only to take care of yourself, but of others, Miss Burton. Nevertheless I shall, with your permission, establish a sort of protectorate over you which shall be exceedingly unobtrusive and undemonstrative, and not in the least like that which some powers make the excuse for exactions, until the protected party is ready to cry out in desperation to be delivered from its friends. I hesitated too long this evening from the fear of being forward; and yet I did not know what was coming, and had learned only accidentally but a few moments before that anything was coming.”

“Well,” replied Miss Burton with a slight laugh, “it’s a comfortable thought that there’s a fort near, to which one can run should an enemy appear; and a pleasanter thought still, that the fort is strong and staunch. but, to change the figure, I have a great fancy for paddling my own light

canoe, and such small craft will often float, you know, where a ship of the line would strike.”

“I will admit, Miss Burton, that ships of the line are often unwieldy and clumsily deep in the water; but if you ever do need a gunboat with a howitzer or two on deck, may I hope to be summoned?”

“I could ask for no better champion. I fairly tremble at the broadside that would follow.”

“Are you thinking of the discharge or the recoil?”

“Both might involve danger,” said Miss Burton, laughing; “but I have concluded to keep on your side through such wars as may rage at the Lake House during my sojourn. I cannot help thinking of poor Mr. and Mrs. Chints. I feel almost as sorry for such people as I do for the blind and deaf. They seem to lack a certain sense which, if possessed, would teach them to avoid such scenes.”

“I detest such people and like to snub them unmercifully,” said Van Berg, heartily.

“That may be in accordance with a gunboat character; but is it knightly?”

“Why not? What does snobbishness and rich vulgarity deserve at any man’s hands?”

“Nothing but sturdy blows. But what do weak, imperfect, half-educated men and women, who have never had a tithe of your advantages, NEED at your hands? Can we not condemn faults, and at the same time pity and help the faulty? The gunboat sends its shot crashing too much at random. It seems to me that true knighthood would spare weakness of any kind.”

“I’m glad you have not spared mine. You have demolished me as a gunboat, but I would fain be your knight.”

“It is Mrs. Chints who needs a knight at present, and not I. It troubles me to think of her worriment over this foolish little episode, and with your permission I will go and try to banish the cloud.”

As she turned she was intercepted by Stanton, who said:

“Miss Burton, let my present to you my cousin, Miss Mayhew.”

A ray from a parlor lamp fell upon Ida’s face, and Van Berg saw at once that it was clouded and unamiable in its expression. Stanton had evidently been reproaching her severely.

Miss Burton held out her hand cordially and said; “I wish to thank you for maintaining the credit of our sex this morning. These superior men are

so fond of portraying us as hysterical, clinging creatures whose only instinct in peril is to throw themselves on man's protection, that I always feel a little exultation when one of the 'weaker and gentler sex,' as we are termed, show the courage and presence of mind which they coolly appropriate as masculine qualities."

"Are you an advocate of woman's rights, Miss Burton?" asked Miss Mayhew, stung by the unconscious sarcasm of the lady's words, to reply in almost as resentful a manner as if a wound had been intended.

"Not of woman's, particularly," was the quiet answer; "I would be glad if every one had their rights."

"You philanthropy is very wide, certainly."

"And therefore very thin, perhaps you think, since it covers so much ground. I agree with you, Miss Mayhew, that general good-will is as cold and thin as moonshine. One ray of sunlight that warms some particular thing into life is worth it all."

"Indeed! I think I prefer moonlight."

"There are certain absorbing avocations in life to which moonshine is better adapted than sunlight, is probably the thought in my cousin's mind," said Stanton, satirically.

"And what are they?" asked Miss Burton.

"Flirtation, for instance."

"My cousin is speaking for himself," said Ida, acidly; "and knows better what is in his own mind than in mine."

"If some ladies themselves never know their own minds, how can another know?" Stanton retorted.

"Well," said Miss Burton, with a laugh, "if we accept a practical philosophy much in vogue—that of taking the world as we find it—flirting is one of the commonest pursuits of mankind."

"I'm quite sure, Miss Burton," said Van Berg, "that your philosophy of life is the reverse of taking the world as we find it."

"Indeed, you are mistaken, sir; I am exceedingly prosaic in my views, and cherish no Utopian dreams and theories. I do indeed take the old matter-of-fact world as I find it, and try to make the best of it."

"Ah, your last is a very saving clause. Too many are seemingly trying to make the worst of it, and unfortunately they succeed."

Ida here shot a quick and vengeful glance at the speaker.

“Please do not present me as a general reformer, Mr. Van Berg,” protested Miss Burton, with a light laugh; “I have my hands full in mending my own ways.”

“And so might we all, no doubt,” said Stanton; “only most of us leave our ways unmended. but I am curious to know, Miss Burton, how you would make the best of a flirtation; since this is emphatically a part of the world as we find it, especially at a summer hotel.”

“The best that we can do with many things that exist,” she replied, “is to leave them alone. Italy is pre-eminently the land of garlic and art; but fortunately we shall not find it necessary to indulge in both and in equal proportions when we are so happy as to go abroad.”

“A great many people prefer the garlic,” said Stanton.

“Oh, certainly,” she answered; “it’s a matter of taste.”

“So then garlic and flirtation are corresponding terms in your vocabulary?”

“I cannot say which term outranks the other, but it seems to me that if a woman regards her love as a sacred thing, she cannot permit an indefinite number of commonplace people even to attempt to stain it with their soiling touch.”

“I think gentlemen show just as much of a disposition to flirt as ladies,” said Ida, with resentment in her tone.

“I will not dispute that statement,” replied Miss Burton, with a laugh; “indeed, I’m inclined to think they are very human.”

“Humane, you mean,” interposed Stanton. “Yes, I often wonder at our patient endurance.”

“Which shall be taxed no longer to-night by me. Good-evening, Miss Mayhew. Good-evening, patient martyrs.”

“Humane, indeed!” said Stanton. “Are you that way inclined, Van?”

“I have no occasion to be otherwise.”

“Well, I feel savage enough to scalp some one.”

“So I should judge,” remarked Ida.

“Perhaps then, as my mood contrasts somewhat favorably with your cousin’s, you will venture to walk with me for awhile?” said Van Berg.

“Indeed, sir,” she replied, taking his arm, “there are times when any change is a relief.”

“I cannot be very greatly elated over that view of the case, certainly,” remarked Van Berg, with a laugh.

She did not reply at once, but after a moment said: "I suppose you regard me as a hopeless case at best."

"What suggests that thought to you, Miss Mayhew?"

"You are not so dull as to need to ask that question, and you only ask it to draw me out. For one thing, you probably think that I instigated Mr. and Mrs. Chints to act as they did. This is not true."

"I'm very glad to hear it."

"I'm no more to blame than Mr. Burleigh was. He knew about it as well as I did, but Mrs. Chints was bound to carry out her project."

"Will you permit a suggestion?"

"I suppose you wish to insinuate that I acted like a heathen, instead of saying that I am one plainly, as does Cousin Ik?"

"I think you acted a little thoughtlessly. If Miss Burton had been in your place, she would have tried to prevent the disagreeable scene."

"Oh, certainly! she is perfect."

"No; she is kind."

"Would it be possible to speak upon some agreeable subject, Mr. Van Berg? I have had enough mortifications for one day."

He was puzzled. What topic could he introduce that would interest this spoiled and petulant beauty.

He touched on art, but she was only artful in her small way, and could not follow him. He tried literature, and here they had even less in common. He would not and indeed could not read the thin society novels which reflected modes of life as trivial as her own, and his books might have been written in another language, so slight was her acquaintance with them. The various political, social, or scientific questions of the day had never puzzled her brain. Van Berg cautiously felt his way towards his companion's knowledge of two or three of the most popular of them. Her answers, however, were so superficial and irrelevant, and also so evidently embarrassed, that he saw his only resources to be society chit-chat, gossip about mutual acquaintances, the latest modes, the attractions of pleasure resorts in the city, and of summer resorts in the country. But he gave his mind to these unwonted themes, and labored hard to be entertaining; for now that he had gained the vantage-ground he sought, he was determined to discover whether there was a sleeping mind or a vacuum behind Miss Mayhew's shapely forehead. Granting that there was a womanly intelligence there, as yet unquickened, he was not so irrational as to imagine

he could jostle it into illumining activity in one short hour, or day, or week. But it seemed to him that if any mind existed worth the name, it would give such encouraging signs of life before many days passed as would promise success of his experiment. He felt that his first aim must be to establish an intimacy that would permit as full and frank an exchange of thought as was possible between people so dissimilar.

While he tried to bring himself down to the littleness of her daily life, he determined to show his disapproval of every phrase of its meanness as far as he could without offending her. He had made her feel that he condemned her course towards Miss Burton that evening, and he had meant to do so.

She resented this disapproval, and at the same time respected him for it. Indeed he puzzled her. He evidently sought and wished for her society; and yet as they walked back and forth, even though she did not look at him when the light gave her the opportunity to do so, she felt intuitively that he did not enjoy her company. She saw that he was laboring hard to make himself agreeable; but his small talk had not the familiar flippancy and fluency of one speaking in his native tongue; nor was his manner that of one who, infatuated with her beauty, had thrown aside all other considerations.

She felt that the man at her side measured her, and understood her littleness thoroughly.

And she herself had a growing consciousness of insignificance that was as painful as it was novel. Adding to all the humiliations of this day here was a man, not so very much older than herself, trying to come down to her level, as he would accommodate his language to a child. No labored argument could have revealed her ignorance to her so clearly, as her conscious inability to follow him into his ordinary range of thought. Unwittingly he had demonstrated his superiority in a way that she could not deny, however much she might be inclined to resent it. And yet he treated her with a sort of respect, and occasionally she saw that he bent his eyes upon her face as if in search of something.

After a transient effort to ignore everything and talk in her usual superficial manner, she became more and more silent and oppressed, and, at last said, somewhat abruptly:

“Mr. Van Berg, I am weary, and I imagine you are too. I think I will say good-night.”

“I scarcely wonder that you are fatigued. You have had a trying day.”

“It has been a horrid day,” she said, emphatically.

“It might have ended much worse, nevertheless.”

“Possibly,” she admitted with a shrug.

“You have more reason to congratulate yourself than you imagine, Miss Mayhew. Even that disagreeable souvenir of our morning peril, your lameness, has disappeared, and you might have been maimed for life.”

“My lameness, like my courage, was chiefly a fraud to begin with, and soon disappeared; but I have other souvenirs of that occasion that I cannot get rid of so easily.”

“If I am one of them, you are right, Miss Mayhew; I shall hold you to our agreement this morning. You put me on my good behavior—have I not behaved well?”

“Yes, better than I have. I was not referring to you personally, but to certain memories.”

“We agreed to let by-gones be by-gones.”

“But others are not parties to this agreement, and every reference to the affair is odious to me.”

“I shall make no further reference to it, and you must be fair enough not to punish me for the acts of others.”

“You also despise me in your heart of my course towards Miss Burton this evening.”

“If I despised you would I have sought your society this evening?”

“I do not know. I don’t understand you, if you will permit my bluntness.”

“Possibly you don’t understand yourself, Miss Mayhew.”

“I understand that I have had a miserable day, and I hope I may never see another like it. Good-night, sir.”

13. Nature's Broken Promise

' VAN BERG had been left to himself but a little time before Stanton and Mr. Burleigh came out upon the piazza, and the three gentlemen sat down for a quiet chat.

"Well," remarked mine host, with a sigh of relief such as a pilot might heave after taking his ship round a perilous point; "well, thanks to Miss Burton's good sense, the affair has ended without any trouble. In a house like this, 'Satan is finding mischief still' whenever my back is turned, and sometimes he threatens to get up a row right under my nose, as in this instance. I was a 'blarsted fool,' as our English friends have it, not to know that Mrs. Chint's drama, although beginning in comedy, might end in tragedy of my losing some good paying boarders. Still further did I demonstrate the length of my ears by even imagining it possible that Miss Burton would take five hundred, or five hundred thousand dollars in any such circumstances. But the whole thing was done in a jiffy, and Mrs. Chints was possessed to have her 'tableau vivant.' Lively picture wasn't it? Still, if Miss Mayhew, when appealed to by Mrs. Chints, had confirmed my doubts, I would have tried to stop the nonsense at any cost."

"Did Miss Mayhew advise the step?" asked Stanton.

"Oh, no! She was non-committal. She acted as if it were none of her affair, save as it might afford her a little amusement. But these rows are no light matters to us poor publicans, who must please every one and keep the whole menagerie in order. Mr. Chints was swearing up and down his room that he had been made a fool of. Mrs. Chints was for leaving tomorrow morning, declaring that she would not endure such airs from a school-teacher. They are rich and have a number of friends who are coming soon, and so my mind was full of 'strange oaths' also, at my prospective loss, when this blessed little woman appears, taps at their door, enters like the angel into the lion's den, and shuts their mouths by some magic all her own. And now they're going to stay; Mr. Chints will give the five hundred to the

Children's Aid Society, all is serene and I'm happy, so much so that I'll smoke another of your good cigars, Mr. Stanton."

"Certainly, half-a-dozen if you wish. How do you imagine she quieted the unruly beasts?"

"Oh, I suppose she got around them through the child—somewhat as she won over my wife this afternoon by means of our cross baby. It's teething, you know—and yet how should you young chaps know anything about babies! No matter, your time will come. This promenading the piazza with lovely creatures who have been half the afternoon at their toilets is all very nice; but wait till you have weathered innumerable squalls in the dead of night—then you'll learn that teething-time in a household is like going around Cape Horn. Well, to return from your future to my present. When so good-natured a man as I am gets into a sympathetic mood with old King Herod, you can imagine what a state the mother's nerves must be in who has to stand it night and day. But as Miss Burton had been commended to my care, I felt that I was in duty bound to introduce her to my wife and show her some attention. So I said to my wife, this afternoon, 'I'm going to bring a young lady in to see you.' 'Do you think I'm in a condition to entertain company?' she asked, with a faint suggestion of hard cider in her tone. 'Well, my dear,' I expostulated, 'it was just the same yesterday, and will be a little more so tomorrow, and I feel that I shall be remiss if I delay any longer.' 'Oh, very well,' she said, as if it were a tooth that must come out sooner or later, 'since the matter must be attended to, let us have it over at once.' But bless you, it wasn't over till supper-time. As I brought the young lady in, the baby waked out of a five-minutes' nap that had cost about an hour's rocking, and I thought the roof would come off. My wife looked cross and worried—well, it was prose, gentlemen, prose—not the poetry of life; and I said to myself, 'I suppose I have about made it certain that this young woman will live and die an old maid by giving her this glimpse behind the scenes. I thought the ladies could get on better without me than with me, so I bowed myself out, glad to escape the din; and I supposed Miss Burton would say a few pleasant things in the direction of Mrs. Burleigh, which she, poor woman, might not be able to hear, and then she would bow herself out, also glad to escape. An hour and a half later I went back to see if I could not coax my wife away for a drive, and what do you suppose I saw?"

"The baby in convulsions," said Stanton.

“Give it up,” added Van Berg.

“Sweet transformation scene; deep hush; my wife asleep in her rocking-chair, the baby asleep in the arms of Miss Burton, who held up a warning finger at me to be quiet. But the mischief was done; my wife started up and was mortified beyond measure that she had treated her guest so rudely. The good fairy, however, was so genuinely delighted that she had quieted the baby and given the tired mother a little rest, that we had to come to the conclusion that she found pleasure in ways that are a trifle uncommon. By some miracle or other she kept the baby asleep, and then my wife and I tried to entertain her a little, but we were the ones that were entertained. Before we knew it, the supper-bell rang, and then I’m blessed if the little chap didn’t wake up and grin at us all. To think then that I should reward her by letting Mr. Chints slap her face with a five-hundred-dollar check! I guess we’ll all know better next time.”

“Did she tell you anything further about her history or her connections?” asked Stanton.

Mr. Burleigh stroked his beard and looked rather blank for a moment.

“Now I think of it,” he ejaculated, “I be hanged if she said a word about herself. And now I think further of it, she somehow or other got Mrs. Burleigh and myself a-talking, and seemed so interested in us and what we said, that I be hanged again if we didn’t tell her all we know about ourselves.”

“She impresses every one as being remarkably frank, and yet I think it will be found that she is peculiarly reticent in regard to herself,” remarked Van Berg musingly. “Well, it’s not often I take people on trust, but I have given this lady my entire respect and confidence.”

“I assure you that there is no trust in this business,” said Mr. Burleigh, emphatically. “I can’t afford to indulge in sentiment, gentlemen; besides, it couldn’t be any more becoming in me than in Tom Chints. I wouldn’t take an unprotected, unknown female into my house if she came with a pair of wings. But Miss Burton brings letters that establish her character as a lady as truly as that of any other woman in the house. I ought to have prevented this Chints business, but then five hundred is a nice little plum, and before I pulled my slow wits together the thing was done.”

“By the way, Mr. Burleigh,” remarked Stanton, “I hear that the parties who are now at my friend Van Berg’s table are soon to leave for the seashore. Can you give me three seats there after their departure?”

“Certainly; put you down right alongside of Miss Burton.”

“Perhaps Van Berg feels that he has the first claim to so good a position?”

“No, Stanton, I shall not place a straw in your way.”

“You never were a man of straw, Van. If I were seeking more than to enjoy the society of this young lady, who seems to be embodied sunshine, I would be sorry to have you place yourself in the way.”

“Sunshine brought to a focus kindles even green wood,” remarked Van Berg, with a significant nod at his friend.

“Well,” said Mr. Burleigh, rising, “if I had not found my mate, I’d be a burr that that little woman wouldn’t get rid of very easily. Good-night, gentlemen. I’ll give either one of you my blessing.”

“Good-night, Van,” said Stanton, also. “I’m not going to stay and listen to your absurd predictions. Neither shall I permit you to enjoy all by yourself the delicate wine of that woman’s wit. When good things are passing round, I propose to have my share. My presence can’t hurt your prospects.”

“And if it did, Ik, do you think me such a churl as to try to crowd you away?”

“That’s magnanimous. I suppose you and my cousin can manage to keep the peace between you.”

“I think the change will be far more disagreeable to Miss Mayhew than to me.”

“You are very polite to say so. Good-night.”

“Well,” mused Van Berg, when left to himself; “I’ve made progress today after a fashion. We have been quite thoroughly introduced—in fact ‘thrown together,’ as fate and all her friends will have it. I might have been weeks in gaining as much insight into her character as circumstances have given me in a few brief hours. But what a miserable revelation she has made of herself—cowardice this morning—fraud this afternoon, and cold selfishness, that can amuse itself with the mortification and misfortunes of others, this evening. This is the moral side of the picture. But when I came to ‘speer’ around to see whether she had any mind or real culture, the exhibition was still more pitiable. Ye gods! that a girl can live to her age and know so little that is worth knowing! She knows how to dress—that is, how to enhance her physical beauty; and that, I admit, is a great deal. As far as it goes it is well. But of the taste of a beautiful and, at the same time,

intellectual and highly cultivated woman, she has no conception; with her it is a question of flesh and blood only.”

“I wonder if it will ever be otherwise? I wonder if her marvelous beauty, which is now like a budding rose, that partly conceals the worm in its heart, will soon, like the overblown flower, reveal so clearly what mars its life that scarcely anything else will be noticed. What a fate for a man—to be tied for life to a woman who will, with sure gradation, pass from at least outward beauty to utter hideousness! Beauty, in a case like this, is but a mask which time or the loathsome fingers of disease would surely strip off; and then what an object would confront the disenchanted lover! It would be like marrying a disguised death’s-head. Never before did I realize how essential is mental and moral culture to give value to mere external beauty.

“And yet she seems to have a kind of quickness and aptness. She is not wanting in womanly intuition. I still am inclined to believe she has been dwarfed by circumstances and her wretched associations. Her mind has been given no better means of development than the knowledge of her beauty, the general and superficial homage that it always receives, the little round of thought that centers about self, and the daily question of dress. That’s narrowing the world down to a cage large enough only for a poll-parrot. If the bird within has a parrot’s nature, what is the use of opening the door and showing it larks singing in the sky? I fear that’s what I’m trying to do, and that I shall go back to my fall work with a meager portfolio and a grudge against nature, for mocking me with the fairest broken promise ever made.”

14. A Revelation

THE NEXT DAY threatened to be a dreary one, for the rain fell so steadily as to make all sunny, out-of-door pleasures impossible. Many looked abroad with faces as dismal and cloudy as the sky; for the number of those who rise above their circumstances with a cheery courage are but few. Human faces can shine, although the sun be clouded; but, as a rule, the shadow falls on the face also, and the regal spirit succumbs like a clod of earth.

The people came straggling down late to breakfast in the dark morning, and, with a childish egotism that considers only self and immediate desires, the lowering weather which meant renewed beauty and wealth to all the land, was berated as if it were a small spite against the handful of people at the Lake House. Van Berg heard Ida Mayhew exclaiming against the clouds as if this spite were aimed at herself only.

“Some of her friends might not venture from the city,” she said.

“They youths are not venturesome, then,” remarked Stanton, who never lost an opportunity to tease.

“Of course they don’t wish to get wet,” she pouted.

“And yet I’ll wager any amount that they are not of the ‘salt of the earth’ in any scriptural sense. Well, they had better stay in town, for this would be an instance of ‘much ventured, nothing gained.’”

“You remind me of a certain fox who could not say enough hard things about the grapes that were out of reach. But mark my words, Mr. Sibley will come, if it pours.”

“He wouldn’t risk the spoiling of his clothes for any woman living.”

“You judge him by yourself. Oh, dear, how shall I get through this long, horrible day! You men can smoke like bad chimneys through a storm, but for me there is no resource today, but a dull novel that I’ve read once before. Let me see, I’ll read an hour and sleep three, and then it will be time to dress for dinner. Oh, good-morning, Mr. Van Berg,” she says to the artist who had been listening to her while apparently giving close attention to

Mrs. Mayhew's interminable tirade against rainy days; "I have just been envying you gentlemen who can kill stupid hours by smoking."

"I admit that it is almost as bad as sleeping."

"I see that you have a homily prepared on improving the time, so I shall escape at once."

On the stairs she met Miss Burton, who was descending with a breezy swiftness as if she were making a charge on the general gloom and sullenness of the day.

"Good-morning, Miss Mayhew," she said; "I'm glad to see you looking so well after the severe shaking up you had yesterday. You would almost tempt one to believe that rough usage is sometimes good for us."

"I have no such belief, I assure you. Yesterday was bad enough, but today promises to be worse. I was going to make up a boating party, but what can one do when the water is overhead instead of under the keel?"

"Scores of things," was the cheery reply. "I'm going to have a good time."

"I'm going to sleep," said Ida, passing on.

"Miss Burton," said Stanton, joining her at the foot of the stairs, "I perceive, even from your manner of descending to our lower world, that you are destined to vanquish the dullness of this rainy day. Don't you wish an ally?"

"Would you be an ally, Mr. Stanton, if you saw I was destined to be vanquished?"

"Of course I would."

"Look in the parlor then. There are at least a dozen ladies already vanquished. They are oppressed by the foul-fiend, 'ennui.' Transfer your chivalric offer to them and deliver them."

"Stanton," laughed Van Berg, "you are in honor bound to devote yourself to those oppressed ladies."

"The prospect is so dark and depressing that I shall at least cheer myself first with the light of a cigar."

"And so your chivalry will end in smoke," she said.

"Yes, Miss Burton, the smoke of battle, where you are concerned."

"I fear your wit is readier than your sword. The soldier that boasts how he would overwhelm some other foe than the one before him loses credit to the degree that he protests."

“You are more exacting, Miss Burton, than the lady who threw her glove down among the lions. What chance would Hercules himself have of lifting those twelve heavy females out of the dumps?”

“It’s not what we do, but what we attempt, that shows our spirit.”

“Then I shall expect to see you attempt great things.”

“I’m only a woman.”

“And I’m only a man.”

“Only a man! what greater vantage-ground could one have than to be a man?”

“The advantage is not so uncommon that one need be unduly elated,” state Stanton with a shrug. “I forget how many hundred millions of us there are. But I’m curious to see how you will set about rendering the hues of this leaden day prismatic.”

“Only by being the innocent cause of your highly colored language, I imagine.”

“Oh, dear,” exclaimed a little boy petulantly, as he strolled through the hall and looked out at the steady downfall of rain. “Oh dear! Why can’t it stop raining?”

“There’s the philosophy of our time for you in a nutshell,” said Van Berg. “When a human atom wants anything, what business has the universe to stand in its way?”

“But you have no better philosophy to offer the disconsolate little fellow, Mr. Ban Berg?” Miss Burton asked.

“Now, Van, it’s your turn. Remember, Miss Burton, he has the same vantage-ground that I have. Indeed he’s half an inch taller.”

“The world long ago learned better than to measure men by inches, Mr. Stanton.”

“Alas, Miss Burton,” said Van Berg; “the best philosophy I have is this: when it rains, let it rain.”

“And thus I’m privileged to meet representatives of those two ancient and honorable schools, the Stoic and Epicurean, and you both think, I fear, that if Xanthippe had founded a school, my philosophy would also be defined. But perhaps you will think better of me if I tell that little fellow a story to pass the time for him. What’s the matter, little folk?” she asked, for two or three more small clouded faces had gathered at the door.

“Matter enough,” said the boy. “This horrid old rain keeps us in the house, where we can’t do anything or stay anywhere. We mustn’t play in

the parlor, we mustn't make a noise in the halls, we mustn't run on the piazzas. I'd like to live in a world where there was some place for boys."

"Poor child," said Miss Burton; "this rain is as bad for you as the deluge to Noah's dove, it has left you no refuge for the sole of your foot. Will you come with me? No one has said you must not hear a jolly story."

"You won't tell me about any good little boys who died when they were as big as I am?"

"I'll keep my word—it shall be a jolly story."

"May we hear it too?" asked the other children.

"Yes, all of you."

"Where shall we go?"

"We won't disturb any one in the far corner of the parlor by the piano. If you know of any other little people, you can bring them there, too," and they each darted off in search of especial cronies.

"May we not hear the story also?" asked Stanton.

"No, indeed, I may be able to interest children, but not philosophers."

"Then we will go and meditate," said Van Berg.

"Yes," she added, "and in accordance with a New York custom of great antiquity, made familiar to you, no doubt, by that grave historian Diedrich Knickerbocker, who gives several graphic accounts of such cloudy ruminations on the part of your city's great-grandfathers."

"I fear you think that the worshipful Peter Stuyvensant's counsellors indulged in more tobacco than thought, and that the majority of them had as few ideas as one of Mr. Burleigh's chimneys," said Van Berg. "And you regard us as the direct descendants of these men, whose lives were crowned with smoke-wreaths only."

"Now, Mr. Van Berg, you prove yourself to be a philosopher of a modern school, you draw your inductions so far and wide from your diminutive premise."

"Well, Miss Burton, you stand in very favorable contrast with us poor mortals. We are going out to add to the clouds that lower over the world, while you are trying to banish them."

"And if, after helping the children towards the close of this dismal day, your heart should relent towards us," added Stanton, "you will find two worthy objects of your charity."

"Oh what a falling off is here!" she exclaimed, following the impatient children. "Knights at first, then philosophers, and now objects of charity."

Miss Burton evidently kept her word, and told a “jolly story,” for the friends saw through the parlor windows that the circle around her grew larger and more hilarious continually. Then would follow moments of rapt and eager attention, showing that the tale gained in excitement and interest what it lost in humor. Young people, who did not like to be classed with children, one by one yielded to the temptation. There was life and enjoyment in that corner and dullness elsewhere, and nothing is so attractive in the world as genuine and joyous life.

Even elderly ladies looked wistfully up at the occasional bursts of contagious merriment, and then sighed that they had lost the power of laughing so easily.

At last the marvelous legend came to an end amid a round of prolonged applause.

“Another, another!” was the general outcry.

But Miss Burton had observed that the ladies and gentlemen present seemed inclined to be friendly towards the young people’s fun, and therefore she broached another scheme of pleasure that would vary the entertainment.

“Perhaps,” she said, “your papas and mammas and the other good people will not object to an old-fashioned Virginia reel.”

A shout of welcome greeted this proposition.

Miss Burton raised her finger so impressively that there was an instant hush. Indeed she seemed to have gained entire control of the large and miscellaneous group which surrounded her.

“We will draw up a petition,” she said; “for we best enjoy our own rights and pleasures when respecting those of others. This little boy and girl shall take the petition around to all the ladies and gentlemen in the room, and this shall be the petition:

“Dear lady and kind sir: Please don’t object to our dancing a Virginia reel in the parlor.”

“All who wish to dance can sign it. Now we will go to the office and draw up the petition.” And away they all started, the younger children, wild with glee, capering in advance.

Stanton threw away his cigar and met her at the office register.

“Gentle shepherdess,” he asked, “whither are you leading your flock?”

“How behind the age you are!” she replied. “Can you not see that the flock is leading me?”

“If I were a wolf I would not trouble the flock but would carry off the shepherdess—to a game of billiards.”

“What, then, would become of the flock?”

“that’s a question that never troubles a wolf.”

“A wolfish answer truly. I think, however, you have reversed the parable, and are but a well-meaning sheep that has donned a wolf’s skin, and so we will put you to the test. We young people will give you a chance to draw up our petition, which, if you would save your character, you must do at once with sheep-like docility, asking no questions and causing no delay. There, that will answer; very sheepishly done, but no sheep’s eyes, if you please,” she added, as Stanton pretended to look up to her for inspiration, while writing. “Now, all sign. I think I can trust you, sir, on the outskirts of the flock. Here, my little man and woman, go to each of the ladies and gentlemen, make a bow and a courtesy, and present the petition.”

“May I not gambol with the shepherdess in the coming pastoral?” asked Stanton.

“No, indeed! You are much too old; besides, I am going to play. You may look gravely on.”

Every one in the parlor smiling assented to the odd little couple that bobbed up and down before them, and moved out of the way for the dancers. The petitioners therefore soon returned and were welcomed with applause.

“Now go to the inner office and present the petition to Mr. Burleigh,” said Miss Burton.

“Hollo!” cried that gentleman, looking around with a great show of savagery, as the little girl pulled the skirt of his coat to attract his attention; “where’s King Herod?”

“We wish to try another method with the children,” answered Miss Burton. “Will it please you therefore graciously to read the petition. All in the parlor have assented.”

“My goodness gracious——”

“No swearing, sir, if you please.”

“Woman has been too many for man ever since she got him into trouble by eating green apples,” ejaculated Mr. Burleigh with a despairing gesture. “Why do you mock me with petitions? THERE is the power behind the throne,” pointing to Miss Burton.

“Take your places, small ladies and gentlemen,” she cried. “That’s Mr. Burleigh’s way of saying yes. While you are forming, I’ll play a few bars to give you the time.”

Did she bewitch the piano that it responded so wonderfully to her touch? Where had she found such quaint, dainty music, simple as the old-fashioned dance itself, so that the little ones could keep time to it, and yet pleasing Van Berg’s fastidious ear with its unhackneyed and refined melody. But the marked and marvelous feature in her playing was an airy rollicksomeness that was as irresistible as a panic. Old ladies’ heads began to bob over their fancy work most absurdly. Two quartets of elderly gentlemen at whist were evidently beginning to play badly, their feet meantime tapping the floor in a most unwonted manner.

“Were I as dead as Julius Caesar I could not resist that quickstep,” cried Stanton; and he rushed over to his aunt, Mrs. Mayhew, and dragged her into line.

“What in the name of all the witches of Salem has got into that piano!” cried Mr. Burleigh, bursting into the parlor from the office, with his pen stuck behind his ear, and his hair brushed up perpendicularly. “There’s sorcery in the air. I’m practiced upon—Keep still? No, not if I was nailed up in one of the soldier’s ‘wooden overcoats.’ The world is transformed, transfigured, transmogrified, and ‘things are not what they seem!’ Here’s a blooming girl who’ll dance with me,” and he seized the hand of a white-haired old lady who yielded to the contagion so far as to take a place in the line beside her granddaughter.

Indeed, in a few moments, all who had been familiar with the pastime in their youth, caught the joyous infection, and lengthened out the lines, each new accession being greeted with shouts and laughter.

The scene approached in character that described by Hawthorne as occurring in the grounds of the Villa Borghese when Donatello, with a simple “tambourine,” produced music of such “indescribably potency” that sallow, haggard, half-starved peasants, French soldiers, scarlet-costumed contadinas, Swiss guards, German artists, English lords, and herdsmen from the Campagna, all “joined hands in the dance” which the musician himself led with the frisky, frolicsome step of the mythical faun.

In the latter instance it was a contagious, mad excitement easily possible among hot-blooded people and wandering pleasure-seekers, the primal laws of whose being are impulse and passion. That the joyous exhilaration which

filled Mr. Burleigh's parlor was akin to the wild, half pagan frenzy that the great master of fiction imagined as seizing upon the loiterers near the Villa Borghese cannot be denied. Both phases of excitement would spring naturally from the universal craving for pleasurable life and activity. The one, however, was a rank growth from a rank soil—the passionate ebullition of passion-swayed natures; the other was inspired by the magnetic spirit of a New England maiden, who, by some law of her nature or consecration of her life, devoted every power of her being to the vivifying of others, and the frolic she had instigated was as free from the grosser elements as the tossing wild flowers of her native hills. With the exception perhaps of Van Berg, she had impressed every one as possessing a peculiarly sunny temperament. Be this as it may, it certainly appeared true that she found her happiness in enlivening others; and it is difficult even to imagine how much a gifted mind can accomplish in this respect when every faculty is devoted to the ministry of kindness.

This view of Miss Burton's character would account in part, but not wholly, for the power she exercised over others. Van Berg thought he at times detected a suppressed excitement in her manner. A light sometimes flickered in her deep blue eyes that might have been caused by a consuming and hidden fire, rather than by genial and joyous thoughts.

As he watched her now through the parlor window, her eyes were burning, her face reminded him of a delicate flame, and her whole being appeared concentrated into the present moment. In its vivid life it seemed one of the most remarkable faces he ever saw; but the thought occurred again and again—"If the features of Ida Mayhew could be lighted up like that I'd give years of my lifetime to be able to paint the beauty that would result."

Just at this moment he saw that young lady approach the parlor entrance with an expression of wonder on her face. He immediately joined her, and she said:

"Mr. Van Berg, what miracle has caused this scene?"

"Come with me and I'll show you," he answered and he led her to the window opposite to Miss Burton, where she sat at the piano. "There," he said, "is the miracle,—a gifted, magnetic, unselfish woman devoting herself wholly to the enjoyment of others. She has created more sunshine this dismal day than we have had in the house since I've been here. Is not that face there a revelation?"

“A revelation of what?” she asked with rising color.

“Of the possibilities of the human face to grow in beauty and power, if kindled by a noble and animating mind. Ye gods!” cried the artist, expressing the excitement which he felt in common with others in accordance with the law of his own ruling passion, “but I would give much to reproduce that face on canvas;” and then he added with a despairing gesture, “but who can paint flame and spirit?”

After a moment he exclaimed, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes: “It appears to me that if kindled by such a mind as that which is burning in yonder face, I could attempt anything and accomplish everything. Limitations melt away before a growing sense of power. What an inspiration a woman can be to a man, or what a mill-stone about his neck, according to what she is! Ah!—”

The cause of this exclamation cannot be explained in the brief time that it occurred. Stanton had happened at that moment to catch a glimpse of Van Berg and his cousin, and he called quite loudly:

“Harold, bring Miss Mayhew in and join us.”

At the same instant Mr. Burleigh’s heavy step passing near the piano, jarred down a picture that was hung insecurely, and it fell with a crash at Miss Burton’s side. Was it the shock of the falling picture upon unprepared and overstrained nerves, or what was it that produced the instantaneous change in the joyous-appearing maiden? Her hands dropped nerveless from the keys. So great was the pallor that swept over her face that it suggested to the artist the sudden extinguishment of a lamp. She bowed her head and trembled a moment and then escaped by a side door.

Van Berg walked hastily to the main entrance, thinking she was ill, but only saw her vanishing up the stairway with hasty steps. Many of the dancers, in their kindly solicitude, had tried to intercept her, but had been too late. It would seem that all ascribed her indisposition to a nervous shock.

“It is evident,” said the lady who had been conversing with her when she had acted in a like manner on the first day of her arrival, “that she possesses a highly sensitive organism, which suddenly gives way when subjected to a strain too severe;” and she remained Van Berg of her former manifestation of weakness.

He accepted this view as the most natural explanation that could be given.

15. Contrasts

GENUINE AND GENIAL were the words of sympathy that were expressed on every side for the young lady who had been transforming the dull day into one of exceptional jollity. A deputation of ladies called upon her, but from within her locked door she confirmed the impression that it was a nervous shock, and that a few hours of perfect quiet would restore her.

And it would seem that she was right, for she came down to supper apparently as genial and smiling as ever. Beyond a slight pallor and a little fulness about her eyes, Van Berg could detect no trace of her sudden indisposition.

The remainder of the day was passed more quietly by the guests of the Lake House, but the force of Miss Burton's example did not spend itself at once, and on the part of some there was developed quite a marked disposition to make kindly efforts to promote the enjoyment of others. The unwonted exhilaration with which she had inspired her fellow guests was something they could scarcely account for, and yet the means employed had been so simple and were so plainly within the reach of all, as to suggest that a genial manner and an unselfish regard for others were the only conditions required to enable each one to do something to brighten every cloudy day.

After Miss Burton's departure, the young people had the dance to themselves, their elders resuming the avocations and soberer pleasures from which they had been swept by an impulse evoked from their half-forgotten youth.

When Van Berg joined Miss Mayhew again, he found her mother and Stanton trying to explain how it all came about.

"There is no use of multiplying words," concluded Stanton; "Miss Burton is gifted with a mind, and she uses it for the benefit of others instead of tasking it solely on her own account, which is the general rule."

At this moment a letter was handed to Mrs. Mayhew, which she read with a slight frown and passed to her daughter. It was from Mr. Mayhew, and contained but a brief sentence to the effect that his absence would

probably be a relief, and therefore he would not spend the coming Sabbath with them.

Ida did not show the superficial vexation that her mother manifested, and which was more assumed than real. Her cheek paled a little, and she instinctively glanced at Van Berg as if her sudden sense of guilt were apparent to his keen eyes. He was looking at her searchingly, and she turned away with a quick flush, nor did she give him a chance to speak with her again that day; but his words—"what a millstone about a man's neck a woman can be!"—haunted her continually. Still oftener rose before her Miss Burton's flushed and kindled face, and the artist's emphatic assertion of the power of mind and character to add to native beauty. Had she not been a millstone about her father's neck? Was there not a fatal flaw in the beauty of which she was so proud, that spoiled it for eyes that were critical and unblinded?

Oppressed by these thoughts and being in no mood for her cousin's banter, or the artist's society which always seemed to render her more uncomfortable, she was glad to escape to the solitude of her own room.

Another "revelation" was slowly dawning upon her mind, namely—just what she, Ida Mayhew, was. A woman is an "inspiration" or a "millstone according to what she is," this stranger, this disturber of her peace, from whom it seemed she could not escape, had not only asserted but proved by showing her a lady she would have passed as plain and insignificant, but who nevertheless possessed some sweet potency that won and cheered all hearts, and who, she was compelled to admit, was positively beautiful as she sat at the piano, radiant with her purpose to cause gladness in others. Miss Burton had created sunshine enough to enliven the dismal day, and had quickened a hundred pulses with pleasure. She had been a burden even to herself.

Everything, from the artist's first disturbing frown to the present hour, had been preparing the way for the sharp and painful contrast that circumstances had forced upon her attention today.

But the thought that troubled her most, was that he saw this contrast more plainly than it was possible for her to see it.

Vaguely, and yet with some approach to the truth, her intuition began to reveal to her the attitude of his mind towards her. She believed that he was attracted, but also saw that he was not blinded by her beauty. She was already beginning to revise her first impression that he was shutting his

eyes to every other consideration, as she had seen so many do in their brief infatuation. His manner was not that of one who is taking counsel of passion only. Those ominous words—"according to what she is"—indicated that he was looking into her mind, her character. With a sense of dismay, she was awakening to a knowledge of the dwarfed ugliness her beauty but partially concealed, and she felt that he, from the first, had been discovering those defects of which she had been scarcely conscious herself. She began to fear that her cousin's words would prove true, and that he would not fall helplessly in love with her. Therefore the opportunity to retaliate and to punish him for all the mortifications that he had occasioned her, would never come. On the contrary, he might inflict upon her, any day, the crowning humiliation of declaring, in indifference of manner, that he had found her out so thoroughly, as to entertain for her only feelings of disgust and repugnance.

"Well," she concluded, recklessly, "why should I care what he thinks? I have lived thus far without his good opinion, and I can live a little longer, I imagine. I have had a good time for eighteen years after my own fashion, and I will just ignore him and have a good time still. Indeed I'll shock him to-night and tomorrow so thoroughly, that he won't come near me again; for I'm sick of his superior airs. I'm sick of his learned talk about books, pictures, and politics, as if a young society girl were expected to know about these things; and as for his small talk, it reminded me of an elephant trying to dance a jig;" and she sprang up with a snatch of song from the "opera bouffe," and began her toilet for dinner.

In a few moments, however, she dropped her hairbrush absently, and forgot to look at her fair face in the mirror.

"I wonder," she mused, "if he and Miss Burton ever met before they came here? It has been a strange coincidence that she should have felt such a sudden indisposition in each instance at the same moment that his name was casually mentioned. True, on both occasions, events occurred that might account for the sudden giving way of her nerves, but I cannot help thinking that she has some association with him that the rest of us know nothing about. She certainly seems more interested in him than in any one else in the house, for I have several times noticed peculiar and furtive glances towards him; besides, they are evidently growing to be very good friends. As for Ik, he seems quite inclined to enter upon a serious flirtation with her. But what do I care for either of them! Mr. Sibley will be here to-

night, and I'll enable this artist to bring his investigations to a close at once. I am what I am, and that's the end of it, and I won't mope and have a stupid time for anybody, and certainly not for him. Let him marry the school-ma'am. She can talk books, art, and all the 'isms' going, to his heart's content. I, as well as Miss Burton, have my opinion of flirting, and know from some little experience that it is jolly good fun.

"He can go his way, I'll go mine; E'en though he frowns, the sun will shine."

And with a careless gesture she affected to dismiss him from her thoughts.

To judge from her manner that evening and the following day, one might suppose that she succeeded very fully. Sibley, with an unwonted venturesomeness, did risk his one immaculate possession, his clothes, and came from the city through the storm. Ida and himself, between them, brought about the nearest approach to a "ball" possible in the circumstances.

The dancing, under their auspices, differed from that of the morning, not merely in name and form, but in its subtle character. In the one instance it had been an innocent pastime, occasioned by childlike and joyous impulses. The people's manner might have reminded one of a bit of darkened landscape that had been rapidly filled with light, and almost ecstatic life by the advent of a May morning.

In the evening, however, everything was artificial and in keeping with the gaslight. The ladies were conscious of their toilets, conscious of themselves, looking for admiration rather than hearty enjoyment. Even the older boys and girls, who had been joyous children in the morning, were now small parodies of fashionable men and women! A band of hired performers twanged out the hackneyed dancing music then in vogue, going over their small "repertoire" with wearisome repetition. People danced at first because it was the thing to do, and not from any inspiration from the melody. As the evening wore on, Sibley, who had been drinking quite freely, tried to introduce, as far as possible, the excitement of a revel, calling chiefly for swift waltzes and gallops through which he and Ida whirled in a way that made people's heads dizzy.

Miss Burton, after going through a quadrille with Stanton early in the evening, had declined to dance any more. She did not feel very well, she explained to Van Berg as he sought her for the next form; but he imagined

that she early foresaw that Sibley and others, and among them even Stanton, were inclined to give the evening a character that was not to her taste.

As Ida had made herself somewhat prominent in inaugurating the "ball," as Sibley took pains to term it on all occasions, Van Berg, as a part of his tactics to win the beauty's good-will, tried at first to make the affair successful. He danced with others, and twice sought her hand; but in each case she rather indifferently told him that she was engaged. He would not have sought her as a partner after his first rebuff had he not imagined, from occasional and furtive glances, that she was not as indifferent as she seemed.

Early in the evening it occurred to him that her slightly reckless manner was assumed, but he saw that she was abandoning herself to the growing excitement of the dance, as Sibley, her most frequent partner, and others, were to the stronger excitement of liquor. Observant mothers called away their daughters. Ladies, in whom the instincts of true refined womanhood were in the ascendancy, looked significantly at each other, and declined further invitations.

Van Berg had also withdrawn, but with his disposition to watch manifestations of character in general, and of one present in particular, he still stood at a parlor window looking on. The band had just struck up a livelier waltz than usual, and Ida and Sibley were whirling through the wide apartment as if treading on air; but when, a few moments later, they circled near where he stood, he saw upon the young man's face an expression of earthiness and grossness that was anything but ethereal. Indeed so unmistakably wanton was the look which Sibley bent upon his companion, whose heaving bosom he clasped against his won, that the artist frowned darkly at him, and felt his hand tingling to strike the fellow a blow.

She, looking up, caught his frown, and in her egotism and excitement, thought it meant only jealousy of the man she had so favored during the evening.

"Perhaps he is more deeply smitten than I imagined, and I can punish him yet," was the hope that entered her mind; and this prospect added to the elation and excitement which had mastered her.

"Can she know how that scoundrel is looking at her? If I believed it I'd leave her marvelous features to their fate," was the thought that passed through his mind.

In his perturbation he walked down the long piazza. Happening to glance into one of the small private parlors, he witnessed a scene that made a very sharp contrast with the one he had just left. An old white-haired, white-bearded man, a well-known guest of the house, reclined in an easy-chair with an expression of real enjoyment on his face. His aged wife sat near, knitting away as tranquilly as if at home, while under the gas-jet was Miss Burton, reading a newspaper, with two or three others upon her lap. She had evidently found the old gentleman trying to glean, with his feeble sight, the evening journals that had been brought from the city, and was lending him her young eyes and mellow voice for an hour. The picture struck him so pleasantly that he took out his notebook and indicated the fortunate grouping within, for a future sketch.

“It would make some difference in a man’s future,” he muttered, “whether this maiden or the one in yonder roue’s embrace were installed as the mistress of his home.”

Going back into the main hallway he met Stanton coming down the stairs with his face unusually flushed.

“Oh, Van,” he cried, “where have you been keeping yourself? Come with me and have some of the best brandy you ever tasted.”

“Where is it?”

“In Sibley’s room. He brought up a couple of bottles of the prime old article, and has invited all his friends to make free with it.”

“I’m not one of his friends.”

“Oh well, you’re my friend! What’s the odds? A swig of such brandy will do you good, so come along.”

“Come out on the piazza, Stanton. I want to show you something.”

“Can’t you wait a few moments? I want to have a whirl in this jolly waltz before it’s over.”

“No; then it will be too late. I won’t keep you long,” and Stanton reluctantly followed him.

Van Berg understood his friend sufficiently well to know that any ordinary remonstrance would have no influence in his present condition, and so sought to use a little strategy. Taking him to the window of the small private parlor, he showed and explained to him the pretty and quiet scene within.

Stanton’s manner changed instantly, and he seemed in no haste to return to the waltz.

“I thought it would strike you as a pretty picture, as it did me,” remarked Van Berg, quietly; “and I also thought that after seeing it you would not want any more of Sibley’s brandy. It would choke me.”

“You are right, Van. I fear I’ve taken too much of it already. I’m glad you showed me this quiet picture—it makes me wish I were a better man.”

“I like that, Ik; I always knew you had plenty of good metal in you. Now I don’t want to be officious, but I would not let a cousin of mine dance with Sibley any longer if I could prevent it without attracting attention. However generous he may have been with his brandy, he has had more than his share himself.”

“Thank you, Van; I understand you. By Jove, I’ll try the same tactics with her that you have with me. I’ll bring her here and show her a scene that has been to me like a quieting and restraining hand.”

A few moments later the waltz ceased, and Miss Mayhew came out on the cool, dusky piazza, leaning on Sibley’s arm. Stanton joined her and said:

“Ida, come with me; I wish to speak with you a moment. Mr. Sibley, please excuse us.”

“Indeed, Mr. Stanton,” said Sibley in tones of maudlin sentiment, “you are cruel to deprive me of your cousin’s society even for a moment. I’ll forgive you this once, but never again.” And then he availed himself of the opportunity to pay another visit to his brandy.

“Ida,” said Stanton, “I want to show you a little picture that has done me good.”

But the young lady was in no mood for pictures or moralizing. Her blood was coursing feverishly through her veins, her spirit had been made reckless by the wilful violence that she was doing her conscience, and also by her deep and growing dissatisfaction with herself, that was like an irritating wound. She was therefore prepared to resent any interruption to the whirl of excitement, which gave her a kind of pleasure in the place of the happiness that was impossible to one in her condition.

“You call that a pretty picture!” she said disdainfully; “Miss Burton reading a newspaper to two stupid old people who ought to be abed! A more humdrum scene I never saw. Truly, both your breath and your words show that you have been drinking too much. But you need not expect me to share in your tipsy sentiment over Miss Burton. Did Mr. Van Berg ask you to show me this matter-of-fact group which, in his artistic jargon, you call a picture?”

“If he had, he showed you a greater kindness than you deserved.”

“Yes, and a greater one than I asked or wished from him.”

“Then you are going back to dance with Sibley?”

“Yes, I am.”

“The prospects are, that you and Mrs. Chints and a couple of half-tipsy men will soon have it all to yourselves. I suppose the old adage about ‘birds of a feather’ swill still hold good. I was in hopes, however, that even if you had no appreciation of what was beautiful, refined, and unselfish in another woman’s action, you still had some self-respect, or at least some fear of ridicule, left. Since you won’t listen to me, I shall warn your mother. If Sibley and two or three others drink much more, Burleigh will interfere for the credit of his house.”

“You have been drinking as well as Mr. Sibley.”

“Well, thanks to Van Berg, I stopped before I lost my head.”

“From your maudlin sentiment over Miss Burton, I think you have lost your head and heart both.”

“Go; dance with Sibley, then,” he said in sudden irritation; “dance with him till you and Mrs. Chints between you have to hold him on his feet. Dance with him till Burleigh sends a couple of colored waiters to take him from your embrace and carry him off to bed.”

She made a gesture of rage and disgust, and went straight to her room.

Sibley, in the mean time, paid a lengthened visit to his brandy, and having already passed the point of discretion, drank recklessly. When he descended the stairs again to look for his partner, his step was uncertain and his utterance thick.

Stanton gave Mr. Burleigh a hint that the young man needed looking after, and the adroit host, skilled in managing all kinds of people and in every condition, induced him to return to his room, under the pretense of wishing to taste his fine old brandy, and then kept him there until the lethargic stage set in as the result of his excess. And so an affair, which might have created much scandal, was smuggled out of sight and knowledge as far as possible. Mrs. Mayhew had been so occupied with whist that she had not observed that anything was amiss, and merely remarked that “Mr. Sibley’s ball had ended earlier than usual.”

16. Out Among Shadows

THE EXPRESSION of Ida Mayhew's face was cold and defiant on the following day. She did not attend church with her mother, but remained all the morning in her room. She not only avoided opportunities of speaking to Van Berg when coming down to dinner and during the afternoon, but she would not even look towards him; and her manner towards her cousin also was decidedly icy.

"I don't know what is the matter with Ida," her mother remarked to Stanton; "she has acted so strangely of late."

"It's the old complaint, I imagine," he replied with a shrug.

"What's that?"

"Caprice."

"Oh, well! she's no worse than other pretty, fashionable girls," said Miss Mayhew, carelessly.

Stanton, in his anger on the previous evening, had not spoken of his cousin to Van Berg in a very complimentary way; but the artist remembered that the young man himself was not in a condition to form either a correct or charitable judgment; while the fact that Ida, as a result of his remonstrance, had gone directly to her room, was in her favor. He still resolved to suspend his final opinion and not to give over his project until satisfied that her nature contained too much alloy to permit of its success. He paid no heed therefore to her coldness of manner; and when at last meeting her face to face on the piazza Sunday evening, he lifted his hat as politely as possible.

Sibley did not appear until the arrival of the dinner hour. He was under the impression that he had gone a little too far the night before, and tried to make amends by an immaculate toilet and an urbane yet dignified courtesy towards all whom he knew. Society very readily winks at the indiscretions of wealthy young men. Moreover, he had been inveigled back to his room before his condition had been observed to any extent. There fore he found

himself so well received in the main, that he soon fully recovered his wonted self-assurance.

Mrs. Mayhew was particularly gracious; and Ida, who at first had been somewhat distant towards him as well as all others, concluded that she had not sufficient cause to be ashamed of him, and so it came about that they spent much of the afternoon and evening together. She did not fail to note, however, that when he approached Van Berg he received a cold and curt reception. Was jealousy the cause of this? In her elation and excitement on the previous evening, she had been inclined to think so, but now she feared that it was because the artist despised the man; and in her secret soul she was compelled to admit that he had reason to despise him—yes, to despise them both. She felt, with bitter humiliation, that his superiority was not assumed but real.

More than once before the day closed, she found herself contrasting the two men. The one had not had a shred of true worth about him. Stanton, to tease her and to justify his interference, had told her that Mr. Burleigh had been compelled to take charge of her companion in order to prevent him from disgracing himself and the house. Although too proud to acknowledge it, she still saw plainly that it was her cousin's interference, and indirectly the intervention of the artist that had kept her from being involved in that disgrace.

Even her perverted mind recognized that one was a gentleman, and the other—well, “a fashionable young man,” as she would phrase it. The one, as a friend, would shield her from every detracting breath; the other, if given a chance, would inevitably tumble into some slough of infamy himself, and drag her after him with reckless selfishness.

Still, with something like self-loathing, she saw that Sibley was her natural ally and companion, and that she had far more in common with him than with the artist. She could easily maintain with him the inane chatter of their frivolous life, but she could not talk with the artist, nor he with her, without an effort that was as humiliating as it was apparent.

What was more, she saw that all others classed her with Sibley, and that the people in the house who were akin to the artist in character and high breeding, stood courteously but coolly aloof from both herself and her mother. She also felt that she could not lay all the blame of this upon her poor father. Indeed, since the previous miserable Sunday on which Van Berg had tried to win Mr. Mayhew from his evil habit for one day at least,

and she had thwarted his kindly intention, she had begun to feel that she and her mother were the chief causes of his increasing degradation. Others, she feared, and especially Van Berg, took the same view.

With such thoughts surging up in her mind and clouding her brow, Sibley did not find her altogether the same girl that she had been the evening before. Still, as has been said, he was her natural ally, and she tried to second his efforts to re-establish a good character and to keep up the appearance of fashionable respect.

Stanton was in something of a dilemma. He did not like Sibley, and was ashamed of his recent excess; but having drunk with him, and so, in a sense, having accepted his hospitality, felt himself obliged to be rather affable. He managed the matter by keeping out of the way as far as possible, and was glad to remember that the young man would depart in the morning. While scarcely acknowledging the fact to himself, he was on the alert most of the day to find an opportunity of enjoying a conversation with Miss Burton; but she kept herself very much secluded. After attending church at a neighboring village in the morning, she spent most of the afternoon with Mrs. Burleigh, assisting her in the care of the cross baby.

Van Berg, much to Stanton's envy, found her as genial and cheery as ever when they met at the table. He learned, from her manner more than from anything she said, that the day and its associations were sacred to her. She affected no solemnity and seemed under no constraint, only her thought and bearing had a somewhat soberer coloring, like the shading of a picture. To his mind it was but another example of her entire reticence in regard to herself, while her smiling face seemed as open as the light.

But as she came out from supper the children pounced upon her, clamorous for a story. She assented on condition that Mr. Burleigh would give them the use of one of the private parlors—a stipulation speedily complied with; and soon she had nearly all the small folk in the hotel gathered round her.

“I shall stand without, like the ‘Peri at the gate,’” Stanton found a chance to say.

“The resemblance is very striking,” was her smiling reply; but for some reason he winced under it and wished he had not spoken.

When she dismissed her little audience there were traces of tears on some of the children's faces, proving that she could tell a pathetic, as well as a jolly story; and Van Berg observed with interest how the power of her

magnetism kept them lingering near her even after she entered the parlor and sought a quiet nook near the old gentleman and lady to whom she had been reading the previous evening.

Mrs. Chints, who liked to be prominent on all occasions, very proudly felt that sacred music would be the right thing on Sabbath evening, and, with a few of her own ilk, was giving a florid and imperfect rendering of that peculiar style of composition that suggests a poor opera while making a rather shocking and irreverent use of words taken from Scriptures.

Van Berg and Stanton, who were out on the piazza, were ready to grate their teeth in anguish, finding the narcotic influence of the strongest cigar no match for Mrs. Chints's voice.

Suddenly that irrepressible lady spied Miss Burton, and she swooped down upon her in a characteristic manner, exclaiming:

"You can't decline; you needn't say you don't; I've heard you. If you sing half as well for us as you did to Mrs. Burleigh's baby this afternoon, we'll be more than satisfied. Now come; one sweet solo—just one."

Stanton craned his neck from where he sat to see the result of this onslaught, but Miss Burton shook her head.

"Well, then, won't you join in with us?" persisted Mrs. Chints. "Sacred music is so lovely and appropriate on Sunday night."

"You are right in that respect, Mrs. Chints. If it is the wish of those present I think some simple hymns in which we can all join might be generally enjoyed."

"Now, my dear, you have just hit it," said the old lady at her side. "I, for one, would very much like to hear some simple music like that we had when I was young."

The old lady's preference was taken up and echoed on every side. Indeed the majority were ready for any change from Mrs. Chints's strident tones.

"Well, my dear," said the lady, "it shall be as you say." Then she added, "sotto voce," with a complacent nod, "I suppose the music we were giving is beyond the masses, but if you could once hear Madame Skaronni render it in our choir at the Church of the (something that sounded like 'pica-ninny,' as by Mrs. Chints pronounced) you would wish for no other. Will you play, my dear?"

"Ah, yes, please do," exclaimed some of the children who had gathered around her.

“In mercy to us poor mortals for whom there is no escape save going to bed, please comply,” whispered the old lady in her ear.

The light in Miss Burton’s eyes was mirthful rather than sacred as she rose and went to the piano, and at once an air of breezy and interested expectancy took the place of the previous bored expression.

“Come, Van,” said Stanton, throwing away his cigar, “we’ll need your tenor voice. We must stand by that little woman. The Chints tribe have incited to profanity long enough, and shall make the night hideous no more. If we could only drown them instead of their voices, what a mercy it would be!” and the young men went around and stood in the open door near the piano.

“You are to sing,” said Miss Burton, with a decided little nod at them.

“We intend to,” replied Stanton, “since you are to accompany us.”

She started “Coronation,” that spirited and always inspiring battle song of the church—jubilant and militant—a melody that is also admirably adapted for blending rough and inharmonious voices.

For a moment her own voice was like that of a singing lark, mounting from its daisy covert; or rather, like the flow of a silver rill whose music was soon lost, however, in the tumultuous rush of other tributary streams of sound; still, the general effect was good, and the people enjoyed it. By the time the second stanza was reached the majority were singing with hearty good-will, the children gathering near and joining in with delight.

Other familiar and old-fashioned hymns followed, and then one and another began to ask for their favorites. Fortunately Mrs. Chints’s knowledge of sacred music was limited, and so she retired on the laurels of having called Miss Burton out, informing half the company of the fact with an important nod; and in remembrance of this fact they were inclined to forgive her the anguish she had personally caused them.

Mrs. Burleigh, who had stolen into the parlor for a little while that she might enjoy the singing, remembered that she had a pile of note-books that had grown dusty on a shelf since the baby had furnished the music of the household. These were brought, and higher and fuller musical themes were attempted, until the singers dwindled to a quartet composed of a lady who had a fair soprano voice, Miss Burton, Stanton and Van Berg. Their selections, however, continued truly sacred in character, thus differing radically from the florid style that Mrs. Chints had introduced.

The sweet and penetrating power of Miss Burton's voice could now be distinguished. For some reason it thrilled and touched its hearers in a way that they could not account for. The majority present at once realized that she was not, and never could become, a great singer. But within the compass of her voice, she could pronounce sacred words in a manner that send them home to the hearts of the listeners like rays that could both cheer and melt.

At last she rose from the piano, remarking that there were other musicians present; and no amount of persuasion could induce her to remain there any longer.

"Perhaps you gentlemen play," she said, turning to the young men who were about to depart. "A man's touch and leadership is so much more decisive and vigorous than a lady's!"

"Mr. Van Berg plays very well indeed, considering his youth and diffidence!" remarked Stanton.

"And he has been taking advantage of a defenseless woman all this time! Mr. Van Berg, if you do not wish to lose your character utterly, you must take my place at the piano."

"I admit," he replied, "that I have taken more pleasure than you will believe in your in your contribution to our evening's enjoyment, but rather than lose your good opinion I will attempt to play or sing anything you dictate, even though I put every one in the parlor to flight, with their fingers in their ears."

"And you fear my taste will impose on you some such blood-curdling combination of sounds? Thank you."

"Now, Van, you have taught us what unconditional surrender means. Miss Burton, ask him to play and sing some selections from the Oratorio of the Messiah."

"Are you familiar with that?" she asked, with a sudden lighting up of her face.

"Somewhat so, only as an amateur can be; but I see, from your expression, that you are."

"I've contributed my share this evening," she said, decisively. "Please give us some selections from the Oratorio."

"Lay your command, then, on Stanton also. There's a part that we have sung together as a duet occasionally, although it is not 'so nominated in the bond,' or score, rather."

“If Mr. Stanton does not stand by his friend, then he should be left to stand by himself.”

"In the corner, I suppose you mean. But do not leave, Miss Burton. If you do not stand by Mr. Van Berg and sing with him the duet that begins with the words—

‘O death! where is thy sting?’

you will deprive us all of the chief pleasure of the evening, and it’s not in your nature to do that."

“Please, please do, Miss Burton,” cried a score of voices.

“You know nothing about my nature, sir. I assure you that I can be a veritable dragon. But out of regard for Mr. Van Berg’s ‘youth and diffidence’ I will sustain him.”

Van Berg’s voice was not strong, but he sang with taste and good expression. It suggested refinement and culture rather than deep, repressed feeling, as had been the case in Miss Burton’s singing. His style would be admired, and would not give much occasion for criticism, but, as a general thing, it would not stir and move the heart. Still, the audience gave close and pleased attention.

Ida Mayhew, who all this time had been out on the piazza and but half listening to Mr. Sibley’s compliments in her attention to the scenes at the piano, now rose and came to one of the open windows, where, while hidden from the singer, she could hear more distinctly. Her features did not indicate that she shared in the pleasure expressed on the other faces within, and her gathering frown was deepened by the shadow of the window frame.

“You do not enjoy it!” said Mr. Sibley, complacently.

“No,” she answered, laconically; but for reasons he little understood.

“Now you show your taste, Miss Mayhew.”

“I fear I do. Hush!” But when Van Berg’s solo ended, she breathed a deep sigh.

Then Stanton’s rich, but uncultivated bass voice joined in the melody. Still the effect was better than would have been expected from amateurs. After a few moments, Stanton stood back and Miss Burton and Van Berg sang together; then every one leaned forward and listened with a breathless hush. Her voice seemed to pervade his with soul and feeling that had been lacking hitherto.

As the last rich chords died away, the strongest expression of pleasure were heard on every side; but Ida Mayhew stepped abruptly out into the

dusk of the piazza with clenched hands and compressed lips.

“Peste!” she exclaimed under her breath. “What a contrast between Sibley and myself last evening and these two people to-night! What a worse contrast there might have been if Ik had not interfered in time! I have a good voice, but the guests of the house have not even thought of me in connection with this evening’s entertainment. I am associated only with the Sibley style of amusements.”

17. New Forces Developing

AFTER MR. VAN BERG and Miss Burton finished the selection from the Oratorio mentioned in the previous chapter, the old white-haired gentleman at whose side the latter had been sitting in the earlier part of the evening rose and said:

“I want to thank all the singers, and especially the young lady and gentleman now at the piano, not only for the pleasure they have given us all, but also for the comforting and sustaining thoughts that the sacred words have suggested. My enjoyments in this world are but few, and are fast diminishing; and I know that they will not refuse an old man’s request that they close this service of song by each singing along some hymn that will strengthen our faith in the unseen Friend who watches over us all.”

Van Berg looked at Miss Burton.

“We cannot refuse such an appeal,” she said.

“I fear that I shall seem a hypocrite in complying,” Van Berg answered, in a low tone. “How can I make a distinctly recognized effort to strengthen faith in others when lacking faith myself.”

Her eyes flashed up to his, in sudden and strong approval. “I like that,” she said. “It always gives me a sense of security and safety when I meet downright honesty. In no way can you better strengthen our faith than by being perfectly true. You give me a good example of sincerity,” she added slowly, “and perhaps my hymn will teach submission more than faith. While I am singing it you may find something that will not express more than you feel.”

In her sweet, low, yet penetrating voice, that now had a pathos which melted every heart, she sang the following words, which, like the perfume of crushed violets, have risen in prayer from many bruised and broken spirits:

"My God, my father, while I stray Far from my home on life’s rough way, Oh teach me from my heart to say, Thy will be done.

What though in lonely grief I sigh For friends beloved no longer nigh;
Submissive still would I reply, Thy will be done.

Renew my will from day to day; Blend it with Thine, and take away
Whate'er now makes it hard to say, Thy will be done.

Then when on earth I breathe no more, The prayer oft mixed with tears
before, I'll sing upon a happier shore, Thy will be done."

Stanton, warm-hearted and genuine with all his faults, retired well into the shadow of the hallway and looked at the singer through the lenses of sympathetic tears.

"Poor orphan girl," he muttered. "What a villain a man would be who could purpose harm to you!"

Van Berg, in accordance with his cooler and less demonstrative nature, kept his position at her side, but he regarded her with an expression of respect and interest that caused Ida Mayhew, who was watching from her covert near, a sense of pain and envy that surprised her by its keenness.

With a sudden longing which indicated that the wish came direct from from her heart, she sighed:

"What would I not give to see him look at me with that expression on his face!"

Then, startled by her own thought, so vivid had it been, she looked around as if in fear it was apparent to her companion.

His eyes were in truth bent upon her, and in the dusk they seemed like livid coals. A moment later, as with a shrinking sense of fear she furtively looked at him again, his eyes suggested those of some animal of prey that is possessed only with the wolfish desire to devour, caring for the victim only as it may gratify the ravenous appetite.

He leaned forward and whispered in her ear:

"Miss Ida, you do not know how strangely, how temptingly beautiful you are to-night. One might well peril his soul for such beauty as yours."

"Hush," she said imperiously, and with a repelling gesture, she stepped further into the light towards the singers.

"Then, when on earth I breathe no more," sang Miss Burton.

The thought was to the heart of the unhappy listener like the touch of ice to the hand. There was a kindling light of hope in Miss Burton's face, and something in her tone that indicated the courage of an unfaltering trust as she sang the closing lines:

"I'll sing upon a happier shore, Thy will be done."

But the words brought a deeper despondency to Ida Mayhew. In bitterness she asked herself, "What chance is there for me to reach 'that happier shore,' with the tempter at my side and everything in the present and past combining to drag me down?"

"There, thank heaven 'meetin's over,'" whispered Sibley, as Miss Burton rose from the piano. "I'm sick of all this pious twaddle, and would a thousand-fold rather listen to the music of your voice out under the trees."

"You 'thank heaven'!" she repeated with a reckless laugh. "I'm inclined to think, Mr. Sibley, from the nature of your words, you named the wrong locality."

The answering look he gave her indicated that she puzzled him. She had not seemed today like the shallow girl who had hitherto accepted of his more innocent compliments as if they were sugar-plums, and merely raised her finger in mock warning at such as contained a spice of wickedness and boldness. There seemed a current of thought in her mind which he could not fathom, and whether it were carrying her away or toward him he was not sure. He understood and welcomed the element of recklessness, but did not like the way in which she looked at Van Berg, nor did it suit his purposes that she should hear so much of what he characterized as "pious twaddle." He whispered again bolder words than he had ever spoken to her before.

"I wish no better heaven than the touch of your hand and the light of your eyes. See, the moon is rising; come with me, for this is the very witching hour for a ramble."

She turned upon him a startled look, for he seemed the very embodiment of temptation. But she only said coldly:

"Hush! Mr. Van Berg is about to sing," and she stepped so far into the lighted room that the artist saw her.

When Miss Burton rose from the piano she did not return to her seat in the parlor, but stood in the shadow of the door-way leading into the hall. The thought of her hymn had come so directly from her heart, that her eyes were slightly moist with an emotion that was more plainly manifest on many other faces. The old gentleman who had asked her to sing had taken off his spectacles and was openly wiping his eyes.

Stanton, ashamed to have her see the feeling she had evoked, turned his back upon her and slowly walked down the corridor. She misunderstood his act and thought it caused by indifference or dislike for the sentiment she had expressed. He had seemed to her thus far only a superficial man of the

world, and this act struck her as characteristic. But beyond this passing impression she did not give him a thought, and turned, with genuine interest, to listen to Van Berg who had said to her:

"I remember a few simple verses which have no merit save that they express what I wish rather than what I am."

With much more feeling, and therefore power, than was his custom, he sang as follows:

"I would I knew Thee better— That trust could banish doubt; I wish that from 'the letter' Thy Spirit might shine out.

I wish that heaven were nearer— That earth were more akin To the home that should be dearer Than the one so marred by sin.

I wish that deserts dreary Might blossom as the rose, That souls, despairing, weary, Might smile and find repose."

Before singing the next stanza he could not forbear looking to see if Miss Mayhew were listening, and thus it happened that his glance gave peculiar emphasis to the thought expressed. She was looking at him with an intensity of expression that he did not understand. Nothing that he did escaped her, and the quick flash of his eyes in her direction unintentionally gave the following words the force and pointedness of an open rebuke;

"I wish that outward beauty Were the mirror of the heart, That purity and duty Supplanted wily art."

He did not see that with a sudden flame of scarlet in her face she stepped back on the dusky piazza as abruptly as if she had received a blow. Had he done so, he might not have sung as effectively the remaining verses. After the first confused moment of shame and resentment passed, she paused only long enough to note with a sense of relief that others had not seen or made any such application of his words as she believed he had intended, and then she took Mr. Sibley's arm and walked away, leaving the remaining two verses unheard—

"I wish that all were better And nearer to their God— That evil's broken fetter Were buried with His rod;

That love might last forever, And we, in future, find There is no power to sever The strong and true in mind."

As he sang the last verse there was also a rapid change in the expression of Miss Burton's face. There was something of her old pallor that has been mentioned before. She looked at him questioningly a moment as if to see if he were consciously making an allusion that touched her very nearly, and

then, seemingly overcome by some sudden emotion that she would gladly hide, she quickly vanished down the dimly lighted hallway, and was seen no more until she came down to breakfast the following morning, as smiling and cheery as ever.

“Confound you, Van,” said Stanton, as the artist escaped from the thanks of the audience into the hall, “What did you put in that last verse for? You made her think of seeing her dead friends again, and so she was in no mood to speak to us poor mortals who are still plodding on in this ‘vale of tears.’ I’d give my ears for a quiet chat with her to-night. By Jove, I never was so stirred up before, and could turn Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhist, or anything else, if she asked me to.”

“In either case, Ik,” said Van Berg, “your worship would be the same, I imagine, and would never rise higher than the priestess.”

“Curse it all,” exclaimed Stanton impetuously, “I feel to-night as if that were higher than I can ever rise. I never was afraid of a woman before; but no ‘divinity’ ever ‘hedged a king’ like that which fills me with an indescribable awe when I approach this unassuming little woman who usually seems no more formidable than a flickering sunbeam. I agree with you now. She has evidently had some deep experience in the past that gives to her character a power and depth that we only half understand. I wish I knew her better.”

“Good-night,” said Van Berg, a little abruptly; “I think that after this evening’s experience, neither of us is in the mood for further talk.”

Stanton looked after him with a lowering brow and muttered: “Is he so sensitive on this subject? By Jove. I’m sorry! I fear we must become rivals, Van. And yet,” he added with a despairing gesture, “what chance would I have with him against me?”

“I could not hear distinctly,” Sibley had remarked as Ida took his arm and walked away from her post of observation. “Were you disgusted with his pious wail on general principles, or did something in his theology offend you?”

“It’s enough that I was not pleased,” she replied briefly.

“Little wonder. I’m surprised you stood it so long. Van Berg and Stanton are nice fellows to lead a conventicle. I think I’ll take a hand at it myself next Sunday evening, and certainly would with your support. I’ll say nothing of the singer, but if you will go with me to the rustic seat in yonder

shady walk, I'll sing you a song that I know will be more to your taste than any you have heard this evening."

"Please excuse me, Mr. Sibley; I'm afraid of the night air."

"You are unusually prudent," he said, a little tauntingly.

"Which proves that I possess at least one good quality," she replied.

"Perhaps if Mr. Van Berg asked you to go you would take the risk."

"Perhaps I might," she admitted, half unconsciously and from the mere force of habit, giving the natural answer of a coquette.

"He had better not cross my path," said Sibley, with sudden vindictiveness.

"Come, come!" replied Miss Mayhew, with a careless laugh, "let's have no high tragedy. I'm in no mood for it to-night, and you have no occasion for alarm. If he crosses your path he will step daintily over it at right angles."

At that moment Van Berg came out on the piazza. Although he could not hear her words, her laugh and tones jarred unpleasantly on his ear.

"Yonder is a genuine affinity," he muttered, "which I was a fool to think I could break up;" and with a slight contemptuous gesture he turned on his heel and went to his room.

"I cannot altogether understand you this evening, Miss Mayhew," said Sibley, with some resentment in his tone.

"You are not to blame for that, Mr. Sibley, for I do not understand myself. I have not felt well today, and so had better say good-night."

But before she could leave him he seized her hand and exclaimed, in his soft, insinuating tones:

"That then is the only trouble between us. Next Saturday evening I shall find you your old charming self?"

"Perhaps," was her unsatisfactory answer.

With a step that grew slower and heavier every moment, she went to her room, turned up the light, and looked fixedly at herself in the glass,

"I wish that outward beauty Were the mirror of the heart,"

she repeated inaudibly, and the her exquisite lip curled in self-contempt.

"Ida, what IS the matter with you?" drawled her mother, looking through the open door-way of her adjacent room. "You act as if you were demented."

"Why did you make me what I am?" she exclaimed, turning upon her mother in a sudden passion.

“Good gracious! what are you?” ejaculated that matter-of-fact lady.

“I’m as good as you are—as good as our set averages, I suppose,” she answered in a weary, careless tone. “Good night;” and she closed and locked her door.

“Oh, pshaw!” said Mrs. Mayhew, petulantly; “those hymns have made her out of sorts with herself and everything. They used to stir me up in the same way. Why can’t people learn to perform their religious duties properly and then let the matter rest;” and with a yawn she retired at peace with herself and all the world.

Ida threw herself on a lounge and looked straight before her with that fixed, vacant stare which indicates that nothing is seen save by the eye of the mind.

“Father’s drunk to-night,” she moaned; “I know it as surely as if I saw him. I also know that I’m in part to blame for it. Could outward beauty mask a blacker heart than mine? It does not mask it from him who sang those words,” and she buried her face in her hands and sobbed, until, exhausted and disheartened, she sought such poor rest and respite as a few hours of troubled sleep could bring.

18. Love Put to Work

ON THE FOLLOWING DAY there was the usual bustle of change and departure that is characteristic of a large summer resort on Monday morning. Stanton found Mrs. Mayhew very ready to occupy the seats he had obtained, and all the more so from his statement of the fact that several others had spoken for them.

“Ida, my dear,” called her mother; “come here, I’ve good news for you. Ik has got us out of that odious corner of the dining-room, and secured seats for us at Mr. Van Berg’s table.”

“I wish no seat there,” she said decisively.

“Oh, its all arranged, my dear; and a good many others want the seats, but Ik was too prompt.”

“I’ll stay where I am,” said Ida, sullenly.

“And have every one in the house asking why?” added Stanton, provokingly. “Mr. Van Berg treats you as a gentleman should. Why cannot you act like a lady toward him? If I were you I would not carry my preferences for the Sibley style of fellows so far that I could not be civil to a man like my friend.”

“You misjudge me,” cried Ida, passionately.

“You have a strange way of proving it. All that is asked of you is to sit at the same table with a gentleman who has won the respect and admiration of every one in the hotel, whose society is peculiarly agreeable to your mother and myself, and who has also shown unusual courtesy towards you ever since he learned who you were. What else can I think—what else can others think, than that your taste leans so decidedly to the Sibley style that you cannot even be polite to a man of high culture and genuine worth?”

“You are too severe, Ik,” said Mrs. Mayhew. “For some reason that I cannot fathom, Ida does not like this artist; and yet I think myself that she would subject herself to very unpleasant remarks if she made any trouble about sitting at the same table with him.”

“Can you not see,” retorted Ida, irritably, “that Ik has not considered us at all, but only himself? He wishes to be near Miss Burton, and without giving us any chance to object, has made all the arrangements so that we must either comply or else be the talk of the house. It’s just a piece of his selfishness,” she concluded with tears of vexation in her eyes.

“Oh, come Ida!” said her mother coaxingly, “I can see only a mole-hill in this matter, and I wouldn’t make a mountain out of it. As far as I am concerned, I should enjoy the change very much, and, as you say, the affair has gone too far now to make objection. I do not intend that either you or myself shall be the subject of unpleasant remark.”

And so the matter was settled, but Ida’s coldness and constraint, when they all met at dinner, very clearly indicated that the change had been made without her consent. Van Berg addressed her affably two or three times, but received brief and discouraging answers.

“Your cousin evidently is not pleased with the new arrangement you have brought about. I cannot see what I have done of late to vex her.”

“I’ll tell you the trouble. You offend her by not being the counterpart of Mr. Sibley,” said Stanton, irritably.

Van Berg’s brow darkened. “Do you think,” he asked in a meaning tone, “that she understands what kind of a man he is?”

“Oh, she knows that he can dance, flirt, and talk nonsense, and she asks for nothing more and thinks of nothing further. I’m out of patience with her.”

Stanton’s words contained the most plausible explanation of Ida’s conduct that occurred to Van Berg. The episode in the stage had made them acquainted, and her preconceived prejudice and hostility had been so far removed as to permit a certain degree of social companionship, whose result would now seem only increased dislike and distaste. As he supposed she would express herself, “he was not of her style.” Had she not spent the greater part of Sunday afternoon and evening with Sibley? What other conclusion was there save that he was “of her style,” congenial both in thought and character! And yet he still refused to entertain the belief that she recognized in him more than a fashionable man of the world.

If only as the result of the pique originating on the evening of the concert, Ida Mayhew had stood aloof from him, he could hope to remove this early prejudice by better acquaintance. But if fuller acquaintance increased her aversion, then he must believe that the defects in her character

were radical, inwrought through the whole web and woof of her nature. He could not assume the "Sibley style" if he would, and would not if he could, were her beauty a hundred-fold greater, were that possible.

He was fast coming to the conclusion, therefore, that he must abandon the project which had so fascinated him, and whose success had so strongly kindled his imagination. And yet he did so reluctantly, very regretfully, chafing as only the strong-willed do, when confronted and thwarted by that which is only apparently impossible, and which they still feel might and ought to be accomplished.

"I feel as the old alchemists must have done," he often thought. "Here is a base metal. Why can I not transmute it into gold?"

But as the conviction of his impotence grew upon him he felt something like resentment toward the one who had thwarted his purpose; and so it naturally happened that when they met again at the supper-table, his cool and indifferent manner corresponded with that of Miss Mayhew to a degree that gave her a deeper pain than she could understand.

"Why should she care?" she asked herself a hundred times that evening. But the unpleasant truth hourly grew more plain to her that she did care.

Stanton and her mother quietly ignored her "foolish pique," as they termed it. In truth the former was so preoccupied with Miss Burton, and with jealousy of his friend, that he had few thoughts for anything else.

He admitted to himself that he had never before been so thoroughly fascinated and awakened; and it was in accordance with his pleasure-loving, self-indulgent nature to drift on this shining tide withersoever it might carry him.

But with a growing feeling of disquietude he saw that Van Berg also was deeply interested in Miss Burton, and, what was worse, he thought he detected an answering interest on her part.

Occasionally, when the artist's face was turned away so that she obtained a good profile view of it, Stanton observed her looking at him with an expression which both puzzled and troubled him. She seemed to forget everything and every one, and to gaze for a moment with a wistful, longing intensity that he would give his fortune for were the glance directed toward himself. And yet when Van Berg addressed her, sought her society, met her suddenly, there was no heightening of color, nor a trace of the "sweet confusion" that is usually inseparable from a new and growing affection in a maiden's heart.

Apart from this occasion, furtive, and wistful look during which her cheeks would grow pale and she appear for the moment oblivious of present surroundings, her manner toward the artist was as frank and natural as toward any one else. It was evident that she liked and respected him, but even his jealousy could not detect the certainty of anything more.

But what was the tendency of Van Berg's mind toward her? That was the question which troubled him more and more every day. From the time of their parting on the previous Sabbath evening there had been a growing reluctance on the part of each to speak of one who so largely occupied the thoughts of both. The old jest and banter about the "school ma'am" ceased utterly, and they mentioned her only occasionally as "Miss Burton." The old frank confidence between them diminished daily, and in their secret consciousness they began to recognize the fact that they might soon become open rivals.

The attitude of Van Berg toward the young stranger who had so deeply interested him from the first hour of their meeting, was peculiar but characteristic. His reason approved of her. Never before had he met a woman who had seemed endowed with so many attractive qualities. She was not beautiful,—a cardinal virtue with him—but her face often lighted up with something so near akin to beauty as to leave little cause to regret its absence and the conviction grew upon him that the spirit enshrined within the graceful and fragile form was almost perfection itself.

It became clearer to him every day that some deep experience or sorrow has so thoroughly refined away the dross of her nature as to make her seem the embodiment of truth and purity. What though she still maintained complete reticence as to the past, avoiding in their conversation all allusion to herself, as far as possible; he still, in his inmost soul, knew he could trust her, and that while her smiling face, like the sunlit rippling surface of mountain lakes not far away, might hide dark, silent depths, it concealed nothing impure.

He also felt that there was no occasion to imagine any deep mystery to be part of her past history. The facts that she was poor and orphaned suggested all the explanations needed, and he felt sure that the sorrows she so sacredly and unselfishly shrouded from the general view would be frankly revealed to the man who might win the right to comfort and sustain her.

Could he win that right? Did he wish to win it? As day after day passed he felt this question to be growing more and more vitally important.

He was not one he believed who, like Stanton, could be carried away by a sudden and absorbing passion. In any and every case, reason, judgment, and taste would offer their counsel, and their advice would be carefully weighed. With increasing distinctness, this cabinet within his own breast urged him to observe this maiden well lest the chief opportunity of his life pass beyond recall.

And he did study her character carefully. Stanton, with the keen pain of jealousy, and Ida Mayhew with a disquiet and sinking of heart that she could not understand, noted that he very quietly and unobtrusively sought her society. When she spoke, he listened. When it was possible without attracting attention his eyes followed her, and yet his conduct was governed so thoroughly by good taste and chivalric regard for the lady herself, that only eyes rendered penetrating by the promptings of the heart would have seen anything more than the general friendliness which she inspired on every side.

Stanton, on the contrary, grew more undisguised and demonstrative in his attentions, although he aimed to conceal his feeling under the humorous and bantering style of address that was habitual with him. The guests of the house were not very long in recognizing in him an admirer of Miss Burton, but they imagined that his devotion was caused more by a wish to while away his idle hours than from any other motive; and it was also quite evident that the young lady herself took the same view. She gave a light and humorous aspect to everything she said, and permitted him scarcely an opportunity for a solitary "tete-a-tete." In vain he placed his bays and buggy at her disposal.

"I am social and gregarious in my tastes," she would reply, "and need the exhilaration of a party to enjoy myself."

Thus Stanton was led to a course of action decidedly in contrast with his past tendencies. He would attach his bays to a roomy carriage, giving her a "carte-blanche" in making up the party if she would be one of the number. He would perspire like a hero in any boating excursion or picnic that she would originate; and thus the fastidious and elegant fellow often found himself in unwonted company, for, with an instinct peculiarly her own, she soon found out the comparatively poor and neglected in the hotel, and appeared to derive her chief pleasure in enlivening their dull days. Quick-

witted Stanton early learned that the surest way to winning a smile from her was to be polite to people that, hitherto, he had habitually ignored. To Miss Burton herself he made no secret of the fact that his course was prompted only by a desire to please her, but she smiling persisted in ascribing it all to his good-nature and kindness of heart.

19. Man's Highest Honor

VAN BERG had not been very long in discovering that Miss Burton had a ruling passion, and it seemed to him a rather unique one. He was familiar with the many forms of self-seeking, common in society; he knew of those who were devoted to literature, science, or some favorite calling, as he was to his art; he had seen a few who apparently so abounded in genial good-nature that they rarely lost an opportunity of performing a kind act; and there were men and women in the world who, he believed, had fully consecrated themselves to the work of doing good from the purest and divinest motives: but he did not remember of ever having met with one whose whole thought appeared bent on disseminating immediate sunshine.

And yet this seemed true of Miss Burton. With admirable tact, with a tireless patience, and an energy out of proportion in one so fragile, she kept herself quietly and unobtrusively busy among the miscellaneous people of the house. Her charity was wide enough for all. Wherever she could discover gloom, despondency, dulness, or pain, there she tried to shine like a sunbeam, as if that were the primal law of her being. She rarely sought to "do good" in the ordinary acceptance of the term; still more rarely did she speak of her own personal faith; to cheer and to brighten appeared to be her one constant impulse. It was evident that this had become a kind of second nature in her now; but the thought occurred more than once to Van Berg that she had adopted this course at first to escape from herself and her own unhappy memories. Every day increased the conviction that sorrow was the black, heavy soil that produced this constant bloom of unselfish deeds.

Before the week was over she gave him special reason to believe that this was true. They were walking up and down the piazza one evening and had been talking with much animation on a subject of mutual interest. But she proved that there was in her mind a deeper and stronger current of thought than that which had been apparent. As the duskiness increased, and as in their promenade their faces were turned away from those who might

have observed them, she said a little abruptly and yet with tremulous hesitancy:

"Mr. Van Berg, does your philosophy teach you to believe, as you sung, on Sabbath evening, that

'There is no power to sever The strong and true in mind?'"

Before answering he turned to look at her. Her face seemed to stand out from the gloom of the night with a light of its own, and was so white and eager as to be almost spirit-like. His tones were sad as he replied:

"I wish I could answer you otherwise than as I must, for the impulse to say some words of comfort, which I feel you need, is very strong. I only sang of what I wished on Sunday evening. I have little philosophy, and still less of definite belief in regard to the future life. While I am not a theoretic skeptic, all questions of faith are to me so vague and incomprehensible that I am a practical materialist, and live only in the present hour."

"But, Mr. Van Berg," she said, in a low tremulous tone, "can you not understand that some people cannot live in the present hour, try as they may? Oh, how desperately hard I try to do so! Can you not imagine that something in one's past may make a future necessary to save from despair? If I lost my hold on that future I should go mad," she added in a whisper. "How can any materialistic philosophy be true when it fails us and so bitterly disappoints us in our need?"

"I do not say it is true," he replied, earnestly. "Indeed your words and manner prove to me, as could no labored argument, what a poor superficial thing it is. I feel, with the force of conviction, that it can no more meet your need than could the husks which the swine did eat."

"Since you were sincere, I will be also," she continued in the same low tone, looking away from him into the dark cloudy sky. "As the hymn I sung may have suggested to you, I have not got very far beyond mere submission and hope. Something in my own soul as well as in revelation tells me that there is a 'happier shore,' and I am trying to reach it; but the way, too often, is like that sky, utterly opaque and rayless."

"I regret more deeply than you can ever know, Miss Burton, that I find nothing in my own knowledge or experience to help you. All I can offer is my honest sympathy, and that you have had from the first; for from the time of our first meeting the impression has been growing upon me that your character had obtained its power and beauty through some deep and sorrowful experience. But while I am unable to give you any help, perhaps I

can suggest a pleasant thought from your own illustration. The black clouds yonder which seem to you a true type of the shadows that have fallen across your path, are, after all, but a film in the sky. The sun, and a multitude of other luminous worlds, are shining beyond them in the heavens. I would I had your chances of reaching a 'happier shore.'”

“That’s a pretty sentiment,” she said, shaking her head slowly; “but those luminous worlds are a great way off, with cold and vast reaches of space between them. Besides, a luminous world would not do me one bit of good. I want—” she stopped abruptly with something like a low sob. “There, there,” she resumed hastily dashing away a few tears. “I have occupied your thoughts too long with my forlorn little self. I did not mean to show this weakness, but have been betrayed into doing so, I think, because you impressed me as being honest, and I thought that perhaps—perhaps your man’s reason might have thought of some argument or probably conjecture relating to the subject that, for causes obvious to you, would be naturally interesting to one so alone in the world as I am.”

“I am sorry indeed that I never used my reason to so good a purpose,” he replied; “and yet, as I said at first, these subjects have ever seemed to me so above and beyond my reason that I have carelessly given them the go-by. My profession has wholly absorbed me since I have been capable of anything worth the name of thought, and the world, toward which your mind is turning, is so large and vague that I cannot even follow you, much less guide.”

She sighed: “It is indeed ‘large and vague.’” Then she added in firm, quiet tones: “Mr. Van Berg, please forget what I have said. The weak must show their weakness at times in spite of themselves, and your kindness and sincerity have beguiled me into inflicting myself upon you.”

“You ask that which is impossible, Miss Burton,” he replied earnestly. “I cannot forget what you have said, nor do I wish to. I need not assure you, however, that I regard your confidence as sacred as if it came from my own sister. Will you also let me say that I never felt so honored before in my life as I have to-night, in the fact that I seemed to your woman’s intuition worthy of your trust.”

They were now turned towards the light that streamed dimly from one of the windows. She looked up at him with a bright, grateful smile, but she apparently saw something in his eager face and manner which checked her smile as suddenly as if he had been an apparition.

She gave him her hand, saying hastily, "Good-night, Mr. Van Berg; I thank you. I—I—do not feel very well," and she passed swiftly to a side door and disappeared.

20. A Wretched Secret that Must be Kept

THE INTERVIEW described in the previous chapter touched Van Berg deeply, but its close puzzled him. Under the influences of his aroused feelings had his face expressed more than mere sympathy? Had her strong intuition, that was like a second sight, interpreted his heart more clearly than he had been able to understand it himself as yet? Reason and judgment, his privy council, had already begun to advise him to win if possible this unselfish maiden, who with a divine alchemy transmuted her shadows into sunshine for others, and often suggested the thought, if she can do this in sorrow, how inexpressibly happy she might make you and your aged father and mother if you could first find out in some way how to make her happy.

Indeed, so clear a case did these counsellors make out, that conscience added her authoritative voice also, and assured him that he would be false to himself and his future did he not, to the utmost, avail himself and his future did he not, to the utmost, avail himself of the opportunity of winning one whose society from the first had been an inspiration to better thoughts and better living.

Until this evening his heart had remained sluggish. Sweet and potent as her voice had been, it had not penetrated to the “holy of holies” within his soul. But had not her low sad tones echoed there to-night in the half involuntary confidence she had given him?

In his deep sympathy, in the answering feeling evoked by her strong but repressed emotion, he thought his heart had been stirred to its depths, and that henceforth its chief desire would be to banish the sorrowful memories typified to her mind by the black clouds above him. Had his face revealed this impulse of his heart before he had been fully conscious of it himself? Was it an unwelcome discovery, that she so hastily fled from it? Or had she been only startled—her maidenly reserve shrinking from the first fore-

shadowing of the supreme request that she should unveil the mysteries of her life to one who but now had been a stranger? He did not know. He felt he scarcely understood her or himself; but he was conscious of a hope that both might meet their happy fate in each other.

He leaned thus for a time absorbed in thought against a pillar where she had left him, then sauntered with bowed head and preoccupied manner to the main entrance, down the steps and out into the darkness. He did not even notice that he passed Ida Mayhew, where she stood among a group of gay chattering young people. Still less did he know that she had been furtively watching his interview with Miss Burton, and that when he passed her without a glance her face was as pale as had been that of the object of his thoughts. But he had not strolled very far down a gravelled path before she compelled him to distinguish her reckless laugh and tones above all the others.

With an impatient gesture he muttered, "God made them both, I suppose; and so there's another mystery."

As Van Berg's interest in Miss Burton had deepened, it had naturally flagged toward the one whose marvelously fair features had first caught his attention and now promised to be links in a chain of causes that might produce effects little anticipated. He had virtually abandoned the project of seeking to ennoble and harmonize these features that suggested new possibilities of beauty to almost every glance, for the reason that he not only believed there was no mind to be awakened, but also because he had been led to think the girl so depraved and selfish at heart that the very thought of a larger, purer life was repugnant to her. He believed she disliked and even detested him, not so much on personal grounds as because he represented to her mind a class of ideas and a self-restraint that were hateful. Circumstances had associated her in his mind with Sibley, who thus cast a baleful shadow athwart even her beauty and made it repulsive. Indeed the mocking perfection of her features irritated him, and he began to make a conscious and persistent effort not to look toward her. He now regarded his hope to illumine her face from within, by delicate touches of mind, thought, and motive, as vain as an attempt to carve the Venus of Milo out of mottled pumice-stone. Still he did not regret to-night the freak of fancy that had brought him to the Lake House, since it had led to his meeting a woman who was to him a new and beautiful revelation of the rarest excellence and grace.

But there was no such compensating outlook for poor Ida. To her, his coming promised daily to result in increasing wretchedness. From the miserable Sunday night on which she had sobbed herself to sleep, the consciousness had continually grown clearer that she could never find in her old mode of life any satisfying pleasure. She had caught a glimpse of something so much better, that her former world looked as tawdry as the mimic scenery of a second-rate theater. A genuine man, such as she had not seen or at least not recognized before, had stepped out before the gilt and tinsel, and the miserable shams were seen in contrast in their rightful character.

But, in bringing the revelation, it happened he had so deeply wounded her pride, that she had assured herself, again and again, she would hate his very name as long as she lived. Did she hate him as she saw him absorbed in conversation with Miss Burton whenever he could obtain the opportunity? Did she hate him as she saw that his eyes consciously avoided her and rested approvingly on another woman? Were hate and love so near akin? Could the belief that he despised her make her so wretched if she only hated him?

During the early part of the present week she had struggled almost fiercely to retain her hold on her old life. Uniting herself to a clique of thoughtless young people, who made amusement and excitement their only pursuit, she seemed to be the gayest and most reckless of them all, while her heart was sinking like lead. Every glance toward the cold, averted face of the artist, inspired her with more than his own scorn toward what she was and the frivolities of her life. She tried to shut her eyes to the truth, and clung desperately to every impeding trifle; but felt all the time that an irresistible tide of events was carrying her toward the revelation that she loved a man who despised her, and always would despise her.

And on this night, when she saw their dim forms and heard their low tones as Miss Burton and Van Berg talked earnestly on the farther end of the piazza; when she saw that they grasped hands in parting, and noted the rapt look upon his face as he passed her by uncaringly and unnotingly—the revelation came. It was as sharply and painfully distinct as if he had stopped and plunged a knife into her heart.

With all her faults and follies, Ida had never been a pale shadowy creature, full of complex psychological moods which neither she nor any one else could untangle. She knew whom and what she liked and disliked,

and it was not her nature to do things by halves. There had always been a kind of simplicity and straightforwardness even in her wickedness; and she usually seemed to people quite as bad, and indeed worse, than she really was.

Why of all others she loved this man, and how it all had come about, was a mystery that puzzled her sorely; but she had no labyrinthine heart in which to play hide and seek with her own consciousness. And so vividly conscious was she now of this new and absorbing passion, that she hastily turned her face from her companions toward the cloudy sky, that looked as dark to her as it had to Jennie Burton, and for a moment sought desperately to recover from a dizzy, reeling sense of pain that was well-nigh overwhelming. Then the womanly instinct to hide her secret asserted itself, and a moment later her laugh jarred discordantly on Van Berg's ears, and he interpreted it as wisely as have thousands of others who fail to recognize the truth that often no cry of pain is so bitter as a reckless laugh.

A little later, however, her companions missed her. Later still her mother sought admission to her room in vain.

When she came down to breakfast the next morning, she was very quiet and self-possessed, but her face was so pale and the traces of suffering were so manifest, that her mother insisted that she was not well.

She coldly admitted the fact.

The voluble lady launched out into an indefinite number of questions and suggestions of remedies.

"Mother," said Ida, with a flash of her eyes and an accent which caused not only that lady but several others to look toward her with a little surprise, "if you have anything further to say to me in regard to my health, please say it in my own room."

Van Berg glanced towards her several times after this, and was compelled to admit that whatever fault he might justly find, the face with which she confronted him that morning was anything but weak and trivial in its expression.

But her icy reserve and coldness did not compare favorably with Miss Burton, who had now fully regained her smiling reticence, acting as usual as if the only law of her being was to utter genial words and to bestow with consummate tact little gifts of attention and kindness on every side, as the summer sun without was scattering its vivifying rays.

21. A Deliberate Wooer

MISS BURTON'S bearing toward Van Berg was very friendly, but he failed to detect in her manner the slightest proof that she had ever thought of him otherwise than as a friend. There was no sudden drooping of her eyelashes, or heightening of color when he spoke to her, or permitted his eyes to dwell upon her face with an expression that was rather more than friendly. He could detect no furtive glances, nothing to indicate that she had caught a glimpse of that secret so interesting to every woman that she would look again, though cold as ice toward the man cherishing it. Nor was there the slightest trace of the constraint and reserve by which all women who are not coquettes seek to check, as with an early frost, the first growth of an unwelcome regard. Her manner was simply what would be natural toward a gentleman she thoroughly respected and liked, with whom her thoughts, for no hidden cause, were especially preoccupied.

Why then had she looked at him so strangely the preceding evening? Why had she apparently shrunk from the expression of his face, as if she had seen there a revelation so sudden and overwhelming that she trembled at it as a shy, sensitive maiden might in recognizing the fact that a strong, resolute man was seeking entrance to the very citadel of her heart? He felt himself utterly unable to explain her action.

What was more, he was puzzled at himself. The sympathy he felt for Miss Burton the previous evening had not by any means left him, but it was no longer a strong and absorbing emotion. His pulse was as calm and quiet as the breathless summer morning. He was conscious of no premonitory chills and thrills, which, according to his preconceived notions of the "grand passion," ought to be felt even in its incipiency. He even found himself criticising her face, and wondering how features so ordinary in themselves could combine in so winning and happy an effect; and then he mentally cursed his cold-bloodedness, and positively envied Stanton in whose manner, in spite of his efforts at concealment, an ardent affection began to manifest itself.

During the day it occurred to him more than once that her course was changing toward Stanton. There was no less return on her part of his light bantering style of conversation. Indeed, she seemed to take great pains to give a humorous twist to everything he said, as if she regarded even the words in which he tried to unfold his deeper thoughts as mere jests. But Van Berg imagined she began to make herself more inaccessible to Stanton. She entrenched herself among other guests in the parlor; she took pains to be so occupied as to make him feel that his approach would be an interruption; and whenever they did meet at the table and elsewhere, it appeared as if she were trying to teach him by a smiling, friendly indifference that he was not in her thoughts at all.

The positive coldness and aversion Ida sought to manifest toward Van Berg would not have been so disheartening as Miss Burton's device of seeming to be so agreeably preoccupied with other people that she could not or would not see the offering Stanton was eager to lay at her feet.

He felt this keenly, and chafed under it; but her woman's tact made her shining armor invulnerable. She persisted in regarding him as the gay, self-seeking, pleasure-loving man of the world that she had recognized him to be on the first day of their acquaintance. He imagined that a great and radical change had taken place in his nature, but she gave him no opportunity of telling her so. At first she had, with laughing courtesy, ignored his gallantry, as if it were only a fashion of his towards any woman who for the time happened to take his fancy; but so far from shunning him she had seemed inclined to employ what she regarded as a caprice or a bit of male coquetry, as the means of adding to the enjoyment of as many as possible; and Van Berg had often smiled to see his languid friend of yore seconding Miss Burton's efforts with an apparent zeal that was quite marvelous. To Stanton's infinite relief, Van Berg did not twit him concerning this surprising departure from his old ways. Indeed, Miss Burton had become too delicate and sacred a theme in both of their minds to permit of their old banter. They had been friends and were so still, yet each recognized the fact that events were coming that would sorely test and perhaps destroy their friendship. While they gradually fell aloof, as men will who are learning that their dearest interests are destined to conflict, they each tried nevertheless to maintain an honorable rivalry, and their bearing toward each other, although tinged with a growing reticence and dignity, was genuinely kind and courteous.

As the week drew to a close, however, it gave Van Berg pleasure—though not by any means in the same degree that it caused Stanton pain—to observe that Miss Burton was shunning the latter’s society as far as politeness permitted.

At the same time, while she evidently enjoyed his companionship, Van Berg observed that she did not seem to specially crave it; nor in truth did he find himself when away from her “distract,” vacant, and miserable, as was manifestly the case with his friend. He concluded that it was difference of temperament—that it was his nature to be governed by judgment and taste, as it was that of Stanton to be swayed by feeling and passion. All the higher faculties of his mind gave their voice for this woman with increasing emphasis. His heart undoubtedly would slowly and surely gravitate in the same direction.

How to win her therefore was gradually becoming the one interesting and most difficult question he had to solve. Although she was poor and alone in the world, it was evident that mere wealth and position would count but little with her. Stanton was handsome, rich, well-connected, and intelligent; but it seemed clear, as she recognized the sincerity of his suit, she withdrew from it. Some coarse, ill-natured people in the house, who at first, with significant nods, had intimated that “the little school-ma’am” was bent on bettering her fortunes, were soon nonplussed by her course.

Thus far Van Berg’s name had not been associated with hers in any such manner as Stanton’s. His cooler head, or heart more correctly, had enabled him to act very prudently. He would enjoy a walk or conversation with her, and there it would end. Neither by lingering glances nor steps did he show that he could not interest himself in other people and things. He did not attend the excursions or rides to which Stanton invited her, and others to please her, because he knew his friend “doted on his absence.” He felt too that the occasion was Stanton’s private property, and that it would be mean not to leave him the full advantage of the device, which might cause him more effort in a forenoon or an evening than he had been accustomed to put forth in a week.

But poor Stanton soon learned that his labors of love were destined to be very promiscuous. He never could manage to carry her off alone in a light skiff upon the lake; he could never inveigle her into the narrow seat of his buggy, nor could his most wily strategy long separate her from their companions on a picnic that had offered to his ardent fancy a chance for a

stroll into some favoring solitude by themselves. Had she been a princess of the blood, surrounded by a guard of watchful duennas, she could not have been more unapproachable to lover-like advances. Yet, with a vexation akin to that of old Tantalus himself, he constantly cursed his stupidity for not making better progress toward securing the smiling affable maiden, who by every law of his past experience ought to second his efforts to win her.

Van Berg, who remained at the hotel, or went off by himself on rambles and sketching expeditions, would watch his opportunity and quietly and naturally join her on the piazza or in the parlor, as he might approach any other lady. As a result they had long animated conversations, and found they had much in common to talk about.

Stanton would gnaw his lip with envy at these interviews and wonder how Van Berg brought them about so easily, but found he could not secure them, save in the immediate presence of others. Thus it came about that Van Berg practically enjoyed much more of Miss Burton's society than the one who made such untiring efforts to obtain it.

In Stanton's too eager suit, Van Berg thought he saw the danger he must avoid, and he complacently congratulated himself that he possessed a temperament which permitted thoughtful and wary approaches. He would not frighten this shy bird by too hasty advances. Through unobtrusive companionship he would first grow familiar to her thoughts; and then, if possible, would make himself inseparable from them.

He reached this conclusion during a ramble on Saturday morning, and with elastic tread returned to the hotel to carry out his well digested policy. As he mounted the steps he saw Miss Burton in the parlor, and at once entered through an open window. She was seated in a corner of the room with two or three little girls around her, and was dressing dolls.

"Do you enjoy that?" he asked, incredulously.

"I'm not a star," she replied looking up with a quiet smile, "but only a planet—one of the smaller asteroids—and shine with borrowed light. These little women enjoy this hugely; and I receive a pale reflection of their pleasure."

"You are certainly happy in your answer, if not in your work," he remarked.

"Mr. Van Berg," said one of the children emphatically, "Miss Burton is the best lady that ever lived."

“I agree with you, my dear,” responded the artist, with answering emphasis.

“Yes, children,” said Miss Burton, her eyes dancing with mischief, “and I want you to appreciate Mr. Van Berg’s genius too. He is the greatest artist that ever lived, and there never were such pictures as he paints.”

“Miss Burton, I beg off,” interrupted Van Berg, laughing. “You always get the better of one. No, children,” he continued in answer to their looks of wonder, “I know less about painting pictures, in comparison, than you do of dressing dolls.”

“But Miss Burton always tells us the truth,” persisted the child.

“Now you see the result of our folly,” said the young lady, shaking her head at him. “We have given this child an example of insincerity. We were jesting, my dear. Mr. Van Berg and I did not mean what we said.”

“But I did mean what I said,” replied the child, earnestly.

“Since only downright honesty,” the artist resumed with a laugh, “is permitted in this little group, so near nature’s heart, I think I must follow this small maiden’s example, and stick to my original statement. For once, Miss Burton, we have won the advantage over you, and have proved that yours are the only insincere words that have been spoken. But I know that if I stay another moment I shall be worsted. So I shall leave the field before victory is exchanged for another reverse.”

As he turned laughingly away he saw—what he had not observed before—that Ida Mayhew was sitting near. She was ostensibly reading; but even his brief glance assured him that her downcast eyes were not following the lines. Her face was so pale, so rigid, so like a sculptured ideal of some kind of suffering he could not understand, that it haunted him.

He had given but little thought to her for the past two days, and indeed had rarely seen her. She had managed to take her meals when he was not present, and on one or two occasions had had them sent to her room, pleading illness as the reason. Indeed her flagging appetite and altered appearance did not make much feigning on her part necessary.

She had evidently heard the conversation just narrated; and she believed that Van Berg had echoed the child’s belief in regard to Miss Burton more in truth than in jest.

The ruling passion of the artist was aroused. A plain woman might have looked unutterable things, and he would have passed on with a shrug, or but a thought of commiseration. But that oval, downcast face followed him. Its

sadness and pain interested him because conveyed to his eye by a perfect contour.

“Was it a trick?” he thought, “or a fortuitous combination of the features themselves, that enabled them to express so much! It must be so, for surely the shallow coquette had not much to express.”

“A plague on the perversity of nature,” he exclaimed, “to give the girl such features. If Jennie Burton had them, she would be the ideal woman of the world.”

The practical result, however, was that he half forgot during dinner that she was “the best woman that ever lived” in his furtive effort to study Ida’s face in its present aspect; and that he also spent most of the afternoon in his room sketching it from memory.

22. A Vain Wish

AS THE WITCH-HAZEL is believed to have the power of indicating springs of water however far beneath the surface, so Miss Burton, by a subtle affinity, seemed to become speedily conscious of the sorrows and troubles of others, even when sedulously hidden from general observation.

She discovered that something was amiss with Ida almost as soon as did the troubled girl herself; but for once her quick perception of causes failed her. She had explained Ida's apparent antipathy to Van Berg on the ground of the natural resentment of a frivolous society girl toward the man who had, by his manner and character, asked her to think and be a woman. It appeared to her, from her limited acquaintance, that Ida was developing into the counterpart of her mother; and for such a person as Mrs. Mayhew, Van Berg could never have anything more than polite toleration.

Miss Burton was aware that the artist's manner toward Ida had indeed been humiliating. During the previous week he had sought her society; but in the emphatic language of his action, he had almost the same as said of late:

“Even for the sake of your beauty I cannot endure your shallowness and moral deformity.”

Little wonder that the flattered belle should feel hate or at least spite toward the man who had virtually given her such a stinging rebuke.

But while this fact and the differences of character explained Ida's manner toward the artist, it did not account for the expression of pain and perplexity that she occasionally detected in the young girl's face. It did not explain why she should sit for an hour at a time, as she had that morning in the parlor, her eyes fixed on vacancy, and her face full of dread and trouble, as if there were something present to her mind from which she shrank inexpressibly. She tried several times to make advances toward the unhappy girl, but was in every instance repelled, coldly and decidedly.

“What IS preying upon Miss Mayhew's mind?” she queried with increasing frequency. Her experience as a teacher of young girls made her

quick to detect the presence of those dangerous thoughts which beset the entrance on mature womanhood. With a frown that formed a marked contrast with her customary gentle and genial expression, she surmised: "Can Sibley, or any one else, be seeking to tempt and lead her astray?"

As the most plausible explanation she finally concluded that Ida was brooding over her father's unhappy tendencies. Mrs. Burleigh had told Miss Burton the whole story; and she had listened, not as to a bit of scandal, but as to another instance of that kind of trouble which ever evoked from her more of sympathy than censure.

Ida might treat her fancied rival, therefore, as coldly as she chose, but the fact of suffering and the shadow resting upon her from her father's course, would bind Jennie Burton to her as a watchful friend with a tie that only returning happiness could sunder.

Stanton and Van Berg were standing together on Saturday evening, when Mrs. Mayhew and her daughter came down to await the arrival of the stage. Ida did not see them at first, and Van Berg was again struck by the pallor and stony apathy of her face. She looked like one wearied by conflict of mind; but the quiet of her face was not that of peace or decision. It was simply the vacancy and languor of one worn out with contending emotions.

"I once said," thought Van Berg, "that she would be beautiful if she were dead, and her frivolous mind could no longer mar the repose of her features with the suggestion of petty thoughts and ignoble vices. By Jove, I never realized how true my words were. As her motionless figure and pallid expression appear in yonder door-way, she would make a good picture of the clay of Eve, before God breathed life into the perfect form. Oh! that I had such power! I would give years to light up that face there with the expressions of which it is capable."

Then Ida saw him, and she turned hastily away, but not before he caught a glimpse of the blood mounting swiftly to her face. She was beginning to puzzle him, and to suggest that possibly his estimate of her character had been superficial.

"Your cousin has not seemed well for the past few days," he remarked to Stanton.

"Oh! Ida is as full of moods as an April day, only they scarcely have a vernal simplicity," was the satirical answer. From some caprice or other she is affecting the pale and interesting style now. See! she has dressed herself this evening with severe simplicity; but the minx knows that thin white

drapery is more becoming to her marble cheeks and neck than the richest colors. Besides, she remembers that it is a sultry evening, and so gets herself up as cool as a cucumber. By all the jolly gods! but she is statuesque, isn't she? Say what you please Van, the best of you artists couldn't imagine a much fairer semblance of a woman than you see yonder—but when you come to her mental and moral furniture—the Good Lord deliver us!"

"'Tis pity, 'tis pity," said Van Berg, in a low, regretful tone.

"An' pity 'tis, 'tis true," added Stanton, with a shrug.

"I can't think it is only affection that has made her appear ill the last two or three days," resumed Van Berg, musingly. "Her face suggests trouble and suffering of some kind."

"Touch of dyspepsia, like enough. However, Sibley will be here in a few minutes and he will cheer her up, never fear. I'm disgusted with her that she takes so to that fellow; for although no saint myself, I can't stomach him."

At the mention of Sibley's name, Van Berg frowned, turned on his heel and walked away.

"If Stanton is right about that fellow's power over her," he muttered, "I'll tear up the sketch I made this afternoon and never give her another thought."

The moment Ida became conscious of Van Berg's observant eyes her languor passed away. She had scarcely glanced at him while at dinner, but she had felt, by some subtle power of perception, that he was furtively watching her, and she also felt there was more of curiosity than kindness in his regard. With an instinct as strong as that of self-preservation, she sought to hide her secret, and when a few moments later the stage was driven to the door, she was prepared to welcome the man she now detested, in order to conceal her heart from the man she loved.

Van Berg, leaning against a pillar near, saw Mr. Mayhew with his sallow, listless face and lifeless tread mount the steps to greet his wife and daughter; but, before he could take Ida's hand, Sibley, in snowy linen and a coat from which the stains and dust of earth seemed ever kept miraculously, brushed past him, and seizing the daughter's hand, exclaimed:

"You see I've kept my promise, and am here." And then he whispered in her ear: "By Jupiter, Miss Ida, you look like a houri just from Paradise to-night."

Mr. Mayhew paused a moment and looked from the forward youth to his daughter's scarlet face, frowned heavily, and then gave her and her mother a very cool greeting before passing on to his room.

Ida could not forbear stealing a look at Van Berg, and her face grew pale again as she encountered his scornful glance. Pride was one of her predominant traits, and his manner touched it to the quick. She resolved to return him scorn for scorn, and to show him that in spite of her heart that had turned against her and become his ally, she could still be her old gay self. Therefore she gave Sibley back his badinage in kind; and in repartee that was bright and sharp as well as reckless, she answered the compliments of other gay young fellows who also gathered around her.

"Did I not tell you Sibley would revive her?" Stanton remarked as they went down to supper. "Such humdrum fellows as you and I are not to the taste of one who has been brought up on a diet of cayenne pepper and chocolate cream."

"But what kind of blood does such a diet make?"

"Judge for yourself. It looks well as it comes and goes in a pretty face."

"Look here, Stanton," said Van Berg, pausing at the dining room door; "there is that Sibley at our table."

"Oh, certainly! He claims to be Ida's friend, and you see that Mrs. Mayhew is very gracious to him. He's rich, and will inherit his father's business also; and my sagacious aunt inquires no further."

"Stanton, we both fee that he is not fit to sit at the same table with Miss Burton."

"You are right, Van," Stanton replied with a deep flush; "but I can do nothing without drawing attention to my relatives. After all, it is only a casual and transient association in a public place, over which we have no control. While she seems too near to him there you know that heaven is as near to hell as they are to each other. For the sake of poor Mr. Mayhew, if for no one else, let the matter pass."

"Very well, Stanton; but it must not happen so another week;" and then the young men who had withdrawn into the hall-way entered, but the expression of coldness and displeasure did not wholly pass from their faces.

23. Jennie Burton's "Remedies."

FORTUNATELY Mr. Mayhew had been placed at the supper-table next to Miss Burton, and Van Berg speedily became absorbed in watching the impression made on each other by these two characters that were so utterly diverse. It needed but a glance to see that Mr. Mayhew was a heavy-hearted, broken-spirited man. His shrunken inanimate features, and slight, bent form, looked all the more dim and shadowy in contrast with his stout, florid wife, who even in public scarcely more than tolerated his presence. This evening she devoted herself to Sibley, who sat between her and her daughter.

Mr. Mayhew seemed unusually depressed even for him, and began to make a supper only in form. Jennie Burton stole a few shy glances at his sallow face, and seemed to find an attraction in it she could not resist. Two handsome lovers sat near her, but she evidently forgot them wholly save when they addressed her; and she wooed the elderly man at her side with consummate tact and grace.

At first he was unconscious of her presence. She was but another human atom, and of no more interest to him than the chair on which she sat. Mechanically he declined one or two things she passed to him, and in an absent manner replied to the few casual remarks by which she sought to engage him in conversation. At last she said, in a voice that was indescribably winning and sympathetic:

"Mr. Mayhew, your sultry week in town has wearied you. Our country air will do you good."

There was so much more in her tones than in her words that he turned to look at her, and then, for the first time, became aware that he was not sitting at the side of an ordinary, well-bred lady.

"Country air is good as far as it goes," he said slowly, scanning her face as he spoke; "but it does not make much difference with me."

“There are other remedies,” she resumed in her low gentle tone, “which, like the air, are not exactly tangible, and yet are more potent.”

“Indeed,” he said, the dawning interest deepening in his face; “what are they?”

“I do not mean to tell you,” she replied with a little piquant nod and smile. “I’ve learned better than those people who have a dozen infallible medicines at their tongues’ end for every trouble under heaven. I never name my remedies; for if I did, people would turn away in contempt for such commonplace simples.”

“I can guess one of them already,” he said with a pleased light coming into his eyes.

“So quickly, Mr. Mayhew? I doubt it.”

“Kindness,” he said, in a low tone.

“Well,” she replied with a slight flush, “I can stoutly assert that this remedy did me good when all the long-named drugs in the ‘Materia Medica’ could not have helped me.”

He looked at her searchingly a moment, and then said in the same low tone:

“And so you are trying to apply your remedy to me? It certainly is very good of you. Most people when they are cured, throw away the medicine, forgetting how many others are sick.”

“Perhaps we can never exactly say we are cured in this life; but I think we can all get better.”

“It depends a great deal upon the disease,” he replied, with a shrug.

“No, Mr. Mayhew,” she said; and, although her tone was low, it was almost passionate in its earnestness. “God forbid that there should be a disease without a remedy.”

He again looked at her with a peculiar expression, and then slowly turned toward his wife and daughter. Mrs. Mayhew was too preoccupied to heed him, and Sibley was just saying:

“Miss Ida, I claim you for the first waltz this evening, and only wish that it would last indefinitely.”

“Pardon me for saying it to one so young and hopeful as yourself, Miss Burton,” Mr. Mayhew resumed gloomily, “but that which both God and good-sense forbid seems the thing most sure to take place in this world.”

Although so dissimilar, deep and sad experiences made them kin, and Miss Burton found she must make an effort not to let their thoughts color

their words too darkly for the time and place.

“I shall not let you destroy my faith in my old-fashioned simples,” she said in tones that were lighter than her meaning. “You must not be sure that because you are so much my senior, all my complaints have been merely children’s troubles. Appearances are often misleading, you know.”

“Not in your case, I think, Miss Burton. I have lost faith in almost everything, and most of all in myself; but this unexpected little talk has touched me deeper than you can know, and I cannot help having faith in you.”

“I will believe it,” she said with a smile, “if you will give me a little of your society before you go back to the city.”

He looked at her with sudden suspicion. “Do you mean what you say?”

“I do.”

“Why do you wish my society?”

She hesitated.

His face darkened still more, for he remembered what he was, and how little this young and lovely girl had in common with him.

“Answer me truly,” he insisted; “why should you wish my society? I’ve not a particle of vanity. I know what I am, and you undoubtedly know also. If you wish to advise me and preach at me, let me tell you plainly but courteously that your efforts, however, well intentioned, would be in vain, and not altogether welcome. I can conceive of no other reason why you should wish for my society.”

Her face became very pale, but she looked him full in his eyes as she replied:

“I do not wish to preach or advise at all. Can you not understand that one may ease one’s own pain by trying to relieve the suffering of another? Now you see how selfish I am.”

His face softened instantly, and he said:

“Miss Burton, that is too divine a philosophy for me to grasp at once. As the world goes now, I think you are founding a school of your own. You will find me an eager listener, if not an apt scholar, whenever you will honor me with your company.” And smiling his thanks he rose and left the table.

This conversation had been carried on in tones too low and quiet to be heard by others in the crowded and noisy dining-room. Van Berg, who sat opposite, had taken pains not to follow it and to appear oblivious, and yet

he could not refrain from observing its general drift and scope in Mr. Mayhew's manner; and his eyes glowed with admiration for her winning tact and kindness. The glance he bent upon her was perhaps more ardent and approving than he was aware, for she, looking up from the abstraction which the recent conversation had occasioned, seemed strangely affected by it, for she trembled and her face blanched with a sudden pallor, while her eyes were riveted to his face.

"You are not well, Miss Burton," said Stanton hastily, but in a low tone. "Let me get you some wine."

She started perceptibly, and then a sudden crimson suffused her face as she became conscious that other eyes were upon her.

In almost a second she recovered herself fully, and replied, with a smile:

"No, I think you, Mr. Stanton. A cup of tea is a panacea for all a woman's troubles, and you see I have it here. I did not feel well for a moment, but am better now."

The eyes of Stanton and Ida met. Both had seen this little episode, and each drew from it conclusions that were anything but inspiriting. But Van Berg was thoroughly puzzled. While as he felt then he would have gladly drawn encouragement from it, and perhaps did so to some extent, he still felt there was something peculiar in her manner, of which he seemed the occasion, but was not the adequate cause.

Miss Burton soon after sought her room, and for a few moments paced it in deep disquiet, and her whole form seemed to become tense and rigid. In low tones she communed with herself:

"Is my will so weak? Shall I continue betraying myself at any unexpected moment? Shall I show to strangers something that I would hide from all eyes save those of God? Let me realize it at once, and so maintain self-control henceforth. This is an illusion—a mere trick of my overwrought mind; and yet it seemed so like—"

A passion of grief interrupted further words. Such bitter, uncontrollable sorrow in one so young was terrible. She writhed and struggled with this anguish for a time as helplessly as if she were in the grasp of a giant.

At last she grew calm. There were no tears in her eyes. She was beyond such simple and natural expression of sorrow. She had ready tears for the troubles of others, but now her eyes were dry and feverish.

"O God," she gasped, "teach me patience! Keep me submissive. Let me still say, 'Thy will be done.' And yet the time is drawing near when—oh,

hush! hush! Let me not think of it—

“There, there, be still,” she said more quietly with her hand upon her side. “Hundreds of other hearts besides your own are aching. Forget yourself in relieving them.”

She bathed her face, put some brighter flowers in her hair, and went down among the other guests, seemingly the very embodiment of sunshine. All eyes save those of Ida Mayhew welcomed her; the children gathered round her; Stanton and Van Berg were both eager for her society in the dance, or better still, for a promenade; but she saw Mr. Mayhew looking wistfully at her, and she went straight to him.

With unerring tact she found out the subjects that were interesting to him, and reviving his faith in his own intelligence, led his mind through sunny, breezy ranges of thought that made the time he spent with her like an escape from the narrow walls and stifling air and gloom of a prison.

24. A Hateful, Wretched Life

THE ADVENT of half a score of young men from the city naturally made dancing the order of the occasion on Saturday evening. Mr. Burleigh, however, gave Sibley a hint that the features he had introduced the previous week must be omitted tonight, since nothing that would in the slightest degree lower the character of his house would be tolerated. The excitement therefore that Sibley had formerly received from Cognac, he now sought to obtain by pursuing with greater ardor his flirtation with Ida. Indeed, to such a nature as his, her beauty was quite as intoxicating as the "spirit of wine." There was a brilliancy in her appearance to night and a piquancy in her words that struck him as very unusual.

Nor was he alone in his admiration. The young men from the city thronged about her, and her hand was soon engaged for every dance until late in the evening; but on this occasion she had no opportunity, as before, of declining invitations from Van Berg. The solicitations of others went for little, the admiring eyes that she saw following her on every side could not compensate for the lack of all attention from him. He danced several times, but it was with those who seemed to be neglected by others. In his quiet, dignified bearing, in his unselfish affability toward those who otherwise would have had a dull evening, he appeared to her in most favorable contrast to the giddy young fellows who fluttered around her, and whose supreme thoughts were always of themselves, and of her only as she could minister to their pleasure.

"Miss Burton has so plainly won him," she thought, "that he has adopted her tactics of looking after those whom every one neglects. I could soon show him the one he has the greatest power of cheering, and I know that she has the deepest need of cheer of any one in this crowded house, but I'd rather die than give one hint of our first meeting he has humiliated me, and I in return love him! But he shall never know it. My looks can be as cold as his."

And so they were toward him, but for all others she had had the gayest smiles and repartee. Vividly conscious of the secret she would so jealously guard, she sought by every means in her power to mask it from him and all others. She would even permit her name for a time to be associated with a man she detested and despised, since thus the truth could be more effectively concealed.

Sibley's attentions were certainly ardent enough to attract attention, and occasionally there was a boldness in his compliments, which she, even in her reckless mood, sharply resented. His eyes seemed to grow more wolfish every time she encountered them, and more than once the thought crossed her mind:

"What a heaven it would be to look up into the eyes of a man I could trust, and who honored me."

What torture it was to see such a man present, and yet to feel that he justly scorned her.

Excitement and her strong will kept her up for a long time, but as the evening advanced despondency and weariness began to gain the mastery. Sibley came to her and said: "Miss Ida, I have your hand for the next waltz, but I see you are worn and tired. Let us go out on the cool piazza instead of dancing."

Listlessly she took his arm and passed through one of the open windows near. Van Berg had disappeared some time before, and there was no longer any motive to keep up the illusion of gayety.

Hardly had she stepped on the piazza before she heard her father say:

"Miss Burton, if it will give you any pleasure to know that you have made this evening memorably bright to one whose life is peculiarly clouded, you can certainly enjoy that assurance in the fullest measure. You have kept your word and have not preached at me at all; and yet I feel I ought to be a better man for this interview."

"O, Miss Ida," exclaimed Sibley, "this is the opportunity that I have been wishing for all the evening. I cannot tell you how gladly I exchange the glare of that room for the light of your eyes only. Would that life were but one long summer evening, and your eyes the only stars in my sky."

"Absurd," she carelessly replied; and then they passed out of hearing.

"Good-night, Miss Burton," said Mr. Mayhew abruptly; and he hastily descended the steps and was soon lost from view in the darkness.

His daughter and the man who seemed to be the companion of her choice, brought back at once the old conditions of his life. The prison walls closed around him again, the air seemed all the more foul and stifling in contrast with the pure atmosphere which he had been breathing, and the gloom of the night was light in comparison with his thoughts as he muttered:

“If Ida were only like this good angel she might save even me; but after my long absence she leaves me wholly to myself for the sake of a man who ought to be an offense to her. If I tell her and her mother what his reputation in New York is they will not listen to me. Although he is the known slave of every vice, my daughter smiles upon him. Froth and mud we are now and ever will be. After a glimpse into the life of that pure, good woman who has tried to be God’s messenger to me to-night, I can find no words to express my loathing of the slough in which I and mine have mired. My only child, by the force of natural selection, bids fair to add to our number a drunkard and a libertine; and I am powerless to prevent it. The mother that should guard and guide her child, is blind to everything save that he is rich. Froth and mud! Froth and mud!”

Unable to endure his thoughts, he went to his room and found oblivion in the stupor of intoxication.

On reaching the end of the long piazza, Sibley led Ida to a veranda little frequented at that hour, saying, as he did so:

“Let us get away from prying eyes. I always feel when with you that three is an enormous crowd.”

A gentleman who had been smoking rose hastily at this broad hint, which he could not help overhearing, and walked haughtily away.

Ida, with a regret deeper than she could have thought possible, saw that it was Van Berg. Her first impulse was to compel her companion to go back; but that would look like following him. Weary, disheartened by the fate that seemed ever against her, she sank into the chair he had just vacated.

For a time she did not heed or scarcely hear Sibley’s characteristic flatteries, but at last he said plainly:

“Miss Ida, do you know that you are the one woman of all the world to me?”

“Oh, hush!” she replied, rising. “I know you say that to every pretty woman who will listen to you, as I shall no longer to-night. Come.”

Baffled and puzzled also by the moody girl, who of late seemed so different from her former self, he had no resource but to accompany her back to the main entrance. Here, where the eyes of others were upon her, she said abruptly, but with a charming smile:

“Good-night, Mr. Sibley,” and went directly to her room.

The young man looked rather nonplussed and muttered an oath as he walked away to console himself after the fashion of his kind.

“Is there no escape from this wretched life?” Ida sighed as she wearily threw herself into a chair on reaching her room. “A man whose addresses are an insult is my lover. The only man I can ever love associates me in his mind with this low fellow. My father obtains what little comfort he gets from the charity of a stranger. How can I face this prospect day after day. Oh, that I had never come here!”

“Ida,” said her mother entering hastily, “what has happened to put your father out so? I had a headache this evening, and came up early. A little while ago he stalked in with his absurd tragic air. ‘What is the matter,’ I asked. ‘Look to your daughter,’ he said. ‘What do you mean?’ I asked, quite frightened. ‘If you were a true mother,’ he replied, ‘you would no more leave her with that rouse Sibley, than with so much pitch. Yet he is courting her openly; and what is worse, she receives his addresses, and permits herself to be identified with him.’ ‘Oh, pshaw,’ I answered carelessly; ‘Sibley is about on a par with half the young men in society, and Ida might do a great deal worse. No fear of her; for there isn’t a girl living who knows how to take care of herself better than she.’ ‘Bah!’ he said, ‘if she knew how to take care of herself, she would permit a snake to touch her sooner than that man. Ida might do worse, might she? God knows how: I don’t. A pretty family we shall be when he is added to our charming group. The mud will predominate then;’ and with that he opened a bottle of brandy and drank himself stupid.”

As Mrs. Mayhew rattled this conversation off in a loud whisper, Ida seemed turning into stone, but at its close she said icily:

“In speaking of such a union as possible, my parents have shown their opinion of me. Good-night. I wish to be alone.”

“But did anything happen between you to set your father off so?” persisted Mrs. Mayhew.

“Nothing unusual. I suppose father heard one of Mr. Sibley’s compliments; and that was enough to disgust any sensible man. Good-

night.”

“My gracious! You might as well turn me out of your room.”

“Mother, I wish to be alone,” said Ida, passionately.

“A pretty life I lead of it between you and your father,” sobbed Mrs. Mayhew, retreating to her own apartment.

“A hateful, wretched life we all three shall lead to the end of time, for aught that I can see,” Ida groaned as she restlessly paced her room; “but I have no better resource than to follow father’s example.”

She took an opiate, and so escaped from thought for a time in the deep lethargy it brought.

25. Half-truths

A CHURCH BELL was ringing in a neighboring village the following morning when Ida awoke. The sunlight streamed in at the open window through the half-closed blinds, flecking the floor with bars of light. Birds were singing in the trees without, and a southern breeze rustled through the foliage as a sweet low accompaniment. Surely it was a bright pleasant world on which her heavy eyes were opening.

Poor child! she was fast learning now that the darkest clouds that shadow our paths are not the vapors that rise from the earth, but the thoughts and memories of an unhappy and a sinful heart.

The sunlight mocked her; and her spirit was so out of tune that the sweet sounds of nature made jarring discord.

But the church bell caught her attention. How natural and almost universal is the instinct which leads us when in trouble to seek the support of some Higher power. No matter how wayward the human child may have been, how hardened by years of wrong, or arrogantly entrenched in some phase of rational philosophy, when the darkness of danger or sorrow blots out the light of earthly hopes, or hides the path which was trodden so confidently, then, with the impulse of frightened children whom night has suddenly overtaken, there is a longing for the Father's hand and the Father's reassuring voice. If there is no God to love and help us, human nature is a lie.

Thus far Ida Mayhew had no more thought of turning Heavenward for help than to the philosophy of Plato. Indeed, religion as a system of truth, and Greek philosophy were almost equally unknown to her. But that church-bell reminded her of the source of hope and help to which burdened hearts have been turning in all the ages, and with the vague thought that she might find some light and cheer that was not in the sunshine, she hastily dressed and went down in time to catch one of the last carriages. When she reached the church, she found her mother had preceded her, and that her cousin Ik Stanton was also there; but she correctly surmised that the only

devotion to which he was inclined had been inspired by Miss Burton, who sat not far away. She was soon satisfied that Van Berg was not present.

As a general thing, when at church, Ida had given more consideration to the people and the toilets about her than to either the service or the sermon; but today she wistfully turned her thoughts to both, in the hope that they might do her good, although she had as vague an idea as to the mode or process as if both were an Indian incantation.

But she was thoroughly disappointed. Her thoughts wandered continually from the services. With almost the vividness of bodily presence, three faces were looking upon her—her father's with an infinite reproach; Sibley's, with smiling lips and wolfish eyes; and Van Berg's, first coolly questioning and exploring in its expression, and then coldly averted and scornful in consequence of what he had discovered. Not houses, but minds are haunted.

The clergyman, however, was an able, forcible speaker, and held her attention from the first. His sermon was topical rather than textual in its character; that is, he enlarged on what he termed "the irreconcilable enmity between God and the world," taking as his texts the following selections:

"The carnal mind is enmity against God."

And again, "Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."

The sermon was chiefly an argument; and the point of it was that there could be no compromise between these contending powers—God on one side, the world on the other—and he insisted that his hearers must be, and were with one party or the other. The trouble was, that in concentrating his thoughts on the single point he meant to make, he took too much for granted—namely, that all his hearers understood sufficiently the character of God, and the sense in which the Bible uses the term "world," not to misapprehend the nature of his "enmity." To seasoned church-goers the sermon was both true and very satisfactory.

But when the minister reached the conclusion of his argument with the words, "So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God," poor Ida drew a long dreary sigh, and wished she had remained at home. She was certainly "in the flesh," if any one were; and in addition to the fact that she neither pleased herself nor any one else that she respected and loved, she was now given the assurance, apparently fortified by Holy Writ, that she

could not “please God.” The simple and divine diplomacy by which this “enmity” is removed was unknown to her.

She turned to note how Miss Burton received a message that was so unwelcome to herself, and saw that she was not listening. There was a dreamy far-away look in her eyes that clearly was not inspired by the thought of “enmity.”

“She is probably thinking of the artist and the ideal future that he can give her. How foolish it is in poor Ik there to try to rival HIM! It was an unlucky day for us both, cousin of mine, when we came to this place!”

More disheartened and despondent than ever, she rode homeward with her mother, answering questions only in monosyllables. All that religion had said to her that morning was: “Give up the world—all with which you have hitherto been familiar, and have enjoyed.” God was an infinite, all-powerful, remote abstraction, and yet for His sake she must resign everything which would enable her to forget, or at least disguise the pain and jealousy which were at times almost unendurable; and she knew of no substitute with which to replace “the world” she was asked to forego.

This religion of mere negation, expulsion, and restraint is too often presented to the mind. Dykes and levees are very useful, and in some places essential; but if low malarial shores could be lifted up into breezy hills and table-lands, this would be better. This is not only possible, but it is the true method in respect to the human soul; and one should seek to grow better not by sedulous effort to keep out an evil world, but rather to fill up his heart with a good pure world such as God made and blessed.

The sermon Ida heard that morning, therefore, only added to the burden that was already too heavy to be carried much longer.

26. Sunday Table-talk

TO THE RELIEF OF ALL save Mrs. Mayhew, Sibley dined with a couple of young, fast men, who enforced their invitation by the irresistible attraction of a bottle of wine.

“There is too much starch and dignity at that table to suit me, any way,” he remarked. “There are those two model saints, who led our devotions last Sunday evening, flirting with ponderous gravity with that deep little school-ma’am, who has turned both their heads, but can’t make up her mind which of them to capture, both being such marvelously good game for one of her class. Cute Yankee as she believes herself to be, she’s a fool to think that either of them is more than playing with her. By Jupiter! but it would be sport to cut ’em both out; and I could do it if I were up here a week. Those who know the world know that such women cipher out these matters in the spirit of New England thrift, and you have only to mislead them with sufficient plausible data to capture them body and soul.” And Sibley complacently sipped his wine as if he had stated all there was to be said on the subject. Few men prided themselves more on a profound knowledge of the world than he.

Ida’s despondency while at dinner was so great she could not throw it off. Listlessly and wearily she barely tasted of the different courses as they were passed to her. She consciously made only one effort, and that was to appear utterly indifferent to Van Berg; and both circumstances and his contemptuous neglect made but little feigning necessary. The evening before had associated her so inseparably in his mind with Sibley, that he was beginning to regard her with aversion.

“Trivial natures are disturbed by trivial causes,” he thought; “and she looks as if the world had turned black because Sibley has been lured from her side for an hour by a bottle of wine. He’ll revive her again before supper.”

“How wintry that old gentleman looks who is just entering!” Stanton remarked. “It makes one shiver to think of becoming as frosty and white as

he.”

“Oh, don’t speak of being old!” cried Mrs. Mayhew. “Remember there are some at the table who are in greater danger of that final misfortune than you young people.”

“Do you dread being old, Miss Burton?” Van Berg asked.

“No; but I do the process of growing old.”

“For once we think alike, Miss Burton,” said Ida abruptly. “To think of plodding on through indefinite dreary years toward the miserable conclusion of old age! and yet it is said nothing is so sweet as life.”

“Really, Cousin, your advance down the ages reminds one more of a quickstep than of ‘plodding,’” remarked Stanton.

“The step matters little,” she retorted, “as long as you feel as if you were going to your own funeral. I agree with Miss Burton, that growing old is worse than being old, though Heaven knows that both are bad enough.”

“I’m not sure that Heaven would agree with either of us,” said Miss Burton, gently.

“I fear the sermon did not do you much good, Coz,” said Stanton, maliciously.

“No; it did not. It did me harm, if such a thing were possible,” was the reckless reply.

“Human nature is generally regarded as capable of improvement,” remarked Stanton, sententiously.

“I was not speaking of human nature generally,” said Ida; “I was thinking of myself.”

“As usual, my charming Cousin.”

She flushed resentfully, but did not reply.

“And I feel that Miss Mayhew has done herself injustice in her thought,” said Miss Burton, with a sympathetic glance at Ida. “And how is it with you, Mr. Van Berg? Do you dread growing old?”

“I fear my opinion will remind you of Jack Bunsby,” replied the artist. “Growing old is like a prospective journey. So much depends upon the country through which you travel and your company. My father and mother are taking a summer excursion through Norway and Sweden, and I know they are enjoying themselves abundantly. They have had a good time growing old. Why should not others?”

Ida appeared to resent his words bitterly; and with a tone and manner that surprised every one she said:

“Mr. Van Berg, I could not have believed that you were capable of making so superficial a reply. Why not say, if the poor were rich, if the ugly were beautiful, if the sick were well, if the bad were good, and we all had our heart’s desires, we could journey on complacently and prosperously?”

The artist flushed deeply under this address, coming from such an unexpected quarter; but he replied quietly:

“That allusion with which I prefaced my remark, Miss Mayhew, proved that I regard my opinion as of little value; and yet I have no better one to offer. Nothing is more trite than the comparison of life to a journey or a pilgrimage. If one were compelled to travel with very disagreeable people, in fifth-rate conveyances, and through regions uninteresting or repulsive, the journey, or to abandon the figure, growing old, might well be dreaded. From my soul I would pity one condemned to such a fate. It would, indeed, be ‘dreary plodding’ where one’s best hope would be that he might stumble upon his grave as soon as possible. But I do not believe in any such dreary fatalism. We are endowed with intelligence to choose carefully our paths and companions; and I cannot help thinking that the majority might choose wisely enough to make life an agreeable journey in the main.”

“Look here, Van; I’m no casuist,” said Stanton with a shrug; “but I can detect a flaw in your philosophy at once. Suppose one wanted good company and could not get it.”

“He had better jog on alone, in that case, than take bad company.”

“And heavy jogging it might be too,” muttered Stanton, with a frown.

Ida’s head dropped low and her face became very pale. Her impulsive cousin in expressing his own tormenting fear, had unconsciously defined what promised to be her wretched experience. She felt that the artist’s eyes were upon her; and in the blind impulse to shield her secret, which then was so vividly plain to her consciousness, she raised her head suddenly, and with a reckless laugh remarked:

“For a wonder I also can half agree with Mr. Van Berg—congenial society for me or none at all.”

A second later she could have bitten her tongue out before uttering words virtually claimed Sibley as her most congenial companion.

“Miss Mayhew is better than most of us in that she lives up to her theories,” Van Berg remarked, coldly.

Her eyes shot at him a sudden flash of impotent protest and resentment, and then she lowered her head with a flush of the deepest shame.

At that moment a loud discordant laugh from Sibley caused many to look around toward him, and not a few shook their heads and exchanged significant glances, intimating that they thought the young man was in a “bad way.”

“Your philosophy, Mr. Van Berg,” said Miss Burton, “may answer very well for the wise and fortunate, for those whose lives are as yet unspoiled and unblighted by themselves or others. But even an artist, who by his vocation gives his attention to the beautiful, must nevertheless see that there are many in the world who are neither wise nor fortunate—who seem predestined by their circumstances, folly, and defective natures to blunder and sin till they reach a point where reason and intelligence can do little more for them than reveal how foolish and wrong they have been, or how great a good they have missed and lost irrevocably. The past, with its opportunities, has gone, and the remnant of earthly life offers such a dismal prospect, and they find themselves so shut up to a certain lot, so shackled by the very conditions in which they exist, that they are disheartened. It is hard for many of us not to feel that we have been utterly defeated and so sink into fatal apathy.”

Mr. Mayhew, who had been coldly impassive and resolutely taciturn thus far, now leaned back in his chair, and his eyes glowed like two lamps from beneath the eaves of his shaggy brows. A young and lovely woman was giving voice to his own crushed and ill-starred nature; and strange to say, she identified herself with the class for which she spoke. In the depths of his heart he bowed down, revered, and thanked her for claiming this kinship to himself, even though he knew it must be misfortune and not wrong that had marred her life.

If Van Berg had not been so preoccupied with the speaker, he would have seen that the daughter also was hanging on the lips that were expressing simply and eloquently the thoughts with which her own heavy heart was burdened. But when the artist began to speak, Ida’s face grew paler than ever as she saw the glow of admiration and sympathy that lighted up his features. Compliments she had received in endless variety all her life, but never had she seen a man look at her with that expression.

“Pardon me, Miss Burton,” he said, “if I protest against your using the pronoun you did. No one will ever be able to associate the word ‘defeat’ with you. I do not understand your philosophy; but I know it is far better than mine. While I admit the truth of your words that I do professionally

shut my eyes as far as possible to all the ugly facts of life, still I have been compelled to note that the world is full of evils for which I can see no remedy, and as a matter of common experience they apparently never are remedied. Good steering and careful seamanship are immensely important; but of what use are they if one is caught in a tornado or maelstrom, or wedged in among rocks, so that going to pieces is only a question of time? Good seamanship ought to keep one from such a fate, it may be said. So it does in the majority of instances; but often the wisest are caught. If you will realize it, Miss Burton, all in this house, men, women, and children, are about as able to take a ship across the Atlantic, as to make the life voyage wisely and safely. As a rule we only sail and sail. Where we are going, and what we shall meet, the Lord only knows—we don't. I have travelled abroad at times, and have seen a little of society at home, and if growing selfish, mean, and vicious, is going to the bad, than it would seem that more find the bottom than any port."

"Oh, hush, Mr. Van Berg," cried Miss Burton. "You will fill the world with a blind, stupid fate and the best one can hope for is the rare good luck or the skilful dodging which enables one to escape the random blows and storms. I believe in God and law, although I confess I can understand neither. As the good Mussulman looks towards Mecca, so I look toward them and pray and hope on. This snarl of life will yet be untangled."

"I assure you that I try to do the same, but not with your success, I fear. Your illustration strikes me as unfortunate. The Moslem looks toward Mecca; but what is there in Mecca worth looking toward? If he only thought so, might he not as well look in any other direction?"

"Please don't talk so, Mr. Van Berg. Don't you see that he can't look in any other direction? He has been taught to look thither till it is part of his nature to do so. In destroying his faith you may destroy him. Pardon me, if I ask you to please remember that faith in God and a future life is more vitally important to some of us than our daily bread. We may not be able to explain it, but we must hope and trust or perish. To go back to your nautical illustration, suppose some who had been wrecked were clinging to a rocky shore, and trying to clamber up out of the cold spray and surf to warmth and safety; would it not be a cruel thing to go along the shore and loosen the poor numb hands however gently and scientifically it might be done? Loosing that hold means sinking to unknown depths. With complacent self-

approval and with learned Athenian airs, many of the savans of the day are virtually guilty of this horrible cruelty.”

“I do not take sides with the Athenians who called St. Paul a babbler,” said Van Berg, flushing; “yet truth compels me to admit that I could worship more sincerely at the ‘Alter of the unknown God,’ than before any conception of Deity that modern Theology has presented to my mind. That does not prove much, I am bound to say, for I have never given these subjects sufficient attention to be entitled to have opinions. Still, I like fair play, whatever be the consequences. Your arraignment of talking skeptics is a severe one and strikes me in a new light. Might they not urge, in self-defense, that there was a deeper and darker abyss on the farther side of the rock to which the wrecked were clinging? May they not argue that the grasp of faith may lead to a deeper and more bitter disappointment?”

“How can they know that? How can they know what shall be in the ages to come?” replied Miss Burton, speaking rapidly. “This is the situation:—I am clinging to some hope, something that I believe will be truth which sustains me, and the only force of the skeptic’s words is to loosen my grasp. No better support is given, no new hope inspired. Believe me,” she concluded passionately, “I would rather die a thousand deaths by torture than lose my faith that there is a God who will bring order out of this chaos of broken, thwarted lives, of which the world is full, and that those who seek a ‘happier shore’ will eventually find it.”

“You will find it,” said Van Berg, in low emphatic tones; and then he added with a shrug, as he rose from the table, “I wish my chances were as good.”

Ida, who a few weeks before would have heard this conversation with unqualified disgust, had listened with eager eyes and parted lips, and she now said coldly, but with a deep sigh:

“Your God and happy shore, Miss Burton, are too vague and far away. Troubles and temptations are in our very hearts.”

Van Berg looked hastily toward her, but she rose and turned her face from him.

Mr. Mayhew shook his head despondently, as if his daughter’s words found a deep, sad echo in his own nature.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; said the wise man of old, ‘all is vanity and vexation of spirit,’” cried Stanton, with the air of one who was trying to escape from a nightmare.

Miss Burton at once became her old, smiling self.

“You do not quote ‘the wise man’ correctly,” she said; “but you remind me that he did say ‘a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.’ It is like mercy ‘twice blessed.’ This much, at least, I know is true; and Mr. Van Berg’s words have put us all at sea to such an extent that it is well to find one wee solid point to stand on.”

As the artist passed out he found opportunity to whisper in her ear:

“I cannot tell you how much I honor the woman who with her SAD heart makes others ‘merry.’”

She blushed and smiled, but only said: “How blind you are, Mr. Van Berg! Can’t you perceive that nothing else does me so much good? Now you see how selfish I am.”

Ida saw him whisper, and noted the answering smile and blush. Was it strange that so slight a thing should depress her more than all the evils of the present world and the world to come?

Surely, since human hearts are what they are, a far-away God would be like the sun of the tropics to the ice-bound at the poles.

27. A Family Group

THE OLD ADAGE, that “as the wine comes in the man steps out,” was not true of Sibley, for the man had stepped out permanently long since. But not very much wine was required to overthrow the flimsy barriers of self-restraint and courtesy that he tried to interpose in his sober moments between his true self and society. Mr. Burleigh frowned at him more than once during the dinner-hour, and was glad to see him stroll off in the grounds with his boon companions.

Stanton followed the Mayhews to their rooms, for he wished to remonstrate with Ida and Mrs. Mayhew in regard to their apparent intimacy with the fellow.

“Ida,” he said, “do you realized the force of your words to Mr. Van Berg at the table today, taken in connection with your action? You said, ‘congenial society for me, or none at all.’ Whatever Van’s faults are, he is a perfect gentleman; and yet you treat him as rudely and coldly as you can, and assert by your actions that Sibley’s society is by far the most congenial to you.”

Ida’s overstrained nerves gave way, and she said, irritably:

“You understood the cheerful questions of our appetizing table-talk today better than you understand me; so please be still.”

“Oh, pshaw, Ik,” commenced Mrs. Mayhew, who now began to wake up since the theme was quite within her sphere, “you are affecting very Puritanical views of late. It does not seem so very long since you and Sibley were good friends.”

“It is within the memory of woman, if not of man,” added Ida, maliciously, “since you drank his brandy, and considerable of it, too.”

Stanton flushed angrily but controlled himself.

“He was never my friend—never more than an acquaintance,” he said emphatically, “and I never before knew him as well as I do now. Moreover, I may as well say it plainly, I am through with that style of men, forever. There is little prospect of my ever becoming saint-like, but I shall, at least,

cease to be vulgar in my associations. I protest against Sibley's coming to our table again."

"You are absurdly unreasonable," replied Mrs. Mayhew in an aggrieved tone. "Sibley is only sowing his wild oats now as you did in the past. I don't know why he is not as good as your friend Mr. Van Berg, who, as far as I can make out, is more of an infidel than anything else. I never could endure these doubting, unsettling people."

"I admit that Sibley is established," said Stanton. "There is little prospect of his ever getting out of the mire in which he is now imbedded."

"Nonsense! What has Sibley done that is particularly out of the way, more than you and other young men? I'm sure his family is quite as rich and fashionable as that of this artist."

"More rich and fashionable. There is just the difference between the Sibleys and the Van Bergs that there is between a drop curtain at a theater and one of Bierstadt's oil paintings. There is more paint and surface in the former, but truth and genius in the latter. If you prefer paint and surface it is a matter of taste."

"I won't endure such insinuations from you," said Mrs. Mayhew, indignantly.

"Oh, hush mother!" said Ida, quietly. "I think Ik is very magnanimous in praising his friend in view of circumstances that are becoming quite apparent. Possibly he is exaggerating a little, in order to show us what a great, generous soul he has. For one, I would like to know wherein this superior race of Van Bergs differs from those who have had the presumption to suppose themselves at least equals."

Ida's allusion and tone stung Stanton into saying more than he intended, and thus the girl's artifice became successful. Hearing about Van berg and all that related to him was like looking out of a desert into a fruitful oasis; and yet cruel as was the fascination, it was also irresistible.

"The manner in which the Van Bergs live, would be a revelation to you," said Stanton, angrily, "and one undoubtedly not at all to your taste. In comparison with the Sibley show-rooms, which are stuffed and crowded with costly and incongruous trumpery, Mrs. Van Berg's house would seem very plain; but to one capable of distinguishing the difference, the evidence of mind and taste, instead of mere money, is seen on every side. Simplicity and beauty are united as far as possible. Everything is the best of its kind and devoid of veneer and sham. There is no lavish and vulgar profusion,

and there is a harmony of color and decoration that makes every room a picture in itself. Moreover, the house does not grow suddenly shabby after you leave those parts which are seen by visitors. It is all genuine and high-toned, like the people who live in it.”

“What sort of people are Mrs. Van Berg and her daughter?” Ida asked, with averted face and low constrained voice.

“Mrs. Van Berg comes of a family that has been aristocratic for several generations, and one that has been singularly free from black sheep. She appears to strangers somewhat reserved and stately, but when you become better acquainted you find she has a warm, kind heart. But she has a perfect horror of vulgarity. If she had seen this Sibley take more wine than he ought and make a spectacle of himself at a public table, she would no more admit him to her parlor than a Bowery rough. Mere wealth would not turn the scale a hair in his favor. If she has impressed on her son one trait more than another, it is this disgust with all kinds of vulgar people and vulgar vice. I don’t think Van will sit down at the same table with Sibley again, or permit Miss Burton to do so.”

Ida averted her face still farther, but said nothing.

“Indeed!” said Mrs. Mayhew; “and has Miss Burton given him the rights of a protector.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, aunt; but I have no nice bit of gossip to report. Miss Burton is an orphan, and so any friend of hers has a right to protect her. I would have taken this matter into my own hands were it not out of consideration for you and Ida, who unfortunately have permitted yourselves to be identified with Sibley as his especial friends. Indeed, most in the house regard him as Ida’s favored or accepted suitor. But I warn you to cut loose from him at once or you may suffer a severe humiliation. If you and Ida will continue to encourage him, then I tell you plainly I shall follow you no further into the slough.”

The maiden stamped her foot and made an emphatic gesture of rage and protest, but did not trust herself to answer the cruel words, each one of which was like the thrust of a knife.

But Mrs. Mayhew, whose desire to be respectable was a ruling passion, now became thoroughly alarmed and said hastily:

“Mr. Sibley is certainly nothing to me, and I hope nothing to Ida. Get rid of him any way you can, since things have reached the pass you represent.

If society is going to put him under ban, we must cut him; that's all there is about it, and his behavior at dinner gives us an excuse."

During this conversation Mr. Mayhew had been lying on the sofa with closed eyes, and as motionless as if he were dead. Now he said in low, bitter tones:

"Mark it well—an excuse, not a reason. O, virtue! how beautiful thou art!"

"You are the last one in the world to speak on this subject," said Mrs. Mayhew, angrily.

"Right again. You see, Ik, my family never before met a man who promised to make such an appropriate addition to our number. It's a pity you are interfering;" and he poured out a large glass of brandy.

"Would to God I had died before I had seen this day!" cried Ida in a tone of such sharp agony that all turned towards her in a questioning surprise; but she rushed into her own room and locked the door after her.

"Things have gone farther between her and Sibley than we thought," said Stanton, gloomily.

"Well, Ik," said Mr. Mayhew with a laugh that was dreadful to hear, "you had better cut loose from us. We are all going to the devil by the shortest cut."

"Would to heaven I had never seen you!" cried Mrs. Mayhew, hysterically. "YOU are the one who is dragging us down. If my nephew deserts us, I will brand him as a coward and no gentleman."

"I'll not desert you unless you desert yourself," said Stanton, with a gesture of disgust and impatience; "but if you persist in going down into the deepest quagmires you can find, you cannot expect me to follow you;" and with these words he left the room.

Mr. Mayhew was soon sunk in the deepest lethargy, and his wife spent the afternoon in impotently fretting and fuming against her "miserable fate," as she termed it, and in trying to devise some way of keeping up appearances.

28. Rather Volcanic

STANTON was glad to escape from the house after the interview described in the previous chapter; and observing that Van Berg was reclining under a tree at some little distance from the hotel, strolled thither and threw himself down on the grass beside him. But his perturbation was so evident that his friend remarked:

“You are out of sorts, Ik. What’s the matter?”

“I’ve been settling this Sibley business with my aunt and cousin,” snarled Stanton; “and some women always make such blasted fools of themselves. But they won’t have anything more to do with him; at least, I’m sure my aunt won’t. As for Ida—but the less said the better. I’m so out of patience with her folly that I can’t trust myself to speak of her.”

“Stanton,” said Van Berg, gloomily, “you have no idea of the regret and disquiet which that girl has caused me as an artist. I have seen her features now for weeks, and I cannot help looking at them, for they almost realize my idea of perfection. But the associations of this beauty are beginning to irritate me beyond endurance.”

“It was a motley crowd that I was the means of bringing to your table,” said Stanton, with an oath; “and I’ve no doubt you have wished us all away many times.”

Van Berg laid his hand on his friend’s arm, and looked into his eyes.

“Ik,” he said slowly, “I was your friend when I came here—I am your friend still. If I cannot love you better than I do myself, you must forgive me. But I shall never take one unfair advantage of you, and I recognize the fact that you have equal rights with myself. Ik, let us be frank with each other this once more, and then the future must settle all questions. The woman we both love is too pure and good for either of us to do a mean thing to win her. Do your best, old fellow. If you succeed, I will congratulate you with an honest heart even though it be a heavy one. I shall not detract from you in the slightest degree, or cease to show for you the thorough liking and respect that I feel. It shall simply be a maiden’s choice

between us two; and you know it is said that the heart makes this choice for reasons inexplicable even to itself.”

“Van, you are a noble, generous fellow,” said the impulsive Stanton, grasping his friend’s hand. “I must admit that you have been a fair and considerate rival. Even my jealousy could find no fault.” Then he added, in deep despondency: “But it is of no use. You have virtually won her already.”

“No,” said Van Berg, thoughtfully, “I wish you were not mistaken, but you are. There is something in her manner towards me at times which I cannot understand; but I have a conviction that I have not touched her heart.”

“She does not avoid you as she does me,” said Stanton, moodily.

“No, she accepts my society much too frankly and composedly,” answered Van Berg with a shrug. “I fear that I can join her anywhere and at any time without quickening her pulse or deepening the color in her cheeks. Now, Ik, we understand each other. Happy the man who wins, and if you are the fortunate one, I’ll dance at your wedding, and no one shall see that I carry a thousand pounds weight, more or less, in my heart.”

“I can’t promise to do as much for you, Van,” said Stanton, trying to smile. “I could not come to your wedding. In fact, Van, I—I hardly know what I would do—what I will do. A few weeks since and the world was abundantly satisfactory. Now it is becoming a vacuum. I fear I haven’t a ghost of a chance, and I—I—don’t like to think of the future. Ye gods! What a change one little woman can make in a man’s life! I used to laugh at these things, and for the past few years thought myself invulnerable. And yet, Van,” he added with sudden energy, “I think the better of myself that I can love and honor that woman. Did I regard her now as I supposed I would when you first uttered your half-jesting prophecy, what a base, soulless anatomy I would be—”

“SACRE! here comes Sibley and others of the same ilk, gabbling like the unmitigated fools that they are.”

Van Berg turned his back upon the advancing party in an unmistakable manner, and Stanton smoked with a stolid, impassive face that had anything but welcome in it. Sibley was just sufficiently excited by wine to act out recklessly his evil self.

“What’s the matter, Stanton?” he exclaimed. “Your phiz is as long as if the world looked black and blue as a prize-fighter’s eye. Is Sunday an off

day in your flirtation? Does the little school-ma'am take after her Puritan daddies, and say 'Hold thy hand till Monday?' Get her out of the crowd, and you'll find it all a pretense."

Stanton rose to his feet, but was so quiet that Sibley did not realize the storm he was raising. Van Berg remained on the ground with his back to the party, but was smoking furiously.

By an effort at self-control that made his voice harsh and constrained, Stanton said, briefly:

"Mr. Sibley, I request that you never mention that lady's name to me again in any circumstances. I request that you never mention her name to any one else except in tones and words of the utmost respect. I make these requests politely, as is befitting the day and my own self-respect; but if you disregard them the consequences to you will be very serious."

"Good Lord, Stanton! has she treated you so badly! But don't take it to heart. It's all Yankee thrift, designed to enhance her value. We are all men of the world here, and know what women are. If it is true every man has his price, every woman has a smaller—"

Before he could utter another word a blow in his face from Stanton sent him sprawling to the earth. He sprang up and was about to draw a concealed weapon, when his companions interfered and held him.

"I shall settle with you for this," he half shouted, grinding his teeth.

"You shall indeed, sir," said Stanton, "and as early, too, as the light will permit tomorrow. Here is my friend Mr. Van Berg," pointing to the artist who stood beside him, "and you have your friends with you. You must either apologize, or meet me as soon as Sunday is past."

"I'll meet you now," cried Sibley, with a volley of oaths. "I want no cowardly subterfuge of Sunday."

Stanton hesitated a moment, and then said decidedly:

"No; I'm not a blackguard like yourself, and out of respect for the Sabbath and others I will have nothing more to do with you today; but I will meet you tomorrow as soon as it is light;" and Stanton turned away to avoid further provocation.

Van Berg thus far had stood quietly to one side, but his face had that white, rigid aspect which indicates the rare but dangerous anger of men usually quiet and undemonstrative in their natures.

"Now that you are through, Stanton, I have something to say concerning this affair," he began, in words that were as clean-cut and hard as steel. "If

you propose to give this fellow a dog's whipping tomorrow, I will go with you and witness the well-deserved chastisement. But if you are intending a conventional duel, I'll have nothing to do with it, for two reasons. The first reason this fellow will not understand. Dueling is against my principles, and he knows nothing of principle. But even if I accepted the old and barbarous code, I should insist that a friend of mine should fight with a gentleman, and not a low blackguard."

"You use that epithet again at your peril," hissed Sibley, advancing a step towards him.

Van Berg made a gesture of contempt toward the speaker as he turned and said:

"You understand me, Stanton; it is not from any lack of loyalty toward you as my friend; but I would not be worthy of your friendship were I false to my sense of duty and honor."

"You are both white-livered cowards," roared Sibley. "One sneaks off under cover of the day—I never saw a fellow taken with a pious fit so suddenly before. The other, in order to keep his skin whole, prates of his dread lest his principles be punctured. the devil take you both for a brace of champion sneaks;" and he turned on his heel and was about to stalk away with a grand air of superiority, when Van Berg said, emphatically:

"Wait a moment; I'm not through with you yet. I give you but a brief half-hour to complete your arrangements for leaving the hotel."

"What do you mean?" said Sibley, turning fiercely upon him.

"I mean, sir, that your presence in that house is an insult to every lady in it, which I, as a gentleman, shall no longer permit. Curse you, had you no mother that you could thus insult all good women by the remark you made a few moments since?"

Half beside himself with rage, Sibley drew a pistol; but before he could aim correctly one of his companions struck up his hand and the bullet whizzed harmlessly over Van Berg's head.

There was a faint scream from the house, which indicated that the scene had been witnessed by some lady there.

The intense passion of the artist, which manifested itself characteristically, held him unflinching to his purpose.

"So you can be a murderer also?" he said, scornfully. "It would almost compensate a man for being SHOT, if, as a result, you could be HUNG."

Sibley's companions speedily disarmed him, strongly remonstrating in the meantime. He, in sudden revulsion, began to realize what he had attempted, and his flushed face became very pale.

"Let them leave me alone," he growled sullenly, "and I'll leave them alone."

"For Heaven's sake, Mr. Van Berg," cried Sibley's companions, "let the matter end here, lest worse come of it."

In the same steely, relentless tones, which made every word seem like a bullet, Van Berg took out his watch, and said:

"It is now four o'clock, sir. After half-past four, you must not show your libertine's face in that house again, while there's a lady in it that I respect."

"Burleigh is proprietor of that house," replied Sibley, doggedly; "and I'll stay up the entire week, just to spite you."

"Let us go to Burleigh, then," said the artist, promptly. "We will settle this question at once."

Sibley readily agreed to this appeal to his host, fully believing that he would try to smooth over matters and assure Van Berg that he could not turn away a wealthy and profitable guest; and so, without further parley, they all repaired to Mr. Burleigh's private office, arousing that gentleman from an afternoon nap to a state of mind that effectually banished drowsiness for the remainder of the day.

"Mr. Burleigh," began Sibley, indignantly, "this fellow, Van Berg, has the impudence to say that I must leave this house within half an hour. I wish you to inform him that YOU are the proprietor of this establishment."

"Humph," remarked Mr. Burleigh, phlegmatically, "that is your side of the story. Now, Mr. Van Berg, let us have yours."

"Mr. Burleigh," said Van Berg, in tones that straightened up the languid host in his easy chair, "would you permit a known and recognized disreputable woman to be flaunting about this hotel?"

"You know me better than to ask such a question," said the landlord, the color of his ruddy cheeks suddenly deepening.

"Well, sir, I claim that a man who bears precisely the same character is no more to be tolerated; and I have learned to respect you as one whom no consideration could induce to permit the presence of a human beast, whose every thought of woman is an insult."

"It's all an infernal lie," began Sibley. "I only made a slight, half-jesting allusion to that prudish little school-ma'am that these fellows are so cracked

over; and they have gone on like mad bulls ever since.”

Mr. Burleigh started to his feet with a tremendous oath.

“You made an ‘allusion,’ as you term it, to Miss Burton, eh!—the young lady who was put under my charge, and who comes from one of the best families in New England. I know what kind of allusions fellows of your kidney make;” and the incensed host struck his bell sharply.

“Send the porter here instantly,” he said to the boy who answered.

“What do you mean to do?” asked Sibley, turning pale.

“I mean to put you out of my house within the next ten minutes,” said Mr. Burleigh, emphatically. “You might as well have made an allusion to my wife as to Miss Burton; and let me tell you that if you wag your wanton tongue again, I’ll have my colored waiters whip you off the premises.”

“But where shall I go?” whined Sibley, now thoroughly cowed.

“Go to the nearest kennel or sty you can find. Either place would be more appropriate for you than my house. Mr. Van Berg and Mr. Stanton, I think you for your conduct in this affair. You are correct in supposing that I wish to entertain only gentlemen and ladies.”

Sibley now began to bluster about law and vengeance.

“Be still, sir,” thundered Mr. Burleigh. “One of the carriages will take you to the depot or landing as you choose. After that, trouble me or mine again at your peril. Now, be off. No, I’ll not take any of your dirty money; and if these friends of yours wish to go with you, they are welcome to do so.”

“We are only acquaintances of Mr. Sibley’s,” chorused his late companions, “and came in merely to see fair play.”

“Well, you haven’t seen ‘fair play,’” growled Mr. Burleigh. “I’ve treated the fellow much better than he deserves.”

Before Sibley could realize it, a carriage whirled him and his baggage away. His reckless anger having evaporated, the base and cowardly instincts of his nature resumed their sway, and he was glad to slink off to New York, thus escaping further danger and trouble.

29. Evil Lives Cast Dark Shadows

CHANGES IN THE WORLD WITHOUT often make sad havoc in our content and happiness. Loss of fortune and friends, removal to new scenes, death and disaster, sometimes so alter the outlook that we have to ask ourselves: Is this the same earth in which we have dwelt hitherto? But the changes that can most blast and blacken, or, on the other hand, glorify the world about us, are those which take place within our souls.

Such a radical change had apparently taken place in Ida Mayhew's world. She was bewildered with her trouble, and could not understand the dreary outlook. She had come to the Lake House but a few weeks before, a vain, light-hearted maiden, looking upon life with laughing and thoughtless glances, and having no more definite purposes than the butterfly that flits from flower to flower, caring not which are harmless and which poisonous, so that they yield a momentary sweetness.

But now, for causes utterly unforeseen and half-inexplicable, all flowers had withered, and the old pleasures once so exhilarating were a weariness even in thought. Her world, once a pleasure garden, had been transformed into a path so thorny and flinty that every step brought new bruises and lacerations; and it led away among shadows so cold and dark, that she shivered at the thought of her prospective life.

Her heart had so suddenly and thoroughly betrayed her, that she was overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness and perplexity. The spoiled and flattered girl had always been accustomed to have her own way. Self-gratification had been the rule and habit of her life. If Van Berg had only admired and complimented her, if he had joined the honeyed chorus of flattery that had waited on her sensuous beauty, his voice would probably have been unheeded and lost among many others. But his sharp demand for something more than a face and form had awakened her, and to her dismay

she learned that her real and lasting self was as dwarfed and deformed as her transient and outward self was perfect.

The artist seemed to her princely, regal even, in his strong cultivated manhood, his lofty calling and ambition, and his high social rank. As for herself, it now appeared that her beauty, whose spell she had thought no man could resist, had lured him to her side only long enough to discover what she was and who she was, and then he had turned away in disgust.

From their first moment of meeting, she felt that she had been peculiarly unfortunate in the impressions she had made upon him. Her attendant at the concert-garden had been a fool; and now he was associating her with a man whom he more than despised. She believed that he pitied her father as the victim of a wife's heartlessness and a daughter's selfishness and frivolity, and that he felt a repugnance toward her mother which his politeness could not wholly disguise. He was probably learning to characterize them in his mind by her father's horrible words—"froth and mud."

Such miserable thoughts were flocking round her like croaking ravens as she sat rigid and motionless in her room, her form tense from the severity of her mental distress. Suddenly Sibley's loud tones, and her cousin's voice in reply, caught her attention, and she opened the lattice of the blinds. She had scarcely done so before she saw Stanton strike the blow which had felled Sibley to the earth.

With breathless interest she watched the scene till Van Berg stepped forward. Then she sprang to a drawer, and taking out a small field-glass which she carried on her summer excursions was able to see the expression of the young men's faces, although she could not distinguish their words. The stern, menacing aspect of the artist made her tremble even at her distance, and it was evident that his words were throwing Sibley into a transport of rage; and when in his passion he tried to shoot Van Berg, she could not repress the cry that attracted their attention.

Her mother, in the adjoining room, commenced knocking at the door, asking what was the matter, but received no answer until Ida saw that the young men were coming toward the house. Then she threw open the door, and told Mrs. Mayhew that she had seen something that looked like a large spider, and that nothing was the matter. Without waiting for further questioning she flitted hastily down-stairs and from one concealed post of observation to another until she saw the angry party enter Mr. Burleigh's private office. A small parlor next to it was empty, and once within it, the

loud tones spoken on the other side of the slight partition were distinctly heard.

As she listened to the words which Van Berg and Mr. Burleigh addressed to the man whom all in the house had regarded as her accepted lover, or at least her congenial friend, her cheeks grew scarlet, and when he was dismissed from the house, she fled to her room; wishing that it were a place in which she might hide forever, so overwhelming was her sense of shame and humiliation.

How could she meet the guests of the Lake House again? Worse than all, how could she meet the scornful eyes of the man who had driven from the place the suitor that she was supposed to favor as he might have scourged away a dog.

She could not now explain that Sibley was and ever had been less than nothing to her—that she had both detested and despised him. She had permitted herself to touch pitch, and it had of necessity left its stain. To go about now and proclaim her real sentiments toward the man who apparently had been her favorite, would seem to others, she thought, the quintessence of meanness. She felt that she had been caught in the meshes of an evil web, and that it was useless to struggle.

Despairing, hopeless, her cheeks burning with shame as with a fever, she sat hour after hour refusing to see any one. She would not go down to supper. She left the food untasted that was sent to her room. She sat staring at vacancy until her face became a dim pale outline in the deepening twilight, and finally was lost in the shadow of night. But the darkness that gathered around the poor girl's heart was deeper and almost akin to the rayless gloom that positive crime creates, so nearly did she feel that she was associated with one from whom her woman's soul, perverted as it was, shrank with inexpressible loathing.

"Ida is in one of her worst tantrums," whispered Mrs. Mayhew to Stanton; "I never knew her to act so badly as she has of late. I wouldn't have thought that such a man as you have found Sibley to be could gain so great a hold upon her feelings. But law! she'll be all over it in a day or two. Nothing lasts with Ida, and least of all, a beau."

"Well," said Stanton, bitterly, "she is disgracing herself and all related to her by her inexcusable folly in this instance. Those who pretended to be Sibley's friends at dinner, are now trying to win a little respectability by turning against him, and the story of his behavior is circulating through the

house. All will soon know that he shot at Van Berg, and that he made insulting remarks about Miss Burton. It will appear to every one as if Ida were sulking in her room on Sibley's account; and people are usually thought to be no better than their friends."

"Oh, dear!" half sobbed Mrs. Mayhew, "won't you go up to her room and show her the consequences of her folly?"

"No," said Stanton, irritably; "not to-night. I know her too well. She will take no advice from me or any one else at present. Tomorrow I will have one more plain talk with her; and if she won't listen to reason I wash my hands of her. Where is Uncle?"

"Don't ask me. Was there ever a more unfortunate woman? With such a husband and daughter, how can I keep up appearances?"

Stanton walked away with a gesture of disgust and impatience.

"Curse it all!" he muttered; "and their shadows fall on me too. What chance have I with the snow-white maiden I'd give my life for when followed by such associations?"

30. The Deliberate Wooer Speaks First

MR. BURLEIGH was one of those fortunate men who when the weather is rough outside—as was often the case in his calling—can always find smooth water in the domestic haven of a wife's apartment. Thus Mrs. Burleigh soon learned the cause of his perturbation; and as she knew Jennie Burton would hear the story from some one else, could not deny herself the feminine enjoyment of being the first to tell it, and of congratulating her on the knightly defender she had secured; for the quarrel had come before Mr. Burleigh in such a form as to make Van Berg the principal in the affair.

Miss Burton's cheek flushed deeply and resentfully as she heard the circumstances in which her name had been spoken, and she said with emphasis:

"Mr. Van Berg impressed me as a chivalric man from the first day of our meeting. But I wish he had paid no heed to the words of such a creature as Mr. Sibley. That his life was endangered on my account pains me more than I can tell you;" and she soon grew so white and faint that Mrs. Burleigh made her take a glass of wine.

"Death seems such a terrible thing to a young, strong man," she added, shudderingly, after a moment, and she pressed her hands against her eyes as if to shut out a vision from which she shrank. "May he not still be in danger from this ruffian's revenge?" she asked, looking up in sudden alarm.

"I'm afraid that he will be," said Mrs. Burleigh, catching the infection of her fears. "I will have Mr. Burleigh see that he is kept away from this place."

Soon after, as Miss Burton was passing through the main hall-way, she met the artist, and stepping into one of the small parlors that was unoccupied, she said:

“Mr. Van Berg, I wish to speak with you. I wish both to thank you, and to ask a favor.”

“Please do the latter only,” he replied, smiling.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she resumed, looking into his face with an expression that made his heart beat more quickly, “your life was endangered on my account this afternoon.”

“That’s a pleasant thought to me,” he said, taking her hand, “that is if you are not offended that I presumed to be your knight.”

“It is a dreadful thought to me,” she answered, earnestly; then in a strange and excited manner she added: “You cannot know—death to some is a horrible thing—it prevents so much—I’ve known—let it come to the old and sad—I could welcome it—but to such as you—O merciful Heaven! Grant me, please grant me, the favor I would ask,” she continued, clinging to his hand. “They say this man Sibley is very passionate and revengeful. He may still try to carry out his dreadful purpose. Please shun him, please avoid him—in mercy do. I’ve more than I can bear now; and if—if—” and she buried her face in her hands.

“And can my poor life be of such value to you, Miss Burton?” he asked, in a deep low tone.

“Ah! you cannot understand,” she said, with a sudden and passionate gesture, “and I entreat you not to ask me to explain. From the first you have been kind to me. I have felt from the day we met that I had found a friend in you; and your risk, your care for me today, gives you a peculiar claim as a friend, but in mercy do not ask me to explain why I am so urgent in my request. I cannot, indeed I cannot—at least not now, in this place. Something happened—Sudden death in one young, strong, and full of hope, like you, seems to me horrible—horrible. In mercy promise to incur no risk on my account,” she said passionately, and almost wildly.

“My poor little friend, how needlessly frightened you are!” he said, soothingly and gently. “There, I will promise you anything that a man of honor can. But a word against you, Jennie Burton, touches me close, very close. As said the Earl of Kent, ‘It invades the region of my heart.’”

She looked up swiftly and questioningly, and then a sudden crimson suffused her face. With a strong and uncontrollable instinct she appeared to shrink from him.

“Kent served one who had lost the power to make return,” she said, shaking her head sadly as she turned away.

“Let me reply with Kent again,” he earnestly responded. “‘You have that in your countenance’—in your character—‘which I would fain call master’; and I am mastered, nor can I be shaken from my allegiance. I can at least imitate Kent’s faithfulness, if not his obtrusiveness, in the service of his king. You have already claimed me as a friend, and so much at least I shall ever be. Let me win more if I can.”

She became very quiet now, and looked steadily into his flushed, eager face with an expression of sorrowful regret and pain that would have restrained him had a ten-fold stronger and more impetuous love been seeking utterance, and by a gesture, simple yet eloquently impressive, she put her finger to her lips. Then giving him her hand she said, with strong emphasis:

“Mr. Van Berg, I would value such a FRIEND as you could be to me more than I can tell you.”

“I shall be to you all that you will permit,” he said, gently yet firmly. “As you now appear I could as soon think of urging my clamorous human love on a sad-eyed saint that had suffered some cruel form of martyrdom for her faith, and then, as the legends teach, had been sent from heaven among us mortals upon some errand of mercy.”

“Your words are truer than you think,” she replied, the pallor deepening in her face. “I have suffered a strange, cruel form of martyrdom. But I am not a saint, only a weak woman. I would value such a friend as you could be exceedingly. Indeed—indeed,” she continued hesitatingly, “there are peculiar reasons why I wish we might meet as friends occasionally. If you knew—if you knew all—you would not ask to be more. Can you trust one who is clouded by sadness and mystery?”

He took her hand in both of his and answered, “Jennie Burton, there could no greater misfortune befall me than to lose my faith in you. I associate you with all that is most sacred to me. Every instinct of my heart assures me that although the mystery that enshrouds your life may be as cold as death, it is, as far as you are concerned, as white as snow.”

“Yes, and as far as another is concerned also,” she said solemnly. “Your trust is generous, and I am very, very grateful. Perhaps—possibly I may—some time—tell you, for you risked your life for me; and—and—there is another reason. But I have never spoken of it yet. Good-night.”

“Stay,” he said, “I cannot begin being a true friend to you by being a false friend to another. I am ashamed that I have been so preoccupied with

myself that I have not spoken of it before. Mr. Stanton resented Sibley's insulting language more promptly than I did. I have been basely accepting a gratitude that rightly belongs to him, and I assure you he is in far more danger from Sibley than I am."

Her brow contracted in a sudden frown, and there was something like irritation in her tones as she said:

"Danger again! and to another, for my sake! Must I be tortured with fear and anxiety, because a low fellow, true to his nature, will be scurrilous? Mr. Van Berg," she continued, with a sudden flash of her eyes, "are you and Mr. Stanton quarrelling with Mr. Sibley on your own account, or on mine? From henceforth I refuse to have the remotest relation to such a quarrel. No remarks of a man like Sibley can insult me, and hereafter any friend of mine who lowers himself to resent them, or has aught to do with the fellow, will both wound and humiliate me."

"After such words, Miss Burton," Van Berg answered with a smile, "rest assured I shall avoid him as I would a pestilence. But remember, I have been as guilty as Stanton, yes, more so; for Stanton received the first provocation, and he is naturally more impetuous than I am. But I have been thanked, as well as warned and justly rebuked. I think," he added, as if the words cost him an effort, "that if you will kindly ask Stanton to have nothing more to do with Sibley, he will accede to your wishes; and whatever he promises, he will perform."

"Is your friend, then, so honorable a man?" she asked.

"He is, indeed," replied Van Berg, earnestly, while a generous flush suffused his face, "a true, noble-hearted fellow. He shows his worst side at once, but you would discover new and good traits in him every day."

She turned away with a low laugh. "Since you are so loyal to your old friend," she said, "I think you will prove true to your new one. I shall put Mr. Stanton to the test, and discover whether he will give up his quarrel with Mr. Sibley for the sake of such poor thanks as I can give. Once more, good-night."

She was hastening away, when he seized her hand and said:

"Why do you go with averted face? Have I offended you?"

She trembled violently. "Please do not look at me so," she said, falteringly. "I cannot endure it. Pity my weakness."

His hand tightened in its warm grasp, and the expression of his face grew more ardent.

She looked up with a sudden flash in her eyes, and said, almost sternly:

“You must not look at me in that way, or else even friendship will be impossible and we must become strangers. Perhaps, after all, this will be the wisest course for us both,” she added, in a gentler tone.

He dropped her hand, but said firmly, “No, Miss Jennie, you have given me the right to call you my friend, and I have seen friendship in your eyes, and friends at least we shall be till the end of time. I shall not say good-night. I shall not let you go away and brood by yourself. I have learned that cheering others is the very elixir of your life; so, come into the parlor. I will find Stanton and our friend with the soprano voice, and the guests of the house shall again bless the stars that sent you to us, as I do daily.”

She smiled faintly and said:

“I’ll join you there after a little while,” and she flitted out into the darkening hall-way, and sought her room by a side stair.

A few moments later Stanton, finding the object of his thoughts did not appear among the guests who sought to escape the sultriness of the evening on the wide piazzas or in the large, spacious parlor, began to wander restlessly in a half-unconscious search. A servant was just lighting the gas in the small and remote reception-room as he glanced in. The apartment was empty, and no echoes of the words just spoken were lingering.

A little later Miss Burton came down the main stair-way in her breezy, cheery manner, and his jealous fears were quieted.

He joined her at once, saying that it was the unanimous wish that she should give them some music again that evening.

She would join with him and others, she said; and her manner was so perfectly frank and cordial, so like her bearing towards a lady friend to whom she next spoke, that he fairly groaned in despair of touching a heart that seemed to overflow with kindness toward all.

Van Berg soon appeared, but Miss Burton, on this occasion, managed that the singing should be maintained by quite a large group about the piano, and on account of the sultriness of the evening the service of song was brief.

While Van Berg was leading a hymn that had been asked for by one of the guests, Miss Burton found the opportunity of saying, “Mr. Stanton, I wish to thank you for your chivalric defense today of one who is poor and orphaned. Mr. Van Berg told me of your generous and friendly course. Thus far I can believe that your conduct has been inspired by the truest and most

manly impulses. But if in any way you again have aught to do with Mr. Sibley, I shall feel deeply wounded and humiliated. I refuse to be associated with that man, even in the remotest degree. Your delicate sense of honor will teach you that if any further trouble grows out of this affair no effort on your part can separate my name from it. The world rarely distinguishes between a gentlemanly quarrel and a vulgar brawl, especially where one of the parties is essentially vulgar. As a gentleman you will surely shield me from any such associations.”

Stanton, remembering his appointment with Sibley, bowed low to hide his confusion.

“I would gladly shield you with my life from anything that could cause you pain,” he said, earnestly.

“I do not make any such vast and tragic demands,” she replied, smilingly, and holding out her hand; “only simple and prosaic self-control, when tipsy, vulgar men act according to their nature. Good-night.”

He was about to kiss her hand, when she gently withdrew it, remarking:

“We plain people of New England are not descended from the Cavaliers, remember.”

He watched until in despair of her appearing again that evening, and then strolled out into the night, feeling in his despondency that no star in the summer sky was more unattainable than the poor and orphaned girl, the impress of whose warm clasp still seemed within his hand.

31. An Emblem

FOR SOME TIME Ida Mayhew neither heeded nor heard the choral music in the parlor below, but at last a clearer, louder strain, in which Van Berg's voice was pre-eminent, caught her attention and she started up and listened at the window.

"He is singing songs of Heaven with Jennie Burton, and I—can there be any worse perdition than this?" she said in a low, agonized tone.

As if by a sudden impulse she quietly unfastened the door that led to her father and mother's room. Perceiving that her mother was not there, she stole noiselessly in, and turned up the lamp.

Mr. Mayhew reclined upon a lounge in the deep stupor of intoxication, his dark hair streaked with gray falling across his face in a manner that made it peculiarly ghastly and repulsive.

"This is my work," she groaned. "Jennie Burton made a noble-looking man of him last evening. I have made him this." She writhed and wrung her hands over his unconscious form, appearing as might one of Milton's fallen angels that had lost Heaven and happiness but not the primal beauty of his birth-place.

"Well," she exclaimed with the sudden recklessness which was one of her characteristics, "if I have caused your degradation I can at least share in it;" and she took an opiate that she knew would produce speedy and almost as deep a lethargy as that which paralyzed her father; then threw herself, dressed, upon her couch, and did not waken until late the following day.

Stanton was sorely troubled over his rash promise that he would meet Sibley at daylight on Monday morning. After Miss Burton's words he felt that he could not keep his appointment, and yet he shrank from the ridicule he believed Sibley would heap upon him. His perturbation was so great that he hunted up Van Berg before retiring, and told him of his dilemma. The artist greatly relieved his mind by saying:

"I think we both have had a lesson, Stanton, in regard to quarreling with such fellows as Sibley, although I hardly see how we could have acted

differently. But villains are usually cowards after their passion cools and they become sober. The case in hand is no exception. Burleigh tells me he has just learned that Sibley took a late boat to the city, and so does not mean to keep the appointment tomorrow. Therefore, sleep the sleep of the just, old fellow. Good-night.”

The throbbing pain in Ida’s head was so great when she awoke on Monday that she half forgot the ache in her heart. She found that her father had gone to the City and that the day was well advanced. Her mother sat looking at her with an expression in which anxiety and reproach were equally blended.

The unhappy woman had learned from her husband’s habits to know what remedies to employ, and so was able gradually to relieve her daughter’s physical distress; but Ida’s weary lassitude and reticence were proof against all her questions and reproaches. It seemed as if nothing could rouse or sting her out of the dull apathy into which she had reacted after the desperate excitement of the preceding day. She pleaded illness, and stubbornly refused to go down to dinner. At last her mother, much to her relief, left her to herself, and went out to drive with Stanton, hoping that she might hit upon some plan of action in regard to the two difficult problems presented in her husband and daughter.

Towards evening Ida slowly and languidly dressed for supper, and then sauntered down to the main piazza for a little fresh air.

The poor girl did not exaggerate the shadow that had fallen upon her association with Sibley, and her supposed grief and resentment at his treatment. Two or three whom she met bowed coldly and distantly, and one passed without recognition. Even Jennie Burton had been indignant all day that one of her sex could be infatuated with such a fellow; and in her charitable thoughts she would be glad to explain such perversity as the result of a disordered and uncurbed fancy, rather than of a depraved heart.

It was not strange, however, that she should suppose Ida’s manner and indisposition were caused by Sibley’s ignominious ejection from the house, when her own mother and cousin shared the same view.

What an unknown mystery each life is, even to the lives nearest to it!

As with slow, heavy steps, Ida approached the main entrance, she noted the distant manner of those she met, and divined the cause; but her apathy was so great that neither anger nor shame brought the faintest color to her cheeks.

She stood in the doorway and looked out a few moments; but the lovely summer landscape, with the cool shadows lengthening across it, was a weariness, and she turned from it as the miserable do from sights that only mock by their pleasant contrast.

The piazza was nearly empty, but before she stepped out upon it she saw not far away a gentleman reading, who at last did cause the blood to rush tumultuously into her face.

At another time she would have turned hastily from him; but in her present morbid mood she acted from a different impulse. The artist had not observed her approach, and standing a little back in the shadow of the hallway she found a cruel fascination in comparing the man she loved with the low fellow whose shadow now fell so darkly across her own character. She looked steadily at his downcast face until every line and curve in his strong profile was impressed on her memory. In the healthful color of his finely-chiseled features there were no indications of that excess which already marred Sibley's countenance. The decided contour corresponded with the positive nature. The unhappy girl felt instinctively that if he were on her side, he would be a faithful ally; but if against her, she would find his inflexible will a granite wall against all the allurements of her beauty. The face before her indicated a man controlled by his higher, not lower nature; and in her deep humiliation she now felt that even if he knew all that was passing in her heart, he would bestow only transient pity, mingled with contempt.

She believed she could hope for nothing from him; and yet, did not that belief leave her hopeless? To what else, to whom else could she turn? Nothing else, no one else then seemed to promise any help, any happiness. Her wretched experience had come as unexpectedly as one of those mysterious waves that sweep the sunny shore of Peru. Whither it would carry her she did not know, but every moment separated her more hopelessly from him who appeared like an immovable rock in his quiet strength.

She was turning despondently away when she heard Jennie Burton's voice, and a moment later that young lady mounted the adjacent steps and said to Van Berg:

"See what a prize I captured at this late season. Roses early in August are like hidden treasures. See, they are genuine hybrids. Have I not had rare good fortune?"

Van Berg rose at once, and met her at the top of the steps; and Ida, who still remained unseen in the hall, now stepped forward into the doorway, so that she might not seem a furtive listener, as he was standing with his back towards her.

“Had I my way, Miss Burton,” said the artist, “you should have this rare good fortune every day of the year.”

She blushed slightly, and said, rather coldly, “Good evening, Miss Mayhew,” thus rendering Van Berg aware of the latter’s presence. The artist only frowned, and gave no other recognition of Ida’s proximity.

“Since you can’t have your way, I shall make the most of my present good fortune. Is not that a beautiful cluster?”

“It is indeed, with one exception. Do you not see that this defective bud mars the beauty of all the others?”

“A ‘worm I’ the bud fell on its damask cheek.’ I took it out and killed it, and was in hopes that if I placed the injured flower in water with the others it might still make a partial bloom. You will think me absurd when I tell you I felt sorry for it, and thought how many roses and lives would be more perfect were it not for some gnawing ‘worm i’ the bud.”

“The ‘worm’ in Shakespeare’s allusion,” said the artist, lightly, “is redeemed by its association and symbolism; but the one that has been at work here was a disagreeably prosaic thing that you rightly put your foot upon. The bud, as it now appears, suggest the worm more than anything else. So, please, let me cut it out; for art cannot tolerate anything so radically marred and defective. Its worm-eaten heart spoils the beauty of the entire cluster.”

“I fear you artists become too critical and exacting. Well, cut it out. I will submit to art in roses, but feel that marred and defective lives should have very different treatment.”

“That depends. If people persist in cherishing some worm of evil, they cannot expect to be held in the same esteem as those who are aiming at a more perfect development. There, now! does not our cluster appear much better?”

“Yes; and yet I cannot help feeling sorry for the poor little bud that has missed its one chance to bloom, and all will wither unless I hasten to my room and put them in water.”

In her prejudice against Ida she had not looked towards her while talking with Van Berg, but in passing, a hasty glance almost caused her to stay and

she speak to her, for she thought she saw her eyes full of unshed tears. But her glance was brief and her prejudice strong. Miss Burton had not a little of the wholesome feminine intolerance for certain weaknesses in her sex. She would counsel a wife to endure a bad husband with a meek and patient spirit. But gentle as she was, she would scorn the maiden who could be attracted by a corrupt man, and almost loathe her for indulging in such an affinity. She could pity Ida—she could pity any one; but the poor girl's unfortunate association with Sibley, and her seeming interest in him, would subordinate pity to indignation and contempt. Her thought was this:

“Miss Mayhew is still a maiden free to choose. Shame on her that she chooses so ignobly! Shame on her that she turns her eyes longingly to fetid pools, instead of upward to the breezy hills. What kind of nature is that which prompts such a choice?”

The artist was more capable of Jennie Burton's indignation and contempt than of her pity; and although he knew Ida still stood in the doorway he did not turn to speak to her. His very attitude seemed to indicate to the unhappy girl a haughty indifference, and yet she was so unhappy, so in need of a kind word or reassuring glance that she could not turn away.

“What a wretched mystery it all is,” she thought. “I ought to hate, yet I love him. Proud as I have thought myself, I could kneel at his feet for one such word and glance as he just gave Miss Burton. For contempt I return him honor and admiration. I cannot help myself. By some strange perversity of my heart, I have become his very slave. How can he be so blind! He thinks me pining for a man that I despise and hate more than he ever can, though the fellow attempted his life. Sibley has come between me and that which is more than life—my chance for happiness and right living. I shall become desperate and bad, like him, if this continues. How strange it is that some sense, some instinct does not tell him there that the girl who stands so near is lavishing every treasure of her soul upon him!

“That poor little rose-bud represents me to his mind. How ruthlessly he is pulling open its heart! Will he see anything else there save the work of the destroyer? Can it not awaken a thought of pity? I will—I must speak to him.”

She took a hesitating step or two towards him. She could almost hear her heart beat. Twice, thrice, words died upon her lips. When was she ever so timid before! If he would only give her an encouraging glance! If he would only turn a little towards her and relax that haughty, unbending attitude—

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said at last, in a voice that was constrained and hard from her effort to be calm, “you seem very vindictive towards that poor little flower.”

He turned partially towards her and coldly said, “Good evening Miss Mayhew;” then, after a second, added carelessly: “I admit that this worm-eaten bud is rather vexatious. It has—what is left of it—exquisite color, and in form nature had designed it to be perfect; but” (with a slight contemptuous shrug) “you see what it is,” and he tossed it down into the roadway.

Her face was very pale and her voice low, as she answered: “And so you condemn it to be trampled under foot.”

“I condemn it! Not at all. Its own imperfection condemns it.”

“The result is all the same,” she replied, with sudden change of manner. “It is tossed contemptuously away to be trodden under foot. Dull and ignorant as you discovered me to be, Mr. Van Berg, I am not so stupid but that I can understand you this evening. Imperfect as I am I could pity that unfortunate flower whose fragrance rose to you like a low appeal for a little consideration, at least. Would it not have bloomed as perfectly as the others if the worm had let it alone? But, I suppose, with artist, if roses or human lives are imperfect, that is the end of them. Misfortune counts for nothing.”

Van Berg listened in surprise to these words, and his haughty complacency was decidedly disturbed. He was about to reply that “Evil chosen and cherished was not a misfortune but a fault,” when she turned from him with more than her former coldness and entered the house.

An impulse that he would have found difficult to analyze led him to descend the steps and pick up the symbolic bud, now torn and withering fast, and to place it between the leaves of his note-book.

If she had only seen this act it would have made a great difference; but, ever present to her thought, it lay where he had tossed it, the emblem of herself.

32. The Dangers of Despair

DISCOURAGEMENT AND DESPAIR are dangerous and often destructive to character. This would be especially true of one like Ida Mayhew; for even in her imperfection she possessed a simplicity and unity which made it impossible for a part of such moral nature as she possessed to stand, if another part were undermined or broken down. The whole fabric would stand or fall together.

She had been a wayward child, more neglected than petted, and had naturally developed a passion for having her own will, right or wrong. As she grew older, her extraordinary dower of beauty threatened to be a fatal one. It brought her attention continuous admiration and flattery from those who cared nothing for her personally. She had received in childhood but little of the praise which love prompts, the tender, indulgent idolatry which, although dangerous indeed to one's best development, sometimes softens and humanizes, instead of rendering selfish and arrogant.

Mrs. Mayhew petted and scolded her child according to her mood, but was quite consistent in her general neglect. Mr. Mayhew was a tired, busy man, who visited at his own home rather than lived there. Thus the growing girl was left chiefly to her own impulses, and average human nature ensured that the habit of thinking of herself first and of pleasing herself at all times should be early formed. Then, as she saw and became capable of understanding the homage that waits on mere beauty, the world over, pride and vanity grew in overshadowing rankness. The attention she received, however, was chiefly made up of the bold stare of strangers, and the open flattery of those who admired her beauty as they would that of a picture, unconsciously but correctly leaving the impression that they cared for her only because of her beauty. That the girl's nature should grow hard and callous under such influences was what might have been expected.

Neglect and a miserable sham of an education had dwarfed her mind. She had been "finished" by an ultra fashionable school before she

understood the meaning of the studies which she passed over in a dainty quickstep, scarcely touching the surface.

Her heart and moral nature were almost equally undeveloped. Hitherto she had known but little experience tending to evoke gentle feeling or generous action. She had confounded the few genuine admirers, who, infatuated with her beauty, endowed her with all heavenly graces, awaiting only the awakening hand of their love, with the heartless or brainless fellows who were not particular about heavenly graces, provided a girl had a fine figure and a fair face.

When the artist first met her at the concert garden, she was in truth a modern Undine. She had feminine qualities and vices, but not a woman's soul. She was not capable of any strong, womanly action or feeling. Her scheme of life was simple indeed, although she was learning to be very artful in carrying it out. It was to have "a good time," as she would phrase it, and at any and every cost to others. After wearying of the life of a belle, she proposed to marry the best establishment that came her way, and became a leader of fashion.

It would seem that not a few fine ladies carry out this simple scheme of life, and never receive a woman's soul. There are Undines at sixty as well as at sixteen.

The artist had been attracted by her beauty, like so many others, but unlike others he had not (as was the case with not a few sensible men) given an admiring glance at the face, and then, recognizing the fact that there was not a woman back of it, passed on indifferently; nor had he bestowed upon her imaginary virtues; and much less had he been satisfied with more flesh and blood.

His manner had been exploring, questioning. He was looking for her woman's soul, even though he might find it unawakened, like the fabled beauty in the mythical castle.

His keen eyes had disturbed her equanimity from the first. As he pursued his quest, her undefined fears and misgivings increased. At last she was compelled to follow his questioning glances, and look past outward beauty to her real self within. From that hour the rank and evil weeds of pride and vanity began to wither. Honest self-scrutiny was like a knife at their roots.

But these traits give a transient support like a false stimulant. As they failed there was nothing to take their place—no faith in God, no self-respect or self-reliance. She could not turn to her own family for sustaining

sympathy, such as many find in their homes, and which is all the more grateful because not inquisitive nor expressed in formal terms. In her selfish pleasure-seeking life she found that she had made an endless number of acquaintances, but no friends. She had not even the resources of a cultivated mind that could exist upon its own stores through this sudden famine which had impoverished her world, nor could she think of a single innocent, attractive, pursuit by which she could fill the weary days. She was like a child that had dwelt in a tropical oasis, the flowers and fruits of which had seemed as limitless as its extent. She had supposed that the whole world would be like this oasis, and the only necessity ever imposed on her would be that of choice from its rich profusion. But ere she was aware she had lost herself in a desert; the oasis had vanished like a mirage, and she had no choice at all. That which her heart craved with an intensity which fairly made it ache, seemed as hopeless as a sudden bloom and fruitage from arid sands.

Instead of going down to supper she returned to the solitude of her own room, but the apathy of the earlier part of the day had vanished utterly. Indeed, body and soul seemed to quiver with pain like a wounded nerve. Anger, which had given a brief support, faded out, and left only shame and despair as in memory she saw the emblem, representing herself, tossed contemptuously into the carriage-way by the man she loved.

“I remember reading,” she groaned, “when at school, how conquerors put their feet on the necks of their captives. He has put his spurning foot on my heart. Oh, hateful riddle! Why should I love the man that despises me?”

Her mother, and then Stanton, called at her door and asked her to come down to supper.

“No,” she said, briefly to each.

“If you knew what people were saying and surmising you would not continue to make a spectacle of yourself,” said her cousin, through the closed door.

“That is one reason why I do not come down,” she replied. “I’m not in the mood to make a spectacle of myself. I have been shown how one perfect member of society regards me, and I am not equal to meeting any more faultless people to-night.”

“Oh, nonsense!” cried Stanton, irritably. “You must come down.”

“Break in the door then, and carry me down,” was the sharp reply.

With a muttered oath he descended to the supper-room, and his moody and absent manner revealed to Mrs. Mayhew and Van Berg that his interview with his cousin had been anything but satisfactory.

For a time the artist seemed rather “distract” also, as if a memory were troubling him. He often looked around when any one entered, and his eyes at times rested on Ida’s vacant chair. But he soon passed under the spell of Jennie Burton’s genial talk, which seemingly glowed with the sunshine that had enveloped her during her quest of the roses, and the poor girl, who was fairly quivering with pain because of his significant act and words on the piazza, was forgotten.

She knew she was forgotten. The hum of voices, the cheerful clatter from the lighted supper-room, came up to her darkening apartment, and only increased her sense of loneliness and isolation. Her quick ear caught Van Berg’s mellow laugh, evoked by one of Miss Burton’s sallies.

It is a dreary sensation to find one’s self wholly forgotten by mere acquaintances; but to find that we have no place in the thoughts of those we love, seems in a certain sense like being annihilated. But for poor Ida was reserved a deeper suffering still, since she believed that the man she loved did not dismiss her from his mind indifferently, but rather with aversion and disgust.

She felt her isolation terribly. To whom could she turn in her trouble? The thought of her father was both a reproach and a humiliation. He was drifting hopelessly, and almost unresistingly, towards final wreck, and, so far from seeking to restrain, she had added to the evil impetus. She shrank from the very idea of confiding in her garrulous, superficial mother. She felt that her cousin detested as well as despised her. The flattered girl, who a little before thought the world was at her feet, now felt friendless and alone, scarcely tolerated by her own family, and scorned by others.

Of course she exaggerated the evil of her lot. The young and inexperienced are ever prone to look, for the time, on the earlier misfortunes of their lives as irretrievable. In after years they may smile at their causeless despair; but the world is full of tragedies that to the wise and sober minded had slight cause.

Ida’s troubles, however, were scarcely slight, and she, above all others, was the least fitted to bear trouble and thwarting. To be refused anything would be a new and disagreeable experience, but to be denied that which her heart craved supremely, tended to call out all the passionate recklessness

of her ungoverned, undisciplined nature. The child from whom something is taken, will often cast away in anger all that is offered in its place; and in like hasty folly many a man and woman, to their eternal regret, have thrown away life itself. Suicide is often the product of passion as well as of despair; the irritable, headlong protest against evils that might have been and should have been remedied.

As Ida sat alone in her desolation and shame, the thought of self-destruction had surged up in the lava of other tumultuous thoughts occasioned by the artist's scorn, and at first she had shrunk from it with natural and instinctive dread. But the awful thought began to fascinate her like a dizzy height from which it seems so easy to fall and end everything.

In her morbid condition and to her poisoned imagination the act did not appear so revolting after all. She had been made familiar with it in her favorite novels. She had often seen it simulated with applause on the stage, with all the melodramatic accessories with which it is produce mere effect. Indeed, from her education, she might also think self-destruction was the only dignified and high-spirited thing to do.

For a time her thoughts took the coloring of high tragedy. She would teach this proud artist a lesson, even though at supreme cost to herself. If he would never love her, she would make it certain that he could not longer despise her. She would write him a letter that would harrow his very soul, informing him that she had taken his hint and followed his suggestion. Since he had thrown away the emblem of herself as a worthless and unsightly thing, she had thrown herself away, so that faultless taste and faultless people might be no more offended by the presence of so much imperfection.

For a moment her eyes glowed with exultation over his imagined dismay as he read this message from one to whom no reparation could be made; and then better and more wholesome feelings resumed their sway. Perverted, misguided, and uncounselled as she was, she was too young, too near the mother heart of nature, not to react from the false and the evil towards the simple and the true.

She threw herself upon her couch. "Oh, that I might live and be happy!" she sobbed. "If in the place of the bitter frost of his words and manner he would give me but one ray of kindness, I would try to bloom, even though but a poor worm-eaten bud."

Frowns blight far more flowers than October nights.

33. "Hope dies Hard."

WHEN ALONE with his friend after supper, Stanton broke out, "Since Ida can't exist without the sight of that wretch, Sibley, I wish she would follow him to New York. If she dotes on such scum, they had better be married, as far as such people can be, and so relieve her relatives of an incubus that is well-nigh intolerable."

"Are you absolutely sure that she does dote on Sibley, and that he is the cause of her evident trouble?" asked Van Berg, with a perplexed frown lowering on his brow.

"I'm not sure of anything concerning her save that she was born to make trouble. I know she was with him all the time he was here, and since he was metaphorically kicked off the premises she has sulked in her room. I suppose, of course, that she is mortified, and hates to meet people. Indeed, from a remark she made, some one must have snubbed her vigorously today; but her course makes everything a hundredfold worse. I am besmirched because of my relationship. I can see this in the bearing of more than one, and even Miss Burton, who could not be consciously unkind to any one, keeps me at a distance by barriers, which, although seemingly viewless, are so real I cannot pass them."

Van Berg surmised that the evasive tact which Miss Burton exercised towards his friend was not caused by his relationship to Ida, and yet was compelled to admit that her frank and friendly bearing towards himself was scarcely less dispiriting. Her manner, as a rule, was so plainly that of a friend only, that were it not for occasional and furtive glances which he intercepted, he would deem his prospects little better than Stanton's, in spite of all that had passed between them. Even in these stolen, questioning, longing glances, there was an element that troubled and perplexed him, and the strange thought crossed his mind that when she looked most intently she did not see Harold Van Berg, but an intervening vision. Her mystery, however, rendered her only the more attractive, and she seemed like a good

angel that had come from an unknown world concerning which she could not speak, and perhaps he could not understand.

Her society was like a delicate wine, delightfully exhilarating while enjoyed, but whose effect is transient. He was provoked at himself to find how well he endured her absence, and how content he was with the genuine friendship she was evidently forming for him. Sometimes he even longed for more of the absorbing passion which he saw had wholly mastered Stanton; but tried to satisfy himself by reasoning that his love was in accordance with his nature, which was calm and constant, rather than impulsive and passionate.

“All the higher faculties of my soul are her allies,” he thought, complacently. “I admire honor, and even reverence her. She could walk through life as my companion, my equal, and in many respects, my superior;” and so with all the delicate and unobtrusive tact of which he was the master he proposed to press his suit.

Since Jennie Burton had plainly intimated that, like King Lear, she had lost her woman’s kingdom—her heart—and so was not able to reward such suit and service, how came it she kept poor Stanton at a distance, but welcomed the society of Van Berg? Possibly her intuition recognized the fact that in the case of Stanton she had touched the heart, but had won the mind of the artist. The first seemed disposed to give all and to demand all. Stanton’s all did not count for very much thus far in her estimation. She had recognized the character he had brought to the Lake House—that of a pleasure-loving man of the world—and she was far too modest to suppose that she could work any material change in this character. Self-indulgent by nature, she believed that he had proposed to enjoy a summer flirtation with one whom he would easily forget in the autumn, and, while this impression lasted, she punished him by requiring that he should be the chivalric attendant of every forlorn female in the house. When she believed, however, that such heart as he possessed was truly interested, she became as unapproachable as the afternoon horizon, whose rich glow is seemingly near, but can never be reached. While she recognized the genuineness of his passion, she did not, as before intimated, regard it as a very serious affair.

“Good dinners and fairer faces than mine will comfort him before Christmas,” she thought.

Few know themselves—their own capabilities of joy, suffering, or achievement. As with Ida, Stanton was at a loss to understand the changes

in his own character. It was quite possible, therefore, that Miss Burton should misunderstand him. Indeed he had, as yet, but little place in her sad and preoccupied thoughts.

For some reason, however, Van Berg's society had for her a peculiar fascination that she could not resist. She scarcely knew whether she derived from it more of pleasure than of pain. She often asked herself this question:

“Which were better for a traveler in the desert—to see a mirage, or the sands only in all their barren reality?”

Her judgment said, the latter; but when the elusive mirage appeared, she looked often with a longing wistfulness that might well suggest a pilgrim that was athirst and famishing.

In spite of her quickness, Van Berg occasionally caught something of this expression, and while he drew encouragement from it, he was too free from vanity and too acute an observer to conclude that all would result as he hoped. The unwelcome thought would come that he was only the occasion and not the cause, of these furtive glances. Was her heart already wedded to a memory, and was she interested in him chiefly because for some reason he gave vividness and reality to that memory? If this were true, what more had he to hope for than Stanton? If this were true, was he not in a certain sense pursuing a shadow? Would success be success? Would he wish to clasp, as his wife, a woman whose heart had been buried in a sepulchre from which the stone might never be rolled away?

His first impression, that Miss Burton had passed through some experience, some ordeal of suffering that separated her from ordinary humanity, often reasserted itself more strongly than ever. At times her flame-like spirit would flash up with a glow and brilliancy that lighted and warmed his very soul, but the feeling began to grow upon him that this genial fire consumed the costliest of all offerings—self. Did not her own broken heart and shattered hopes supply the fuel? Instead of brooding apart over some misfortune that would have crushed most natures, was she not seeking to make her life an altar on which she laid as a gift to others the best treasures of her woman's soul?

The more closely he studied her character, and the controlling impulses of her life, the more sincere became his admiration, and the deeper his reverence. He felt with truth that she WAS of different and finer clay from himself.

So strong was this impression, that the thought occurred to him that in this and kindred reasons might be found the explanation of the peculiar regard he felt for her. He had virtually offered himself, and would again if he could find the opportunity. If he were sure the he would win her, he would exult as one might who had secured the revenue of a kingdom, the purest and largest gem in the world, or some other possession that was unique and priceless. The whole of his strong intellectual nature would be jubilant over the great success of his life. He was also conscious that some of the deepest feelings of his soul were interested. She was becoming like a religion to him, and he imagined that his regard for her was somewhat akin to that of a devout Catholic for a patron saint.

And yet he was compelled to admit to himself that he did not lover her as he supposed he would love the woman he hoped to make his wife. Why was his heart so tranquil and his pulse so steady? Certainly not because of assured success. Why did his regard differ so radically from Stanton's consuming passion? Should Stanton win her he felt that he could still seek her society and enjoy her friendship. The prospect of never winning her himself did not rob life of its zest and color. On the contrary, he believed that she would ever be an inspiration, an exquisite ideal realized in actual life. As such he could not lose her any more than those women whom poetry, fiction, and history had placed as stars in his firmament, and this belief so contented him as to awaken surprise.

As he returned from a long and solitary stroll on Monday evening he soliloquized complacently, "I am making too great a mystery of it all. She is not an ordinary woman. Why should I feel towards her the ordinary and conventional love which any woman might evoke? There is more of spirit than of flesh and blood in her exquisite organization. Sorrow has refined away every gross and selfish element, and left a saint towards whom devotion is far more seemly and natural than passion. She awakens in me a regard corresponding to her own nature, and I thank heaven that I am at least finely enough organized to understand her and so can seek to win her in accordance with the subtle laws of her being. She would shrink inevitably from a downright, headlong passion like that of Stanton's, no matter how honest it might be or how good the man expressing it. No hand, however strong, will ever grasp this 'rara avis,' this good angel, rather. Her wings must be pinioned by gossamer threads of patient kindness, delicate sympathy, nice appreciation, and all woven and wound so unobtrusively

that the shy spirit may not be startled. What a fool I was to blurt out my feelings last evening! What rare good fortune is mine in the fact that she gives me the vantage-ground of friendship from which to urge a suit wherein must be combined sincerity with consummate skill. I fear I must efface some other image before I can implant my own. How fortunate I am that my cool and well-poised nature will enable me to work under the guidance of judgment rather than impulse.”

Feeling that he had much to gain and was in danger of irretrievable loss, he lightly mounted the steps of the hotel, bent on finding at once the object of his thoughts.

He saw her leaving a group in the parlor, of which Stanton was one, and he hastened to intercept her in the hall-way. Just as he was about to speak to her, Mr. Burleigh came bustling up and said:

“Miss Burton, a stranger—not to fame or fortune, nor to you probably, but a stranger to me—is inquiring for you—a stranger from the South. He would not give his name, and—good heaven, Miss Burton! are you ill?”

Van Berg led her into a private parlor near. She certainly had grown very white and faint. But after a moment there came a flash of hope and eager expectation into her face that no words could have expressed.

“His name—his name?” she gasped.

Mr. Burleigh looked at her a second, and then said: “Stay quietly here, I’ll bring him to you; and then, Mr. Van Berg, perhaps you and I might form an enormous crowd.”

“Had I not better leave you at once?” the artist asked when they were alone.

“Wait a moment. I—I—am very weak. It cannot be—but hope dies hard.”

Trembling like a leaf, and with eyes aflame with intense, eager hope, she watched the door.

A moment later Mr. Burleigh ushered in a middle-aged gentleman, who commenced saying:

“Pardon me, Miss Burton, for not sending my name, but you would not have known it”—then the young lady’s appearance checked him.

The effect of his coming was indeed striking. It was as if a gust of wind had suddenly extinguished a lamp. The luminous eyes closed for a moment, and the face became so pallid and ashen in its hue as to suggest death. It

was evident to Van Berg that her disappointment was more bitter than death.

“Miss Burton took a long walk this afternoon,” he said, hastily, “and, I fear, went much beyond her strength. Perhaps she had better see you tomorrow.”

“Oh, certainly, certainly; I will remain, if there is need,” the gentleman began.

By a strong and evident effort Miss Burton regained self-control, and said, with a faint smile that played over her face a moment like a gleam of wintry sunshine:

“You strong men often call women weak, and we, too often, prove you right. As Mr. Van Berg suggests, I am a little overtaxed to-night. Perhaps I had better see you in the morning.”

“I am a transient guest, and ought to be on my way with the first train,” said the gentleman. “My errand is as brief as it is grateful to me. Do not leave, sir,” he said to Van Berg. “If you are a friend of Miss Burton it will be pleasant for you to hear what I have to say; and, I warrant you that she will never tell you nor anyone else herself.”

“May I stay?” he asked.

She felt so weak and unnerved, so in need of a sustaining hand and mind that she looked at him appealingly, and said:

“Yes. This gentleman cannot disgrace me more than I have myself this evening.”

“Disgrace you! Miss Burton,” exclaimed the gentleman. “Your name is a household word in our home, and our honor for it is only excelled by our love. You remember my invalid daughter, Emily Musgrave—our only and unfortunate child. She attended the college in which you are an instructress. Before she came under your influence her infirmities were crushing her spirit and embittering her life. So morbid was she becoming that she apparently began to hate her mother and myself as the authors of her wretched existence. But by some divine magic you sweetened the bitter waters of her life, and now she is a fountain of joy in our home. In her behalf and her mother’s, I thank you; and even more, if possible, in my own behalf, for the reproachful, averted face of my child was killing me;” and tears stood in the strong man’s eyes.

There was nothing conventional in the way in which Jeannie Burton received his warm gratitude. She leaned wearily back in her chair, and for a

moment closed her eyes. There was far more resignation than of pleasure in her face, and she had the air of one submitting to a fate which one could not and ought not to resist.

“Your three lives are much happier then?” she said, gently, as if wishing to hear the reassuring truth again.

“You do not realize your service to us,” said Mr. Musgrave, eagerly. “Our lives were not happy at all. There seemed nothing before us but increasing pain. You have not added to a happiness already existing merely, but have caused us to exchange positive suffering for happiness. Emily seems to have learned the art of making every day of our lives a blessing, and she says you taught her how. I would go around the world to say to you, ‘God bless you for it!’”

“Such assurances ought to make one resigned, if not content,” she murmured in a low tone, as if half speaking to herself. Then rising, by an evident effort, she cordially gave her hand to Mr. Musgrave, and said:

“You see, sir, that I am scarcely myself to-night. I think I could give you a better impression of your daughter’s friend tomorrow. Give her my sincere love and congratulations. She is evidently bearing her burden better than I mine. You cannot know how much good your words have done me to-night. I needed them, and they will help me for years to come.”

The gentleman’s eyes grew moist again, and he said, huskily:

“I know you are rather alone in the world, but if it should ever happen that there is anything that I could do for you were I your father, call on John Musgrave. There, I cannot trust myself to speak to you any more, though I have so much to say. Good-night, and good-by;” and he made a very precipitate retreat, thoroughly overcome by his warm Southern heart.

“I dread to leave you looking so sad and ill, or else I would say good-night also,” said Van Berg.

She started as if she had half forgotten his presence, and kept her face averted as she replied:

“I will say good-night to you, Mr. Van Berg. I would prove poor company this evening.”

“Before you go I wish to thank you for letting me stay,” he said, hastily. “As Mr. Musgrave asserted, you would indeed never have told me what I have heard, and yet I would not have missed hearing it for more than you will believe. How many lives have you blessed, Jennie Burton?”

“Not very many, I fear, but I half wish I knew. Each one would be like an argument.”

“Arguments that should prove that you ought to let the dead past bury its dead, and live in the richer present,” he said, earnestly.

“The richer present!” she repeated slowly, and her face grew almost stern in its reproach.

“Forgive me—in the present you so enrich, then,” he said, eagerly.

Again she averted her face, and he saw that for some reason she wished to avoid his eyes.

“I am too weak and unnerved to do more than say good-night again,” she said, trying to smile. “You are fast learning that if you would be my friend you must be a patient and generous one.”

“Thank heaven I came to the Lake House!” ejaculated the artist as he strolled out into the star-light. Thank heaven for this mingling mystery and crystal purity. It does me good to trust her. There is a deep and abiding joy in the very generosity she inspires. I am learning the spell under which Emily Musgrave came. But how strange it all is! She expected some one to-night, whom she would have welcomed as she never will me. “The only rival I have to fear may not be dead, as I supposed, and yet my perverse heart is more full of pity for her than jealousy. I had no idea that I was capable of such self-abnegation. Has she the art of spiritual alchemy, and so can transmute natures full of alloy into fine gold?”

Van Berg was an acute observer, and had large acquaintance with the world in which he lived, and its inhabitants. He was in the main, however, an unknown quantity to himself.

34. Puzzled

TUESDAY was dreary enough to more than one at the Lake House. Clouds covered the sky, yet they gave little promise of the rain which the thirsty earth so needed. To Ida, as she looked out late in the morning, they seemed like a leaden wall around her, shutting off all avenues of escape.

Her mother joined her as she went down to a cold and dismal breakfast, long after all the other guests had left the dining-room, and she commenced fretting and fuming, as was her custom when the world did not arrange itself to suit her mood.

“Everything is on the bias today,” she said, “and you most of all from your appearance. I wish I could see things straightened out for once. The little school-ma’am, who turns everybody’s head, is sick in her room, and did not come down to breakfast. Therefore we had a Quaker meeting. If you had been present with your long face, the occasion would have been one of oppressive solemnity. Ik appeared as dejected as if he were to be executed before dinner, and scarcely ate a mouthful; I never saw a fellow so changed in all my life. Although your artist friend had a rapt, absorbed look, he was still able to absorb a good deal of steak and coffee. I saw him and Miss Burton emerge from a private parlor last night, and he probably understands Miss Burton’s malady better than the rest of us. Why—what’s the matter? Would to heaven I understood your malady better! Are you sick?”

“Yes,” said Ida, rising abruptly from the table, “I am sick—sick of myself, sick of the world.”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Mrs. Mayhew, sharply, “are you so wrapt up in that fellow Sibley, that you can’t live without him?”

Ida made a slight but expressive gesture of protest and disgust; then said, in a low tone, as if to herself: “If my own mother so misjudges me, what can I expect of others?”

Mrs. Mayhew followed her daughter to her room with a perplexed and worried look.

“Ida,” she began, “you are all out of sorts; you are bilious; you’ve got this horrid malaria, that the doctors are always talking about, in your system. Let me send for our city physician, Doctor Betts. Never was such a man at diagnosis. He seems to look right inside of one and see everything that’s going on wrong.”

“For heaven’s sake don’t send for him then!” exclaimed Ida.

Mrs. Mayhew looked askance at her daughter a moment, and then asked bluntly:

“Why? What’s going on wrong in you?”

“I do not know of anything that’s going on right,—to use your own phraseology.”

“You mean to say, then, that there is something wrong?”

“You intimated at the breakfast-table that everything was going wrong. So it has seemed to me, for some time. But come, mother, drugs can’t reach my trouble, and so you can’t help me. You must leave me to myself.”

“I think you might tell your own mother what is the matter,” whined Mrs. Mayhew.

“I think I might also,” said Ida, coldly. “It is not my fault but my great misfortune that I cannot.”

At this Mrs. Mayhew whimpered: “You are very cruel to talk to me in that way.”

“I suppose I’m everything that’s bad,” Ida answered recklessly. “That seems to be the general verdict. Perhaps it would be best for you all were I out of the way. I can scarcely remember when I have had a friendly look from any one. Things could not be much worse with me than they are now. I think I would like a change, and may have a very decided one.” Then seizing her hat, she left her mother to herself.

Mrs. Mayhew sank into a chair, and a heavy frown gathered on her brow as she thought deeply for a few moments.

“That girl means mischief,” she muttered. “I wonder if she is holding any communication with Sibley? I always thought Ida would take care of herself, but she’ll bear watching now. She hasn’t been like herself since she came to this place. I must consult Ik at once. Things are bad enough now, heaven knows; but if Ida should do anything disgraceful, I’d have to throw up the game.” (Mrs. Mayhew was an inveterate card-player, and her favorite amusement often colored her thoughts and words.)

Stanton was found smoking and pretending to read a newspaper in a retired corner of the piazza, but from which, nevertheless, he could see whether Miss Burton made her appearance during the morning.

Mrs. Mayhew explained her fears, and the young man used very strong language in expressing his disgust and irritation.

“A curse upon it all!” he concluded. “Since she must, and apparently will gratify this low taste, can you not return to New York, patch up the fellow into some sort of respectability and marry them with a blare of brazen instruments that will drown the world’s unpleasant remarks?”

“That would be better than the scandal of an elopement,” mused perplexed Mrs. Mayhew. “From what you say, Sibley is bad enough, and Ida seems reckless enough to do anything. I wish we had never come here.”

“So do I,” groaned Stanton. “No, I don’t, either. In fact I’m in a devil of a mess myself. You know it, and I suppose all see it. I can’t help it if they do. My passion, no doubt, is vain, but it’s to my credit. Ida’s is disgraceful to herself and to us all. If I’d been here alone and Van Berg had not come, I might have succeeded; but NOW”—and with a despairing gesture he turned away.

“Ik, come back,” cried his aunt, “of course I feel for you. You are independent, and can marry whom you please, though heaven knows you could do better than—”

“Heaven knows nothing of the kind,” he interrupted, irritably, “and if you were nearer heaven—but there, what’s the use.”

“You’re right now, Ik. We can’t afford to quarrel. You must talk to Ida. We must watch her. Find out if you can what is in her mind, and if the worst comes to the worst, they will have to be married. I suppose it will be wise to hint to her that if she WILL marry Sibley she had better do it in as respectable and quiet a way as possible.”

“The idea of anything being respectable and quiet where they are concerned!” snarled Stanton.

“Well, well,” groaned Mrs. Mayhew, “do your best.”

But Ida was not to be found.

She appeared at dinner, however, and not a few looked at her, and stole furtive glances again and again. Among these observers was the artist, and it was evident that he was both perplexed and troubled. Was this cold, marble-cheeked woman the butterfly that had fluttered into the country a few weeks since?

“She may be a bad woman,” he thought, “but she has become a woman in the last few days. She looks years older. I thought her shallow, but she’s too deep for me. For some reason I can’t associate that face, as it now appears, with Sibley, and yet it is so full of mingled pain and defiance, that one might almost think she meditated a crime. She looks ill. She is ill—she is growing thin and hollow-eyed. What a magnificent study she would make of a half-famished captive; or of beauty chained—not married to a man hateful and hated; or, possibly, of innocence meditating guilt, and yet seeking vainly to disguise the dark thoughts by a marble mask. There is some transforming process going on in Ida Mayhew’s mind, and from her appearance I rather dread the outcome; but her face is becoming a rare study.”

Although with the exception of a slight response to his formal bow she had sought to ignore his presence and to avoid his eyes, she was still conscious of this furtive scrutiny, and it hurt her cruelly. It seemed as if he were studying her as one might a peculiar specimen.

“His critical eyes are trying to look into me heart as they did into the poor little rose-bud,” she thought; and her face grew more rigid and inscrutable under his gaze. as early as possible she left the table.

“I wish I knew just what her trouble was,” thought the artist. “If not connected with that wretch Sibley, I could pity her with all my heart. Well, take all the good the gods send, I’ll sketch her face this afternoon as I have last seen it.”

“Your cousin begins to look decidedly ill,” he said to Stanton, after dinner.

His friend’s only reply was an imprecation.

“Your remark is emphatic enough, but I don’t understand it any better than I do Miss Mayhew.”

“It’s to your credit you don’t. Her mother has reason to believe that there is some devilry on foot between her and Sibley. I’m to find out and thwart her if I can. I suppose I shall have to say, in substance: ‘Since you will throw yourself away on the fellow, go through all the formalities that society demands. In such case your family will submit, if they can’t approve. You see I’m frank with you, as I’ve been from the first.’ Would to heaven she had never come here, and now think of it there has been a change in her for the worse ever since she came. It must be the influence of

that cursed Sibley. Some women are fools to begin with; but from a fool infatuated with a villain, good Lord deliver us!”

“You fear an elopement then?” said Van Berg, his face darkening into his deepest frown.

“I fear worse than that. Sibley is as treacherous as a quagmire. If a woman ventured into a false position with him he would marry her only when compelled to do so. I’m savage enough to shoot them both this afternoon. I see but one way out. I must warn her promptly, and in language so emphatic that she will understand it, that everything must be after the regulation style.”

Van Berg made a gesture of contempt, but said to his friend:

“Stanton, I’m sorry for you. Such trouble as this would cut me deeper than any other kind. If I can do anything to help you, count on me. I’m in the mood myself to shoot Sibley, for he has spoiled for me the fairest face that evil ever perverted.”

Van Berg did not sketch Ida Mayhew’s face that afternoon. On the contrary, he resolutely sought to banish her image from his mind. When last he saw that face, it seemed made of Parian marble. Now it rose before him so blackened and besmirched that he thought of it only with anger and disgust.

Ida kept herself so secluded in the afternoon that Stanton could not find her, but this very seclusion, which the poor girl sought in order to hide her wounds, only increased his own and Mrs. Mayhew’s fears deepened their suspicions.

She was a little late in appearing at the supper-table, for her return from the wanderings of the afternoon had required more time than she supposed. She was very weary; moreover, the hours spent in solitude with nature had quieted her overstrung nerves. The sun had shone upon her, though the world seemed to frown. Flowers had looked shyly and sweetly into her face as if they saw nothing there to criticise. She had plucked a few and fastened them into her breast-pin, and their faint perfume was like a low, soothing voice. She was in a softened and receptive mood, and a kind word, even a kind glance, might have tuned the scale in favor of better thoughts and better living.

But she did not receive them. Her coming to the table was greeted with an ominous silence, for each one was conscious of thoughts so greatly to her prejudice that they scarcely wished to meet her eye. Mrs. Mayhew

looked excessively worried and anxious. Stanton was flushed and angry. The artist was icy as he only knew how to be when he deemed there was sufficient occasion; and in his opinion, the presence of the prospective and willing bride of the man who had attempted his life, and, what was far worse, insulted the woman he most honored, was occasion, indeed.

From time to time he gave her a cold, curious glance, as one might look at some strange, abnormal thing for which there is no accounting; but his slight scrutiny was no longer furtive. He looked at her openly as he would at an OBJECT, and not at a woman whose feelings he would not wound for the world. His thought was: "A creature akin to Sibley deserves no consideration, and can put in no just claim for delicacy."

Indeed he felt a peculiar vindictiveness towards her to-night, because she had so thwarted him, and was about to carry her extraordinary dower of beauty to the moral slough that seemingly awaited her. Therefore, his glance swept carelessly over her with a cold indifference that chilled her very soul.

But these transient glances caught enough to trouble him with a vague uneasiness. Although he was steeled against her by prejudice and anger, something in her appearance so pleaded in her favor that misgivings would arise. Once he thought she met his eyes with something like an appeal in her own, but he would not look long enough to be sure. A moment later he was vexed with himself that he had not.

The silence or the forced remarks at the table were equally oppressive, and Ida immediately felt that she was the cause of the restraint. She was about to leave the table in order to relieve them of her presence, when Miss Burton unexpectedly entered and took her chair, which hitherto had been vacant. She was a little pale and wan, but this only made her look the more interesting, and both Stanton and Van Berg welcomed her as they would the sunshine after a dreary storm. Even Mrs. Mayhew seemed to find a wonderful relief in her coming, and added her voluble congratulations.

"I have had nervous headaches myself, and know how to sympathize with you," she concluded.

"She does not know how to sympathize with me," sighed her daughter.

The sigh caught Van Berg's attention, and he was surprised to see that the maiden's eyes were full of tears. She bowed her head a moment to hide them, and then abruptly left the table and the room.

The artist's misgivings ended in something like compunction, as he thought: "Her tears are caused by the contrast between the icy reception we gave her, and the cordial welcome we have just given Miss Burton. Confound it all! I wish I knew the exact truth, or that she would leave for parts unknown where I could never see her again."

Miss Burton glanced wistfully after the retreating maiden, but no explanation was offered. Then, as if feeling that she had lost a day's opportunity for diffusing sunshine, she became more genial and brilliant than Van Berg had ever known her to be. They lingered long at the table; Mr. Burleigh and others joined them. Their laughter rang out and up to the dusky room in which poor Ida was sobbing,

"I wish I were dead and out of every one's way."

Van Berg laughed with the others, but never for a moment did he lose the uneasy consciousness that he might possibly be misjudging Ida Mayhew. Although Mr. Burleigh's portly form occupied her chair, it did not prevent him from seeing a pale tearful face that was far too beautiful, far too free from all gross and sensual elements, to harmonize with the character he was supposing her to possess. He re-called what she had said about the "fragrance" of the rose-bud he had torn and tossed away, rising to him like "a low, timid appeal for mercy." Had she shyly and timidly appealed to him for a kinder judgment that evening, and had he been too blind and prejudiced to see anything save the stains left by Sibley's name? If she proposed to go to Sibley, why was she not like him in manner? It was strange that one akin to such a fellow should fasten wild flowers on her bosom, and still more strange that they should be so becoming.

The cool and sagacious Van Berg, who so prided himself on his correct judgment, was decidedly perplexed and perturbed.

35. Desperately Wounded

STANTON basked in Miss Burton's smiles until a significant look from Mrs. Mayhew reminded him of his disagreeable task, for the performance of which there seemed a greater urgency than ever. Ida's rather precipitate withdrawal from the supper-room was another proof in their eyes that some mischief was brewing.

He listened at her door for a moment, and could not fail to hear the stifled sound of her passionate grief; then knocked, but there was no response.

"Ida," he said, in a kinder tone than usual, "I want to see you."

She tried to quiet her sobbing, and after a moment faltered: "You had better leave me to myself."

"No, I must see you," he said kindly but firmly. "I have something to say to you."

The poor girl was so lonely and heart-broken, that she was ready for the least ray of comfort. She now saw that she was ignorant and exceedingly faulty. She was ready to admit the fact that she had acted very foolishly and unwisely, and that circumstances were against her. Ill-omened circumstances have brought to condemnation and death innocent men. Ida would not now claim that she was innocent of blame, but events had seemed so unfortunate of late, that she was half ready to think that some vindictive hand was shaping them.

But she did not feel that she was now worse than she had been. On the contrary, she had longings for a better life and a broader culture such as she had never experienced before. The artist's eyes, in searching for her woman's soul, revealed to her that she had been a fool; but now she would gladly become a woman if some one would only point out the way.

"Mother and Ik might learn that I am not wholly bad if they would only take the trouble to find out," she murmured. "Ik used to be kind-hearted, and I thought he cared a little for me, in spite of our sparing. Why is he so hard on me of late? Why can't he believe that I am just as capable of

detesting Sibley as he is? Perhaps he does mean to say a kind word, and give me a chance to explain.”

These thoughts passed through her mind as she lighted the gas and bathed her face, that she might, to some extent, remove the evidences of grief.

Stanton misunderstood her wholly. The new Ida, that deep feeling and recent events were developing, was unknown to him, and he had been too preoccupied to see the changes, even had they been more apparent. He did feel a sort of commiseration for her evident suffering, for he was too kind-hearted not to sympathize even when he believed pain to be well-deserved. But he thought he must still deal with her as a wayward, passionate child, as he had in the past, when she cried till she obtained what she wished, right or wrong. He now believed that she was as fully bent on carrying out her own unreasonable will, but remembered that she was no longer a child, and might be guilty of folly that society would not forgive as childish. Therefore he wished to see her face, and was disposed to be wary and observant.

He gave her a quick, keen glance as he entered and then said:

“What’s the matter, Ida? Why do you sit here in the shadows? It’s as dark as a pocket;” and he turned the gas higher.

She did not answer, but sat down with her face averted from him and the light. “He has come here as a spy, and not as a comforter,” she thought.

He looked at her a moment, mistook her silence as an expression of the settled obstinacy of her purpose.

“Well, Ida,” he said, a little irritably, “I know you of old. I suppose you will have your own way as usual. If we must submit, why then we must; but you can’t expect us to do so with any grace. If you won’t give up this Sibley, for heaven’s sake let your mother arrange the matter after the fashion of the day! Out of regard for your family, go through all the regular formalities.”

She started violently and then leaned back in her chair as if she were faint, and half stunned by a blow. He regarded her manner as evidence of guilt, or, at least, of proposed criminal imprudence on her part, and went on still more plainly:

“If you can’t exist without Sibley—why, marry him; but see to it that there is a plenty of priest, altar, and service; for you know, or you ought to, that he’s a man who can’t be trusted a hair’s breadth.”

She averted her face still farther, and said in a low constrained tone:

“My family, then, consent that I should marry Mr. Sibley?”

“No; we submit to the marriage as an odious necessity, on condition that you put the whole matter into your mother’s hands and allow her to arrange everything according to society’s requirements.”

“Please let me understand you,” she said in a lower voice. “My family offer to submit to the marriage as a dire necessity lest my relations with Mr. Sibley cover them with a deeper shame?”

“Well, in plain English, yes.”

“It is indeed extraordinarily plain English—brutally plain. And does—does Mr. Van Berg share in your estimate of me?”

Her manner and words began to puzzle Stanton, and he remembered the artist’s question—“Are you absolutely sure that Sibley is the cause of her trouble?” He thought that perhaps it might be good policy to contrast the two men.

“To be frank,” he replied, “I think Mr. Van Berg has both wished and tried to think well of you. He admired your beauty immensely, and sought to find something in your character that corresponded with it. Even after your studied rudeness to him, your open preference of Sibley’s society to his, and your remark explaining your course, ‘congenial society or none at all’” (Ida fairly groaned as he recalled her folly), “he tried to treat you politely. That you should refuse the society of a gentleman like my friend for the sake of such a low fellow as Sibley, is to us all a disgusting and fathomless mystery. The belief that you could throw yourself and your rare beauty into this abominable slough, was so revolting to Van Berg, that he never would wholly accept of it until today.”

She rose to her feet and turned upon him. Her eyes were fairly blazing with indignation, and her face was white and terrible from her anger. In tones such as he had never heard any woman use before, she said:

“But today you have succeeded in satisfying him that this is not only possible, but the most natural thing for me to do. You have told him that my family will submit to my marriage with a loathsome wretch, who got drunk in the presence of ladies, insulted an orphan girl, and attempted murder—and all in one Sunday afternoon. I suppose you thought me captivated, and carried away by such a burst and blaze of villainy; and so my high-toned family explain to the faultless and aristocratic Mr. Van Berg that they will submit to an odious marriage lest I clandestinely follow the scoundrel who was very properly driven away, like the base cur he is. This is why you

received me to-night as if I were a pestilence. This is why I was treated at the table as if I were a death's head. This is why your perfect friend looked towards me as if my chair were vacant. He refused even to recognize the existence of such a loathsome thing as my family explain to him that I am. Great heaven! may I never live to receive a deeper humiliation than this!"

"But, Ida," cried Stanton, deeply alarmed and agitated by her manner, "how else could we explain your action and your reckless words to your mother?"

"Oh, I admit that circumstances are against me, but there is no excuse for this outrage! I don't know what I did say to mother. I've been too wretched and discouraged to remember. She IS my mother, and I'll say nothing against her, though, heaven knows, she has been a strange mother to me. Would to God I had a father that I could go to, or a brother! But it seems I have not a friend in the great, scornful world. Don't interrupt me. Words count for nothing now, and mine least of all. If you were all ready to believe me capable of what you have plainly intimated, you need something stronger than words to convince you to the contrary. Of one thing I shall make sure—you and your faithless friend shall never have the chance to insult me again. I wish you to leave my room."

"Oh come, Ida, listen to reason," Stanton began coaxingly.

"I admitted you," she interrupted with a repellent gesture, "in the hope of receiving a little kindness, for which I was famishing, but I would rather you had stabbed me than have said what you have. Hush, not a word more. The brutal wrong has been done. Will you not go? This is my private apartment. I command you to leave it; and if you will not obey I will summon Mr. Burleigh;" and she placed her hand on the bell.

Her manner was at once so commanding and threatening that Stanton, with a gesture of deprecation and protest, silently obeyed.

He was so surprised and unnerved by the interview in which the maiden had turned upon him with a fiery indignation that was almost volcanic, that he wished to think the affair all over and regain his composure before meeting any one. Clearly they had failed to understand Ida of late, and had misjudged her utterly. And yet, guided by appearances, he felt that they could scarcely have come to any other conclusion.

Now that he had been jostled out of his preoccupation, he began to realize that Ida had not appeared of late like the frivolous girl that had accompanied him to the country. Changes were taking place in her as well

as in himself, "but not from the same cause," he thought. "After her words and manner to-night, I cannot doubt that Sibley has disgusted her as well as the rest of us, although she had a strange way of showing it. It cannot be that a woman would speak of a man for whom she had any regard, as Ida did of the wretch with whom we were associating her; and as for Van Berg, she has taken no pains to conceal her strong dislike for him from the first day of their meeting. I can't think of anyone else at present (although there might be a score) who is disturbing the shallow waters of her mind.

"I'm inclined to think that she is deeply mortified at the false position in which Sibley has placed her, and is too proud to make explanations. It may be also that she is realizing more fully the disgrace of her father's course, and it is also possible that she is waking up to a sense of her own deficiencies. Although she could not fail to dislike such people as Jennie Burton and Van Berg, she would be apt to contrast herself with them and the impression which she and they made on society. Confound it all! I wish I had not taken it for granted that she was pining for Sibley and ready to throw herself away for his sake. It has placed me in a deucedly awkward position. I doubt if she ever fully forgives me, and I can't blame her if she doesn't."

"Well?" said Mrs. Mayhew, as Stanton moodily approached her.

"Come with me," he said. When they were alone he prefaced his story with the irritable remark:

"It's a pity you can't understand your daughter better. She detests Sibley."

"Thank heaven for that," exclaimed the mother.

"I should be more inclined to thank both heaven and yourself if you had discovered the fact before sending me on such an intensely disagreeable mission. You must manage your daughter yourself hereafter, for she'll never take anything more from me;" and he told her substantially the nature of his interview, and his surmises as to the real causes of her trouble.

"I think you are right," said Mrs. Mayhew, whose impressions were as changeable as superficial; "and I'm excessively glad to think so. With her beauty, Ida can, in spite of her father, make a brilliant match, in every sense of the word;" and with the prospect of this supreme consummation of life regained, the wife and mother gave a sigh of great relief.

"But she's in an awful mood, I can tell you," said Stanton, dubiously. "I never knew a woman to look and speak as she did to-night. If you don't

manage better she'll make us trouble yet."

"Oh, I'm used to Ida's tantrums. They don't last. Nothing does with her. Time and another admirer will bring her around."

"Well, you ought to know," said Stanton with a shrug; "but I retire from the management. I can't help saying, however, that something in her looks and words makes me uneasy. I regret exceedingly I spoke as I did, and shall apologize at the first opportunity."

"You'll have that in the morning. Things are so much better than I feared that I am greatly relieved. She'll come around now if nothing more is said. Roiled water always settles when kept quiet;" and Mrs. Mayhew returned to the parlor in much better spirits.

Stanton followed his aunt and joined a small group that had gathered around Miss Burton. Van Berg gave him a quick, questioning look, but gathered the impression only that he had been subjected to a very painful interview.

"She has evidently realized his worst fears," he thought; "curses on her!" and his face grew fairly black for a moment with anger and disgust.

But Jennie Burton's silver tongue soon charmed away the evil spirits from both the young men.

She had fine conversation powers, and her keen intuition and her controlling passion to give pleasure enabled her to detect and draw out the best thoughts of others. Her evident sympathy put every one at ease, and gave people the power of such happy expression that they were surprised at themselves, and led to believe that they not only received but gave something better than average. Therefore, under the magic of her good-will, both eyes and minds kindled, and even common-place persons became almost brilliant and eloquent.

Stanton's was the only clouded face in her circle that evening; and true to her instinct, she set about banishing his trouble, whatever it might be—an easy task with her power over him.

Since it daily became more evident to her that she must wound his vanity, and perhaps his heart a little, she tried to make amends by showing him such public consideration as might rob his disappointment of humiliation and bitterness.

Stanton, therefore, soon forgot Ida's desperate face, and was enjoying himself at his best.

Yet Ida's face but faintly revealed her heart. It seemed that the end had now come in very truth, and she was conscious chiefly of a wild impulse to escape from her shame and suffering. There was also a bitter sense of wrong and a wish to retaliate.

"I'll teach them all a lesson," she muttered, as she paced her room swiftly to and fro. "This proud artist thinks he can look at me as if I were empty air; that he can forget me as he has the rose-bud he tossed away. I will insure that he looks at me once with a face as white as mine will then be, and that he remembers me to his dying day."

After becoming more calm, and as if acting under a sudden impulse, she hastily made a simple but singular toilet.

When completed, her mirror reflected a plain, close-fitting, black gown, which left her neck and arms bare. Around her white throat she placed a black velvet band, and joined it by a small jet poniard studded with diamonds. Her sunny hair was wound into a severely simple coil, and also fastened with a larger poniard, from the haft and guard of which glistened diamonds of peculiar brilliancy. She took off all her rings, and wore no other ornaments. Then taking from her table a book, bearing conspicuously as its title the word "Misjudged," she went down to the parlor.

She paused a moment on the threshold before she was noticed. Her mother was eagerly gossiping with two or three fashionable women about a scandal that she hoped might cause her own family's short-comings to be forgotten in part. Miss Burton was telling a story in her own inimitable style, and ripples of smiles and laughter eddied from her constantly. Stanton's and Van Berg's faces were aglow with pleasure, and it was plain the speaker absorbed all their thoughts.

"In the same way he will forget me, after I am dead," said the unhappy girl to herself, and the thought sent a colder chill to her heart, and a deeper pallor to her face.

Her gaze seemed to draw his, for he looked up suddenly. On recognizing her his first impulse was to coldly avert his eyes, but in a second her unusual appearance riveted his attention. She saw the impulse, however, and would not look towards him again. She entered as quietly and as unexpectedly as a ghost, and the people seemed as much surprised and perplexed as if she were a ghost.

She took a seat somewhat apart from all others, and apparently commenced reading. She was not so far away but that Van Berg could

decipher the title, "Misjudged," and having made out the significant word, its letters grew luminous like the diamonds in her hair.

Never before had he been so impressed by her beauty, and yet there was an element in it which made him shiver with a dread he could not explain to himself. He was surprised and shocked to find how pale and wan her face had become, but in every severe marble curve of her features he saw the word, "Misjudged." He could scarcely recognize her as the blooming girl that he had first seen in the concert garden. Suffering, trouble of mind, was evidently the dark magician that was thus transforming her; but why did she suffer so deeply? As she sat there before him, not only his deeper instincts, but his reason refused almost indignantly to associate her any longer with Sibley. There was a time when she seemed akin to him; but now she suggested deep trouble, despair, death even, rather than a gross "bon vivant." Was she ill! Yes, evidently, but he doubted if her malady had physical causes.

"What a very strange toilet she has made!" he thought; "simple and plain to the last degree, and yet singularly effective and striking. Her fingers were once loaded with rings, but she has taken them all off, and now her hands are as perfect as her features. She does not wear a single ornament, save those ominous poniards. Does she mean to signify by these that she is wounded, or that she proposes to inflict wounds? Ye gods! how strangely, terribly, exasperatingly beautiful she is! I have certainly both misjudged and misunderstood her."

These thoughts passed through his mind as he stole an occasional glance at their object, who sat with her profile towards him almost in the line of his vision. At the same time he was apparently listening to a prosy and interminable story from one of the group of which he was a member. They had been telling anecdotes of travel, and the last speaker's experience was, like his journey, long and uninteresting.

Van Berg soon observed that many others besides himself were observing Miss Mayhew. She seemed to fascinate, perplex, and trouble all who looked towards her. The singular beauty and striking toilet might account, in part, for the lingering glances, but not for the perplexity and uneasiness they caused. If Ida had been dead her features could not have been more colorless; and they had a stern, hard, desperate expression that was sadly out of harmony with what should be the appearance of a happy young girl.

Her presence seemed to cause an increasing chill and restraint. The healthful and normal minds of those about her grew vaguely conscious of another mind that had been deeply moved, shaken to its foundations, and so had become almost abnormal and dangerous in its impulses.

There is a very general tendency both to observe and to shrink from that which is unnatural, and if the departure from what is customary is shown in unexpected and unusual mental action, the stronger become the uneasiness and dread in those who witness it. All who saw Ida recognized that she was not only unlike herself, but unlike any one in an ordinary state of mind, and people who were intimate looked at each other significantly, as if to ask —“What is the matter with Miss Mayhew? What is the matter with us all?”

Were it not that the maiden occasionally turned a leaf, in order to keep up the illusion that she was reading, she might have been a statue, so motionless was her form, and so pallid her face. But she felt that she was perplexing and troubling those who had wounded her, and the consciousness gave secret satisfaction. Her past experience taught her to appreciate stage effect, and, since she meditated a tragedy, she proposed that everything should be as tragic and blood-curdling as possible.

There is usually but a short step between high tragedy and painful absurdity, which exasperates us while we laugh at it; but poor Ida’s thoughts were so desperately dark and despairing, and her exquisite features, made almost transparent by grief and fasting, so perfectly interpreted her unfeigned wretchedness, that even those who knew her but slightly were touched and troubled in a way that they could not explain even to themselves.

Miss Burton was evidently meditating how she could approach Ida, who seemed encased in a repellant atmosphere. Van Berg saw that Stanton looked anxious and perplexed, and that Mrs. Mayhew was exceedingly worried and annoyed. At last he hastily approached her daughter and whispered,

“For heaven’s sake, Ida, what’s the matter? You look as if you had gone into mourning.”

The young lady glanced coldly up and said stonily:

“You have at least taught me to dress appropriately.”

“Nonsense,” continued the mother, in a low, irritable tone. “Why can’t you cheer up and act like other people? Don’t you see you’re giving us all the shivers?”

She slowly swept the room with her eyes, and saw that not a few curious glances were directed towards her. Then, with bowed head, she glided from the room without a word.

Miss Burton caught up with her in the hall-way. "You are ill, Miss Mayhew," she said, with gentle solicitude.

"Yes," Ida replied, in the same stony, repellant manner; "but you are not a physician, Miss Burton. Good evening." And she went swiftly up to her own room, as if determined to speak with no one else that evening.

36. Temptation's Voice

VAN BERG had been so near that he could not help overhearing Mrs. Mayhew's words which had led to the abrupt and silent departure of her daughter from the parlor.

"There is some misunderstanding here," he thought, "whose effects are becoming outrageously cruel. The poor girl was driven away from the supper-table, and now she is driven out of the parlor. She has been an anomaly from the moment I saw her, and I now mean to fathom the mystery. Her exquisite face indicates that she is almost desperate from some kind of trouble. She is becoming ill—she is wasting under it. Sibley would be a fatal malady to any respectable girl, but I must give up all pretense of skill at diagnosis if he is the cause; for were her heart set on him why the mischief can't she go to him with all her old reckless flippancy? There is no need of any elopement, as Ik fears. She can easily compel her mother to go to the city, and her father would have no power to prevent the alliance, were she bent upon it. I believe her family misunderstand and are wronging her, and I may have occasion to go down on my knees myself, metaphorically, and ask her pardon for my superior airs."

These and kindred other thoughts passed through his mind as he slowly paced up and down a side piazza which he often sought when he wished to be alone. Stanton, having lost Miss Burton for the evening, soon joined him, and threw himself dejectedly into a chair.

"Van," he said, "I used to be rather self-complacent. I thought I had learned to take life so philosophically that I should have a good time as long as my health lasted. But to-night I feel as if life were a horribly heavy burden which I, an overladen jackass, must carry for many a weary day. How little we know what we are and what is before us! I've been a fool; I am a fool!"

"Well, Ik," replied Van Berg with a shrug, "I imagine there is a pair of us. My reason—all that's decent in me—refuses to regard Sibley as the cause of your cousin's most evident distress. For heaven's sake don't

confirm your words of this afternoon, or I shall feel like taking the first train, in order to escape from the most exasperating paradox that ever contradicted a man's senses."

"Van, you are right. I am mortified with myself beyond measure, and I am bitterly ashamed that my aunt, her own mother, should have so grossly misjudged her. Sibley, no doubt, IS the occasion of her trouble in part, for she seems fairly to writhe under the false position in which he has placed her by leading every one to associate her name with his; but I now believe that she loathes and detests him more than you or I can. Certainly no woman could speak of a man in harsher or more scathing terms than she spoke of him to-night. Well, to sum up the whole miserable trough, by taking her mother's view for granted, I made such a mess of it that I doubt if she ever speaks civilly to either of us again."

"Why! was my name mentioned?" asked Van Berg, quickly.

"Yes, confound it all! When things are going wrong there is a miserable fatality about them, and the worst always happens. She asked me point-blank if you shared my estimate of her, and I suppose got the impression you did."

"Well really, Stanton," said Van Berg, with some irritation, "I think you must have been unfortunate in your language."

"Worse than unfortunate. The whole blunder is unpardonable. Still, do me justice. I could not answer her question with a bold lie. And what would have been its use? How could you explain your bearing towards her at the supper table? Your manner would have frozen Jezebel herself."

"I was an infernal fool," groaned Van Berg.

"It is due to us both that I should say I told her you had tried to form a good opinion of her, and very reluctantly received the view her mother suggested. I said, in effect, you wished to think well of her, although she had treated you so badly."

"Treated me badly! I have treated her a thousandfold worse. She, at least, has never insulted me, and I can never forgive myself for the insult I have offered her.

"Well, I hope to find her in the mood to accept an apology in the morning," said Stanton.

"I'm in a confoundedly awkward position to apologize," growled Van Berg. "Any reference to such an affair will be like another insult;" and the

friends parted in an unsatisfactory state of mind towards each other, and especially towards themselves.

But that was a sad and memorable night to Ida Mayhew. She felt that it might be her last on earth; for her dark purpose was rapidly taking definite form.

she was passing into that unhealthful condition of mental excitement, in which the salutary restraints of the physical nature lose their power. In the place of drowsiness and weariness, she began to experience an unnatural exaltation which would make any reckless folly possible, if it took the guise of sublime and tragic action.

Few realize to what degree the mind can become warped and disordered, even with a brief time, by trouble and the violation of the laws of health; and some, by education and temperament, are peculiarly predisposed to abnormal conditions. Science has taught men how to build ships with water-tight compartments, so that if disaster crushes in on one side, the other parts may save from sinking. There are fortunate people who are built on the same safe principle. They have cultivated minds, and varied resources in artistic and scientific pursuits. Above all else, they may have faith in God and a better life to come; such possessions are like the compartments of a modern ship. Few disasters can destroy them all, and in the loss of one or more the soul is kept afloat by the others.

But it would seem that poor Ida's character had been constructed with fatal simplicity, and when the cold waves of trouble rushed in there was nothing to prevent her from sinking beneath them like a stone. Her mind was uncultivated, and art, science, literature offered her as yet no resources, no pursuits. She had a woman's heart that might have been filled with sustaining love, but in its place had come a sudden and icy flood of disappointment and despair. She loved, with all the passion and simplicity of a narrow, yet earnest nature, the man who had awakened the woman within her, and he, she believed, would never give her aught in return, save contempt. She naturally thought that she had been degraded in his estimation beyond all ordinary means of redemption; therefore, in her desperation and despair, she was ready to take an extraordinary method of compelling at least his respect.

Moreover, Ida was impatient and impetuous by nature. She had a large capacity for action, but little for endurance. It would be almost impossible for her to reach woman's loftiest heroism, and sit "like Patience on a

monument, smiling at grief.” It would be her disposition rather to rush forward, and dash herself against an adverse fate, meeting it even more than half way. All the influences of her life had tended to develop imperiousness, willfulness, and now her impulse was to enter a protest against her hard lot that was as passionate and reckless as it was impotent.

Apart from her supreme wish to fill Van Berg with regret, and awaken in him something like respect, the thought of dragging on a wretched existence through the indefinite years to come was intolerable. The color had utterly faded out of life, and left it bald and repulsive to the last degree.

Fashionable dissipation promised her nothing. She had often tasted this, to the utmost limit of propriety, and was well aware that the gay whirl had nothing new to offer, unless she plunged into the mad excitement of a life which is as brief as it is vile. It was to her credit that death seemed preferable to this. It was largely due to her defective training and limited experience, that a useful, innocent life, even though it promised to be devoid of happiness, was so utterly repulsive that she was ready to throw it away in impatient disgust.

As yet she was incapable of Jennie Burton’s divine philosophy of “pleasing not” herself. He who “gave his life for others” was but a name at the pronunciation of which, in the Service, she was accustomed to bow profoundly, but to whom, in her heart, she had never bowed or offered a genuine prayer. Religion seemed to her a sort of fashion which differed with the tastes of different people. She was a practical atheist.

It is a fearful thing to permit a child to grow up ignorant of God, and of the sacred principles of duty which should be inwrought in the conscience, and enforced by the most vital considerations of well-being, both for this world and the world to come.

But Ida Mayhew thought not of God or duty, but only of her thwarted, unhappy life, from which she shrank weakly and selfishly, assuring herself that she could not and would not endure it. In her father she saw only increasing humiliation; in her mother, one for whom she had but little affection and less respect, and who would of necessity irritate the wounds that time might slowly heal, could she live in an atmosphere of delicate, unspoken sympathy; in herself, one whom she now believed to be so ignorant and faulty that the man she loved had turned away in disgust on finding her out. If all this were not bad enough, unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances, even more than her own folly, had brought about a

humiliation from which she felt she could never recover. In her blind, desperate effort to hide her passion from the man she loved, she had made it appear that she was infatuated with the man she loathed, and who had shown himself such a contemptible villain that her association with him was the scandal of the house. If her own mother and cousin could believe that she was ready to throw herself away for the sake of such a wretch, what must the people of the hotel think? What kind of a story would go abroad among her acquaintances in the city? She fairly cringed and writhed at the thought of it all.

It seemed to the tortured and morbidly excited girl that there was but one way out of her troubles, and dark and dreadful as was that path, she thought it could lead to nothing so painful as that from which she would escape.

But after all, her chief incentive to the fatal act was the hope of securing Van Berg's respect, and of implanting herself in his heart as an undying memory, even though a sad and terrible one. With her ideas of the fitness of things this would be a strong temptation at best; but the present conditions of her life, as we have seen, so far from restraining, added greatly to the temptation.

And, as has been said, while the act seemed a stern and dreadful alternative to worse evils, it was not revolting to her. She had seen so many of her favorite heroines in fiction and actresses on the stage "shuffle off the mortal coil" with the most appropriate expressions and in the most becoming toilets and attitudes, that her perverted and melodramatic taste led her to believe that Van Berg would regard her crime as a sublime vindication of her honor.

Her only task now, therefore, was to frame a letter that would best accomplish this end, and at the same time wring his soul with unavailing regret.

But she was too sincere and sad to write diffusely and vaguely. After a few moments' thought she rapidly traced the following lines:

"Mr. Van Berg:

"You first saw me at a concert, and your judgment of me was correct, though severe. Your eyes have since been very cold and critical. I have followed your exploring glances, and have found that I am, indeed, ignorant and imperfect—that I was like the worm-eaten rose bud that you tossed contemptuously down where it would be trampled under foot. Seldom is that unfortunate little emblem of myself out of my thoughts. If I dared to

appeal to God I would say that he knows that I would have tried to bloom into a better life, even though imperfectly, if some one had only thought it worth while to show me how. It is too late now. Like my counterpart, that you threw away, I shall soon be forgotten in the dust.

"Although your estimate has been so harsh, I will not dispute it. Circumstances have been against me from the first, and my own folly has added whatever was wanting to confirm your unfavorable opinion. But today your thoughts wronged me cruelly. You have slain all hope and self-respect. I do not feel that I can live after seeing an honorable man look at me as you looked this evening. You believed me capable of flying to the man who attempted your life—who insulted and orphaned a girl. You looked at me, not as a lady, but an object beneath contempt. This is a humiliation that I cannot and will not survive. When you know that I have sought death rather than the villain with whom you are associating me, you may think of me more favorably. Possibly the memory of Ida Mayhew may lead you, when again you see a worm-eaten bud, to kill the destroyer and help the flower to bloom as well as it can. But now, like my emblem, I have lost my one chance.

The night was now far spent. Her mother, having been refused admittance, had fumed and fretted herself to sleep. The house was very still. She opened her window and looked out. Clouds obscured the stars, and it was exceedingly dark.

"The long night to which I'm going will be darker still," sighed the unhappy girl. "Well, I will live one more day. Tomorrow I will go out and sit in the sunlight once more. I wish I could go now, for already I seem to feel the chill of death. Oh, how cold I shall be by this time tomorrow night!"

She shuddered as she closed the window.

After pacing her room a few moments, she exclaimed, recklessly,

"I must sleep—I must get through with the time until I bring time to an end," and she dropped a powerful opiate into a glass.

Holding it up for a moment with a smile on her fair young face that was terrible beyond words, she said slowly,

"After all it's only taking a little more, and then—no waking."

37. Voices of Nature

BEFORE RETIRING, Ida had unfastened her door, so that her mother, finding her sleeping, might leave her undisturbed as late as possible the following day; and the sun was almost in mid-heaven before she began slowly to revive from her lethargy.

But as her stupor departed she became conscious of such acute physical and mental suffering that she almost wished she had carried out her purpose the night before. Her headache was equaled only by her heartache, and her wronged, overtaxed nervous system was jangling with torturing discord. But with the persistence of a simple and positive nature she resolved to carry out the tragic programme that she had already arranged.

She was glad to find herself alone. Her mother, with her usual sagacity, had concluded that she would sleep off her troubles as she often had before, and so left her to herself.

The poor, lost child made some pathetic attempts to put her little house in order. She destroyed all her letters. She arranged her drawers with many sudden rushes of tears as various articles called up memories of earlier and happier days. Among other things she came across a little birthday present that her father had given her when she was but six years of age, and she vividly recalled the happy child she was that day.

“Oh, that I had died then!” she sobbed. “What a wretched failure my life has been! Never was there a fitter emblem than the imperfect flower he threw away. I wish I could find the poor, withered, trampled thing, and that he might find it in my hand with his letter.”

She wrote a farewell to her father that was inexpressibly sad, in which she humbly asked his forgiveness, and entreated him, as her dying wish, to cease destroying himself with liquor.

“But it is of no use,” she moaned. “He has lost hope and courage like myself, and one can’t bear trouble for which there is no remedy. I’m afraid my act will only make him do worse; but I can’t help it.”

To her mother she wrote merely, "Good-by. Think of me as well as you can till I am forgotten."

Her thoughts of her mother were very bitter, for she felt that she had been neglected as a child, and permitted to grow up so faulty and superficial that she repelled the man her beauty might have aided her in winning; and it was chiefly through her mother that her last bitter and unendurable humiliation had come.

Mrs. Mayhew bustled in from her drive with Stanton, just before dinner, and commenced volubly:

"Glad to see you up and looking so much better." (Ida knew she was almost ghastly pale from the effects of the opiate and her distress, but she recognized her mother's tactics.) "Come now, go down with me and make a good dinner; then a drive this afternoon, to which Ik has invited you, and you will look like your old beautiful self."

"I do not wish to look like my old self," said Ida coldly.

"Who in the world ever looked better?"

"Every one who had a cultivated mind and a clear conscience."

"I declare, Ida, you've changed so since you came to the country that I can't understand you at all."

"Do not try to any longer, mother, for you never will."

"Won't you go down to dinner?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't wish to, for one thing; and I'm too ill, for another. Send me up something, if it's not too much trouble."

"I'm going to have a doctor see you this very afternoon," said Mrs. Mayhew, emphatically, as she left the room.

To do her justice she did send up a very nice dinner to Ida before eating her own. As far as doctors and dinners were concerned, she could do her whole duty in an emergency.

"Isn't Ida coming down?" whispered Stanton to his aunt.

"No. I can't make her out at all, and she looks dreadfully. You must go for a doctor, right after dinner."

Van Berg could not hear their words, but their ominous looks added greatly to his disquietude. He had been too ill at ease to seek even Miss Burton's society during the morning, and had spent the time in making a

sketch of Ida as she stood in the doorway before entering the parlor the previous evening.

But Jennie Burton did not seem to feel or resent his neglect in the slightest degree. Indeed, her thoughts, like his own, were apparently engrossed with the one whose chair had been vacant so often of late, and who, when present, seemed so unlike her former self.

“I fear your daughter is more seriously indisposed than you think,” she said anxiously to Mrs. Mayhew.

“I’m going to take Ida in hand,” replied the matter-of-fact lady. “She IS ill—far more so than she’ll admit. I’m going to have the doctor at once and put her under a course of treatment.”

“Curse it all!” thought Van Berg, “that is just the trouble. She has been under a course of treatment that would make any woman ill, save her mother, and I’m inclined to think that I was the veriest quack of them all in my treatment.”

“I wish she would let me call upon her this afternoon,” said Miss Burton, gently.

“Oh, I think she’ll be glad to see you!—at least she ought to be;” but it was too evident that Mrs. Mayhew was at last beginning to grow very anxious, and she made a simpler meal than usual. Stanton in his solicitude, hastened through dinner, and started at once for the physician who usually attended the guests of the house.

Ida, in the meantime, had forced herself to eat a little of the food sent to her, and then informing the woman who had charge of their floor that she was going out for a walk, stole down and out unperceived, and soon gained a secluded path that led into an extensive tract of woodland.

Stanton brought the doctor promptly, but no patient could be found. All that could be learned was that “Miss Mayhew had gone for a walk.”

“Her case cannot be very critical,” the physician remarked, smilingly; “I will call again.”

Stanton and his aunt looked at each other in a way that proved the case was beginning to trouble them seriously.

“She knew the doctor would be here,” said Mrs. Mayhew.

“I fear her complaint is one that the doctors can’t help, and that she knows it,” replied the young man, gloomily. “But you seem to know less about her than any one else. I shall try to find her.”

But he did not succeed.

“Miss Burton,” said Van Berg, after dinner, “I wish you would call on Miss Mayhew. I think she is greatly in need of a little of your inimitable tact and skill. ‘A wounded spirit who can bear?’ And in such an emergency, you are the best surgeon I know of. I think some of us wounded her deeply and unpardonably by continuing to associate her with Sibley, after he revealed what an unmitigated rascal he was. Strong as appearances were against her, I feel that I cannot forgive myself that I took anything for granted in a case like that.”

“I am glad,” she answered, “that you have come to my own conclusion, that Miss Mayhew, with all her faults, is too good a girl to be guilty of a passion for a man like Sibley. If she regards him in any such way as I do, I do not wonder that it has made her ill to be so misjudged. I must plead guilty also to having wronged her in my thoughts. While I try to exercise the broadest charity, my calling, as a teacher, has brought me in contact with many girls that—through immaturity and innate foolishness—are guilty of conduct that taxes one’s faith in human nature severely. Goodish sort of girls are sometimes infatuated with very bad men. I suppose it is evident to all that Miss Mayhew’s early and, indeed, present influences are sadly against her; but unfortunate as have been her associations of late, I am coming to the belief that, however faulty she may be, she is not naturally either silly or weak. But my acquaintance with her is very slight, and I must confess I do not understand her very well. For some reason she shuns me and has evidently disliked me from the first.”

“I don’t understand her at all,” said Van Berg, in a tone that proved him greatly annoyed with himself. “I have thought that I had sounded the shallow depths of her character several times, and then some new and perplexing phase would present itself, and put me all to sea again. It may seem ludicrous to you that her beauty should irritate me so greatly because of its incongruous associations.”

“Not at all,” she replied, with a little nod. “I was not long in discovering that you were a pagan, and that beauty was your divinity.”

“Correct in all respects save the divinity,” he answered promptly; and he would have said more, but she passed into the parlor among the other guests.

Ida found herself too weak and unnerved to walk far, but she discovered a secluded nook into which the sunlight streamed with a grateful warmth; for although the day was warm, she shivered with cold as if the chill in her

heart had diffused itself even to her hands and feet. Dense shrubbery hid her from the path along which she saw Stanton pass in his fruitless quest.

For a long time she sat in dreary apathy, almost as motionless as the mossy rock beneath her, and was conscious only of her throbbing forehead and aching heart. Gradually, however, nature's vital touch began to revive her. The sunlight warmed and tranquilized the exquisite form that had been entering its shuddering protest against the chill and corruption of the grave. The south wind, laden with fresh woodland odors, fanned her cheeks, and whispered that there were flowers blooming that she could not see, and that the future also might reveal joys now hidden and unknown, if she would only be patient. Every rustling leaf that fluttered in the gale, but did not fall, called to her with its tiny voice: "Cling to your place, as we do, till the frost of age or the blight of disease brings the end in God's own time and way." A partridge with her brood rustled by along the edge of the forest, and the poor girl imagined she saw in the parent bird, as she led forward her plump little bevy, the pride and complacency of a happy motherhood, which now would never be hers; and from the depths of her woman's heart came nature's protest. Then her heavy eyes were attracted by the sport of two gray squirrels that were racing to the top of one tree, scrambling down another, falling and catching again, and tumbling over each other in their mad excitement. She felt that, at her age, their exuberant life and enjoyment should be a type of her own, but their wild, innocent fun, in contrast with her despair, became so unendurable that she sprang up and frightened them away.

But after she was quiet they soon returned, barking vociferously, and sporting with their old abandon. It was not long since they had left the nest in the old hemlock tree, and they were still like Ida, before she had learned that there was anything in the world that could harm her. Other wild creatures flew or scampered by, some stopping to look at her with their bright quick eyes, as if wondering why she was so still and sad. The woods seemed full of joyous midsummer life, and Ida sighed:

"Innocent, happy little things; but if they knew what was in my heart, they would be so frightened they could scarcely creep away to hide."

Then with a sudden rush of passionate grief, she cried:

"Oh, why cannot I live and be happy, too?" and she sobbed till she lay exhausted on the mossy rock.

Whether she had swooned, or from weakness had become unconscious, she did not know, when, considerably later, she roused herself from what seemed like a heavy and unrefreshing sleep. Her dress was damp with dew, the sun had sunk so low as to fill the forest with a sombre shade; the happy life that had sported around her was hushed and hidden, and the wind now sighed mournfully through the trees. Gloom and darkening shadows had taken the place of the light and joyousness she first had seen. In the face and voices of nature, as in those of earthly friends, the changes are often so great that we are tempted to ask in dismay, are they—can they be the same?

She was stiff and cold as she rose from her rocky couch, but she wearily turned her face towards the hotel, muttering, as she plodded heavily along,

“The little people of the woods are happy while they can be, as I was, but the sportsman’s gun, or the hawk, or winter’s cold, will soon bring to them bitter pain, and death. their brief day will soon be over, as mine is.”

“Ah, the sun is sinking behind that cloud,” she said, in a low tone, as she came out into the open fields. “I shall not see it again; it will not be able to warm me tomorrow;” and with a slight gesture of farewell, she continued on her way with bowed head.

38. A Good Man Speaks

AS IDA APPROACHED the hotel, Van Berg and Stanton saw her, and the latter hastened down the steps to join her.

“Why, Ida!” he exclaimed, “where have you been? I’ve searched for you high and low.”

“You had no right to do so, sir,” she said coldly, as she passed on.

“Wait a moment, Ida, please. I wish to speak with you—to ask your pardon—to apologize in the strongest terms.”

She would not break again her ominous silence, but continued on with bowed head, up the steps, and through the hall. Stanton, to save appearances before the guests who were near, walked at her side, but her manner chilled and embarrassed him so greatly, that only as she was about to enter her room did he again address her, and now entreatingly:

“Ida, won’t you speak to me?”

“No!” was her stern, brief response; and she locked her door against him.

“Van,” said Stanton gloomily, “I’d give a year’s income if I had not spoken to my cousin as I did last night. She’ll never forgive me. It seems as if my words had turned her into ice, she is so cold and calm; and yet her eyes were red with weeping. I have strange misgivings about the girl.”

“Yes, Ik,” said the artist, gloomily, “we have both made an unpardonable blunder. If Miss Burton cannot thaw her out, I shall not dare to try.”

“With her usual perversity,” replied Stanton, “she dislikes Miss Burton, and I doubt if she will listen to her.”

“I have great faith in her tact and genuine goodwill. It was wonderful how quickly she brought Mr. Mayhew under her genial spells. She has promised to see your cousin this evening.”

“I’m sorry,” said Stanton, gloomily, “that it should have been at your request rather than mine. But I suppose your wishes are becoming omnipotent with her.”

“No, Ik; I regret to say that they weigh with her only as those of a friend,” was Van Berg’s quiet response.

“Well, well, Van, bear with me, for I’m in a devil of a scrape.”

Even Miss Burton’s efforts could not brighten the clouded faces that gathered at the supper-table. In truth, her attempts were brief and fitful, for she seemed absorbed in thought herself. She heard Mrs. Mayhew whisper to Stanton,

“If I were a perfect stranger she could not keep me at a greater distance. I can do nothing with her or for her.”

To their surprise, Ida quietly walked in and took her place. Her face was very grave and very pale; the traces of her grief were still apparent, and they caused in Van Berg the severest compunction. She was now dressed richly, but plainly and unobtrusively. Her manner was quiet and self-possessed, but there was an expression of desperate trouble in her eyes that soon filled Van Berg with a strong and increasing uneasiness. She returned his bow politely, but distantly. Poor Stanton scarcely dared to look towards her. At supper, on the previous evening, he had taken no pains to conceal his contempt and displeasure; now he was unable to hid his embarrassment and fear. As in the parlor on the previous evening so now again, there was an element in Ida Mayhew’s appearance or in herself that caused deep disquietude.

“I’m very glad, Ida, you’ve changed your mind and come down,” began Mrs. Mayhew, volubly.

“I have not changed my mind,” she replied, with such sad, stern emphasis that they all involuntarily looked at her for a moment.

Poor Mrs. Mayhew was so quenched and depressed that she did not venture to speak again.

Only Miss Burton was able to maintain her self-possession and tact, and she was intently but unobtrusively studying Miss Mayhew. Her college-life had made her acquainted with so many strange feminine problems that she had the nerve and experience of a veteran, but she could not penetrate the dark mystery in which Ida had now shrouded herself. Resolving, however, that she would not succumb to the chill and restraint that paralyzed the others, she persisted in conversing with her in simple, natural tones.

Ida replied in perfect courtesy and not with unnecessary brevity, but if her words were polished, they were also as cold and hard as ice. Nothing that Miss Burton said could bring the glimmer of a smile athwart her features that were growing so thin and transparent that even an approach to

a pleasant thought would have lighted them up with a momentary gleam. Miss Burton found her task a difficult one.

“She affected me as strangely,” she afterwards said to Van Berg, “as if a dead maiden were sitting at my side, who had still, by some horrible mystery, the power of speech.”

As for Van Berg, he had hitherto supposed that his quiet, well-bred ease would be equal to every social emergency, but he now found himself tongue-tied and embarrassed to the last degree. He could not speak to the woman whom he felt he had so deeply wronged in his thoughts and manner, and who was also well aware of the fact. He felt that he had no right to speak to her until he had first asked and secured her forgiveness. This could not be done in public, and he greatly doubted whether she ever would pardon him. As a chivalric man of honor, he was overwhelmed with a sense of the insult he had unwittingly offered to the maiden opposite him, who now appeared as if mortally wounded. Beyond a few forced remarks to Stanton and Miss Burton, he made a show of eating his supper in silence. But he longed to escape from his present ordeal, and resolved to leave the table as soon as appearances permitted.

One thing in Ida’s manner perplexed him greatly. She now looked at him as if he were an object, scrupling not to meet his eye with her strange, unwavering gaze. There was nothing of the haughty indifference which she had manifested the evening before in her occasional glances. She rather looked as one who is trying to fix an object in his memory that he may carry an accurate picture of it away with him.

The thought crossed his mind more than once, “We have wakened our Undine’s sleeping mind with a vengeance, but have jostled it so rudely that I fear the frail article is hopelessly shattered.”

Miss Burton tried once more to make the conversation general, but her effort ended rather disastrously.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said, “I’ve been reading an essay this afternoon in which the writer tries to prove that science has done more for humanity than art and religion combined. Now I suppose you would be inclined to take the same ground in regard to art that I ought in respect to religion.”

Van Berg was about to reply, when his attention was caught by a vivid gleam in the face of Ida, who looked up as if she wished to speak.

“I think Miss Mayhew has an opinion on this subject,” he said, with a bow.

She looked steadily at him as she replied promptly, "I have a decided opinion, though I base it on such poor and narrow grounds as personal experience. I think art is by far the most potent. It has accomplished for me much more than science or religion ever did, or could."

"What has it done for you, Miss Mayhew?" he asked, dreading the answer.

"It has filled me with despair," she replied with a glance and tone which he never afterwards forgot. Then, with the same cold, quiet manner in which she had come, she left the table.

Van Berg turned very pale, for he at once understood her reference to the emblematic rose-bud he had thrown away, and his remark, "Art can tolerate no such imperfection."

Her words and manner hopelessly perplexed the others, but Van Berg believed he had found light on the problem that had hitherto baffled him, but so far from being reassured, he had never been at such bitter odds with himself before.

He also soon after left the table, hoping to find an opportunity to express his regret that he had been so harsh by prejudice; but Miss Mayhew was not to be found.

"Can it be," he thought, as he strode off into the shrubbery, "that I have been blind to the very effects that I hoped to cause? Can it be that she has been made to feel her imperfection so keenly, and in such a way as to create only utter discouragement? She evidently understands the worm-eaten rose-bud I tossed away to be the emblem of herself. Oh, the curse of Phariseeism—the 'holier than thou' business, whatever form it takes. It has made an egregious fool of me."

"But her relations with Sibley, confound it all! I can't understand them. Why did she associate with him so constantly, and then say, 'Congenial society, or none at all'? Seems to me she ought to have seen what he was before he showed his cloven feet so plainly. Well, perhaps the most rational as well as charitable explanation is that her eyes were opened to see him in his true colors, as well as herself. Had Titania's eyes been disenchanted when she was fondling the immortal Weaver, she might have perished with disgust; and it is scarcely strange that Miss Mayhew should be ill on finding that she was infatuated with a man who was both ass and villain. She evidently sees things now as they are, and since her vision has become so good, I am very sorry I do not appear to better advantage. People who stalk

along through life with elevated noses, are not pleasing or edifying spectacles.”

His disquietude soon caused him to return to the hotel, in hopes of seeing the object of his thoughts.

He had hardly reached the piazza before Ida appeared, dressed in a plain walking suit. She hesitated a moment in the door-way as if undecided in her course. A party of gay young people were just starting on a stroll to a neighboring village. With apparent hesitancy, she said to one of the young girls:

“I have an errand to the village; may I walk with you for company?”

“Oh, certainly,” replied the girl, but evidently not welcoming this addition to their party, and Ida went away with them, but not as one of them, isolated more, however, by her own manner than by the bearing of her companions.

The explanation of her action was this: on opening her drawer after returning to her room, she found, with a sense of dismay—as if a misfortune had occurred instead of an incident that gave a chance for better thought—that in taking the opiate the night before, she had replaced the cork in the phial insecurely, and that nearly all its contents had oozed away. Some might have regarded this incident as an omen or a providential interference; but Ida was neither superstitious nor speculative in her nature; she was positive and willful, rather, and the current of her purposes always flowed strongly, though it might be in narrow channels.

“There is nothing left for me to do,” she muttered, “but go to the village. I don’t know whether Mr. Burleigh has laudanum, and my asking for it might excite suspicion.”

It was terrible to see her fair young face grow hard like marble in her stern determination to carry out her awful design, and the impress of this remorseless purpose filled Van Berg with so great foreboding that he could not resist the impulse to follow the desperate girl. If harm should come to her through the harshness of others, and as he now feared, more especially his own, he would never forgive himself.

Mrs. Mayhew and Stanton did not see her departure—they were in anxious consultation in one of the small private parlors, and the artist, to disarm suspicion of his design, entered the hotel, and passed out again by a side door, from which he took a short-cut across the field intending to watch Ida, without being himself observed.

Having found some dense copse-wood by the road-side, and near to the village, he sat down and waited. The gay, chattering party soon passed, Ida walking by herself on the opposite side of the road, with head bowed as if wholly wrapped in her own thoughts. Her unhappy face appealed to his sympathy even more than her graceful carriage to his sense of beauty, and he longed to join her and make such amends as were possible.

He now followed at too great a distance for recognition in the deepening twilight, and saw the young people enter a confectionery shop, but observed, with increased uneasiness, that Miss Mayhew parted from them and went to an adjacent drug-store. She soon joined the party again, however, and they all apparently started homeward.

Van Berg at once determined to go to this drug-store and learn, if possible, if there were anything to confirm the horrible suspicion that crossed his mind. He remembered that despair and desperate deeds often went together, and the daily press had taught him how many people, with warped and ungoverned moral natures, place their troubles beyond remedy by the supreme folly of self-destruction.

By a considerable detour through a side street, he reached the store unperceived, and found the druggist rather disquieted himself.

“Are you staying at Burleigh’s?” he asked.

“I am,” Van Berg replied.

“Do you know a young lady boarding there with large dark eyes and auburn hair?”

“I do.”

“Is there—is there anything wrong about her?”

“Why should there be? Why do you ask?”

“She has just been in here, and she looked sick and strangely, and all she wanted was a large phial of laudanum. Somehow her looks and purchase have made me uneasy. I never saw so white a face in my life, and she seemed weak and very tired. If she’s sick, how comes it she’s walking to the village? Besides, she seemed to have very little to do with the party she joined after leaving here.”

Van Berg controlled himself only by a powerful effort, and was very glad that the brim of his soft hat concealed the pallor of his own face. He managed to say quietly:

“The young lady you describe has not been well, and has probably found the walk longer and more wearisome than she supposed. As for the

laudanum, that's used in many ways. Some cigars, if you please—thank you. I'll join the lady and see that she reaches home safely," and he hastily left the store and walked swiftly away.

"He wouldn't go as fast as that if he wasn't a little uneasy, too," muttered the druggist, whose dearth of business gave him abundant leisure to see all that was going on, and to imagine much more.

Van Berg determined to overtake Ida before she reached the hotel, and his strides were as long and swift as mortal dread could make them.

In the meantime, while the artist was making the detour necessary to reach the drug-store without meeting Ida, she and her companions had started homeward. As they approached a church on the outskirts of the village, the bell in the steeple commenced tolling.

"What's that for?" asked a young man of the party of a plain, farmer-like appearing man, who was just about to enter.

"For prayer-meetin'," was the good-natured reply. "It wouldn't hurt you to come to it;" and the speaker passed into the lecture-room.

"I call this frivolous assemblage to order," cried the youth, turning around to his companions. "If any one of our number has ever attended a prayer-meeting, let him hold up his right hand. I use the masculine pronoun, because the man always embraces the woman—when he gets a chance."

No hands were held up.

"Heathen, every mother's son of us," cried the first speaker. "The daughters are angels, of course, and don't need to go to prayer-meetin', as he of the cowhide sandals just termed it. But for the novelty of the thing, and for the want of something better to do, I move that we all go to-night. If it should be borous, why, we can come out."

The proposition pleased the fancy of the party, and with gay words and laughter that scarcely ceased at the vestibule, they entered the place of prayer and lighted down among the sober-visaged, soberly-dressed worshippers like a flock of tropical birds.

Ida reluctantly followed them. At first she half decided to walk home alone, but feared to do so. She who had resolved on facing the "King of Terrors" shrank, with a woman's instinct, from a lonely walk in the starlight.

She sat in dreary preoccupation a little apart from the others and paid no more heed to the opening services than to their ill-concealed merriment.

the minister was away on his August vacation. Prayer-meetings were out of season, and very few were present. The plain farmer was trying to conduct the service as well as he could, but it was evident he would have been much more at ease holding the handle of a plow or the reins of his rattling team, than a hymn-book. Dr. Watts and John Wesley might have lost some of their heavenly serenity could they have heard him read their verses, and certainly only a long-suffering and merciful God could listen to his prayer. And yet rarely on the battle-field is there more moral courage displayed than plain Thomas Smith put forth that night in his conscientious effort to perform an unwonted task; and when at last he sat down and said, "Bruthren, the meetin' is now open," he was more exhausted than he than he would have been from a long day of toil.

"The Lord looketh at the heart" is a truth that chills many with dread, but it was a precious thought to Farmer Smith as he saw that his fellow church members did not look very appreciative, and that the gay young city-people often giggled outright at his uncouth words and manner.

Ida would have been as greatly amused as any of them a few weeks since, but now she scarcely heard the poor man's stumblings, or the wailing of the hymns that were mangled anew by the people. She sat with her eyes fixed on vacancy, thinking how dreary and empty the world had become; and it seemed to her that religion was the most dreary and empty thing in it.

"What good can this wretched little meeting do any one?" she thought, more than once.

She was answered.

Near her was a very old man who had been regarding the ill-behaved party with an expression of mingled displeasure and pity. Now that the meeting was open to all he rose slowly to his feet, steadying himself with his cane.

"He looks like the Ancient Mariner," giggled an exceedingly immature youth, who sat next to Ida.

She turned upon him sharply and said, in a low tone, "If you have the faintest instincts of a gentleman you will respect that venerable man."

The youth was so effectually quenched that he bore the aspect of a turnip-beet during the remainder of the service.

"My young friends," began the old man in tones of gentle dignity, "will you listen patiently and quietly to one that you see will not have the chance to speak many more words. My eyes are a little dim, but you all appear

young and happy; and yet I am sorry for you, very sorry for you. You don't realize what you are and what is before you. You remind me of a number of pleasure boats just starting out to sea. I have been across this ocean, and have almost reached the other shore. I know what terrible storms and dangers you will meet. You can't escape these storms, my young friends. No one can, and you don't seem prepared to meet them.

"Your manner has pained me very much, and yet, as my Master said, so I have felt, you 'know not what you do.' There is a Kingly Presence in this place that you have not recognized. Do you not remember who it was that said, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'?"

"I am very old, but my memory is good. It seems but a short time ago that I was as young thoughtless as any one of you, and yet it was seventy years ago. I have tested the friendship of Jesus Christ for over half a century. Have I not then a right to speak of it? Ought I not to know something about him?"

"Do you ask me if my Master has kept me from trouble and suffering all these years? Far from it. Indeed, I think he has caused me a good deal of trouble and pain in addition to that which I brought on myself by my own folly and mistakes; but I now see that he caused it only as the good physician gives pain, in order to make the patient strong and well. But one thing is certainly true. He has stood by me as a faithful friend all these years, and has brought good to me out of all the evil. I have been in sore temptations and deep discouragement. My heart at times has seemed breaking with sorrow. Mine has been the common lot. But when the storm was loudest and most terrible, his hand was on the helm, and now I am entering the quiet harbor. There has been much that was dark and hard to understand; there is much still; but there is plenty to prove that my Heavenly Father is leading me home as a little child.

"It is a precious, blessed truth that I wish to bring you fact to face with to-night, and yet it may become a very sad and terrible truth, if you shut your eyes to it now and remember it only when it is too late. I wish to assure you, on the ground of simple, down-right experience, through all these years, that God's 'unspeakable gift,' his only Son, is just what our poor human nature needs. Jesus Christ 'is able to save them of the uttermost that come to God by him.' He helps us overcome that awful disease—sin. He brings to our unhappy hearts immortal life and health. I know it as I

know that I exist. He has helped me when and where there was no human help. I have often seen his redeeming work in the lives of other faulty, sinful people like myself.

"The question therefore which you must each decide is not whether you will believe this or that doctrine, or do what this or that man teaches. The question is this:—Here is a tender, merciful, Divine Friend. He offers to lead you safely through all the dangers and hard places in this world, as a shepherd leads his flock through the wilderness. Will you follow him, or will you remain in the wilderness and perish when the night comes, as it surely will? If you will follow him as well as you can, he'll bring you to a happy and eternal home. Thanks to his patient kindness which never falters, he has brought me almost there.

"And now, my young friends, beat with an old man, and let me say, in conclusion, that you all need the kind, patient, faithful Friend that I found so long ago. No evil, no misfortune can come into any human life that is beyond his power to remedy and finally banish forever. If you have not found this Friend, this Life-giver, I am younger and happier than you are today, although I am eighty-eight years old."

Once before a rash, despairing man lifted his hand against his life, but God's message to him, through his apostle, was, "Do thyself no harm." And now again a faithful servant, speaking for him whose coming was God's supreme expression of good-will towards men, had brought a like merciful message to another poor soul that had taken counsel of despair. Ida Mayhew might learn, as did the jailer of Philippi, that God has a better remedy than death for seemingly irretrievable disasters.

The old gentleman's words came home to her with such a force of personal application that she was deeply moved, and even awed. They seemed like a divine message—nay more, like a restraining hand. "How strange it was," she thought, that she had come to this place!—how strange that a serene old man, with heaven's peace already on his brow, should have uttered the words best adapted to her desperate need. If he had spoken of duty, obligation, of truth in the abstract, his tones would have been like the sound of a wintry wind. But he had spoken of a Friend, as tender, patient, and helpful as he was powerful. What was far more, he spoke with the strong convincing confidence of personal knowledge. He had tried this Friend through all the vicissitudes of over half a century, and found him true. Could human assurance—could human testimony go farther? Deep in

her heart she was conscious that hope was reviving again—that the end had not yet come.

The gay young party, touched and subdued, passed out quietly with the others. But Ida lingered.

“Who is that old gentleman?” she asked of a lady near her.

“That is Mr. Eltinge—Mr. James Eltinge,” was the reply.

Ida passed slowly towards the door, looking wistfully back at the old man, who stopped to greet cheerily one and another.

“No one need be afraid to speak to him,” she thought. “His every look and tone show him to be kind and sincere. I’ll see him before—before”—she shuddered, and scarcely dared to put her dark purpose in thought in the presence of one who had lived patiently at God’s will for nearly a century.

She stepped out into the night and watched for his coming. In a moment or two the old gentleman also passed out, and stood waiting for his carriage.

Timidly approaching him, she said, “Mr. Eltinge, may I speak with you?”

He stepped with her a little aside from the others.

“Mr. Eltinge,” she continued, in a voice that trembled and was broken by her feeling, “I am one of the young people you spoke to this evening. I’m in trouble—deep trouble. I want such a Friend as you described to-night.”

He took her hand and said, in a hearty voice, “God bless you, my child. He wants you more than you want him.”

“May I come and see you tomorrow morning?” asked Ida, hurriedly, for his tones of kindness, for which her heart was famishing, were fast breaking down her self-control.

“I’ll come and see you,” was his prompt and cordial response.

“No,” she faltered, “let it be as I wish. Please tell me where to find you.”

As he finished directing her, she stooped down and kissed his hand, and then vanished in the darkness.

“Perhaps I’m not yet a cumberer of the ground,” murmured the old man, wiping a sudden moisture from his eyes.

39. Van Berg's Escape

IDA found the party, on whose companionship she had in a measure forced herself, waiting and calling for her. The words of the old gentleman had inspired them with kinder and more considerate feeling.

"I'm coming," she answered; "don't wait for me, I'll keep near you."

As they had already observed her evident wish to be left to herself, they complied with her request.

The icy calm of her despair was now broken.

"God bless him for his kindness!" she murmured, and "God bless him for his hearty, hopeful words; they may save me yet," and she followed the others, crying softly to herself like a little child. It would seem as if every warm tear fell on her heart, that had been so hard and desperate before, so rapidly did it melt at the thought of the old man's kindness.

But before she reached the hotel she began to grow excessively weary. She had not only overtaxed her powers of endurance, but had overestimated them.

At last, as she was about to ask her companions to walk more slowly, lest she should be left alone by the roadside in her weakness, she heard the sound of strong, rapid steps.

"Where is Miss Mayhew?" was the anxious query of a voice that made her heart bound and color come into her face, even at the moment of almost mortal weakness and weariness.

"Here is Miss Mayhew," said one of the half-grown youths. "She prefers to walk by herself, it seems."

"Thank you," replied Van Berg, decisively. "I will see her safely home;" and the party went on, leaving him face to face with the maiden whom he now believed he had very greatly wronged, and who, he feared might yet prove herself capable of a terrible crime.

She stood before him with bowed head. In her weakness and agitation she trembled so violently that even in the starlight he could not help seeing her distress, and it filled him at once with pity and alarm.

“You are ill, Miss Mayhew,” he said, anxiously.

“Yes,” she answered; then, conscious of her growing need, she said, appealingly, “Mr. Van Berg, with all my faults I am at least a woman. Please help me home. I’m so weak and weary that I’m almost ready to faint.”

He seized her hand and faltered hoarsely, “Miss Mayhew, you have not—you have not taken that drug—”

She was so vividly conscious of her own dark secret, and so impressed by his power to discover all the evil in her nature, that she replied in a low tone,

“Hush. I understand you. Not yet.”

“Thank God!” he ejaculated, with such a deep sigh of relief that she looked at him in surprise. Then he drew her hand within his arm, and weary as she was, she could not help noting that it trembled as if he had an ague.

For a few moments they walked on without speaking. Then the artist addressed her.

“Miss Mayhew—”

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said, hastily interrupting him. “Spare me to-night. I’m too weary even to think.”

Again they walked on in silence, but his agitation was evidently increasing.

“Let me enter by that side door, please,” she said as they approached the hotel.

“Miss Mayhew,” he began in a low, hurried tone, “I must speak. You said you were a woman. As such I appeal to you. A woman may, at times, have no pity on herself, but it rarely happens that she is pitiless towards others, and it is said that she is often the most generous and merciful towards those who have wronged her. I have wronged you cruelly and unpardonably. I knew it as soon as you entered the parlor last evening. There is no excuse for me—I will never forgive myself, but I do most sincerely apologize and ask your forgiveness. Miss Mayhew, I appeal to your generosity—I appeal to your woman’s heart. If you should consummate the awful purpose which I fear has been in your mind, I should go mad with remorse. You would destroy me as surely as yourself. Pardon me for speaking thus, but I fear so greatly—O God! can she have already committed the fatal act?”

Ida’s overtaxed powers had given way, and she would have fallen had he not sustained her. His words had overwhelmed her, and, taken in connection

with those spoken by old Mr. Eltinge, had given a glimpse of the awful abyss into which she had well nigh plunged, dragging others, perhaps, after her. She recoiled from it all so strongly that she became sick and faint from dread; and Van Berg was compelled to support her to a rustic seat near the path. He was about to leave her in order to obtain assistance, when she put her hand on his arm and gasped:

“Wait—give me time—I’ll soon be better. Do not call any one, I beg.”

“Let me quietly bring you a little wine, then, from my own room?”

She bowed her assent.

The stimulant soon revived her. He stood at her side waiting with intense anxiety till she should speak. At last she rose slowly and weakly, saying in a low tone:

“Mr. Van Berg, I suppose I have now reached the lowest depth in your estimation, but I cannot help it. I admit that I was in an awful and desperate mood, and was about to act accordingly. There is no use of trying to hid anything from you. But a good man spoke kindly to me to-night, and the black spell is broken. There is the drug I purchased,” and she handed him the phial of laudanum. “You may now dismiss all fears. I will explain further another time if you care to hear. Please let me go in by myself.”

“Pardon me for saying, no,” he answered, gently. “I think I am best able to-night to judge of what is right. You must go in at the main entrance, and on my arm. Henceforward I shall treat you with respect, and I intend that all others shall also.”

With a low sob, she said, impulsively: “Oh, Mr. Van Berg, forgive me! but that was my motive. I meant to compel your respect; and I thought there was no other way. I thought that if I went to my grave, instead of going to the man who attempted your life, you would see that you had misjudged me. Here is a letter which I wrote you. It should go with the poison. It is all that I can offer in excuse or extenuation.”

“Good God!” he exclaimed. “I have escaped a worse fate than yours would have been,” and she felt his arm again trembling violently beneath her hand.

“I did not think you would care so greatly,” she murmured.

“Miss Mayhew,” he said, in a deep voice, “promise me, before God, that you will never harbor such a thought again.”

“I hope I never may,” she replied, despondently, “but I’ve lost all confidence in myself, Mr. Van Berg.”

“Poor child! What a brute I’ve been,” he muttered; but she heard him.

As they mounted the piazza, they met Stanton and Mrs. Mayhew.

“Why, Ida,” exclaimed her mother, “I thought you were in your room.”

“I walked to the village with a party of young people,” was her hasty reply, “and Mr. Van Berg met me on our return. I’m very tired. Good-night,” and she went directly to her room.

The artist’s manner in parting was polite and respectful, and by this simple act, he did much to reinstate her in the social position she had well nigh lost, through her supposed infatuation with the man who was now a synonym in the house for everything that was vile.

On the following day, through the aid of Miss Burton, he caused the impression to be generally given that Miss Mayhew had been exceedingly mortified that she had ever associated with such a villain as Sibley had shown himself to be, and still more pained to think that she should be imagined capable of any other feeling save contempt for him, after learning of his disgraceful words and actions. These explanations gave an entirely new aspect to the matter, and sufficiently accounted for her increasing indisposition and rather odd behavior. Indeed, people placed it to her credit that she was so deeply affected, and were all the more inclined to make amends for having misjudged her.

Mrs. Mayhew accompanied her daughter to her room, but Ida told her that she was too weary to answer a single question, and that she wished to be alone.

“Van, may I speak with you?” Stanton had asked, anxiously.

When they were sufficiently far from the house to ensure privacy he began again: “Van, what’s the matter? You were as white as if you had seen a ghost.”

“I’m not afraid of ghosts,” said the artist, almost sternly, “but there are things which I mortally fear, and chief among these are blunders—stupid, irrational acts, but involving results that may be beyond remedy. You and I have just made one that might have cost us dear. Of course you will treat your cousin hereafter as you please, but I most decidedly request that you do and say nothing that involves any reference to me. I wish her to form her opinions of my attitude towards her solely from her own observation.”

“I think you are a trifle severe, but I suppose I deserve it,” said Stanton, stiffly.

“I admit that I am strongly moved. I do not excuse myself in the least; and yet you know I was misled. I must tell you plainly that Ida Mayhew is not a girl to be trifled with. I fear her mother wholly fails in understanding her, and from what you yourself have told me of her father, she has no help there. She has no brother, and you should take the place of one, as far as possible. The only right I have to speak thus is on the ground of the great wrong I have done her, and for which I can never forgive myself. Miss Mayhew and I are comparative strangers and our brief summer sojourn here will soon be over. By mere accident facts have come to my knowledge tonight which prove in the most emphatic manner, that she requires kind, unobtrusive, but vigilant care. I never knew of a girl who needed a brother more than she. She is not bad at heart—far from it, but she is fearfully rash, and she is warped by education, or its lack, and by the vile literature she has read, to such a degree that she cannot see things in their true moral aspects. I’ll give you a plain hint, and then you must not ask me anything further, for both you and I must be able to say that the history of my last interview was never given. My hint is this—I do not believe that self-destruction ever appeared to Miss Mayhew as an awful and revolting crime. Her actual life, hitherto, has been a round of frivolity. Only on the stage or in the absurd woes of her stilted heroes and heroines, has she given any attention to the sad and serious side of life. Men and women committing suicide to slow music is the chief stock in trade in some quarters, and when serious trouble came to her this devil’s comedy had been robbed of its horror by the clap-trap of stage effect. That is the only way in which I can account for it all or excuse her. But the fact that she recoiled from Sibley so strongly and felt the disgrace of her association so keenly, proves that she possesses a true woman’s nature. But, as I said, she needs a brother’s care. You are nearest of kin, Stanton, and you must give it. Indeed, Ik, pardon the freedom of an old friend whom circumstances have strangely mixed up in this affair, I think you are honor-bound to give this brother’s protection; and you ARE a man of honor if you pass your word.”

“Do you—do you think there is still any danger that she will—”

“No; the danger is passed for this occasion; but you must guard her from deep despondency or strong provocation in the future.”

“The task you require is a difficult one. I doubt whether she ever forgives me even.”

“I think she will. I have also learned to-night that genuine kindness and sympathy have great weight with her. Pledge me your word that you will do the best you can.”

“Well, Van, I suppose I ought—I will. But your words have quite unnerved me.”

“Unnerved! I’m worse than that. I feel as if I had passed through a month’s illness. Never breathe a whisper of all this to any one. Good-night.” And he strode away in the darkness.

Having reached a secluded spot, he ground the phial of laudanum that Ida had given him under his heel with the vindictiveness with which he would stamp out the life of a poisonous reptile.

Then he returned to his room and took out Ida’s letter, but his hands trembled so that he could scarcely open it. As he read, they trembled still more, and his face became almost ashen in its hue. He was so appalled at what might have happened that his heart seemed for a second to cease its pulsations.

“Great God!” he said, in a hoarse whisper—“what an escape I’ve had!”

Hour after hour passed, but he sat motionless, staring at the abyss into which he had almost stumbled.

The song of a bird without reminded him that morning was near. He drew the curtain and saw that the dawn was reddening the sky.

“Thank God,” he cried, fervently, “for the escape we both have had!”

Then, in order to throw off the horrible nightmare that had oppressed him, he stole quietly out into the fresh, cool, dewy air.

40. Van Berg's Conclusions

VAN BERG knew that the word “discouragement” was in the dictionary, and he supposed he understood its meaning, but Ida Mayhew’s farewell letter proved to him that he was mistaken. There are some things we never learn until taught by the severe logic of events and experience. There had been nothing in his own history or character that enabled him to realize the dreary sinking of heart—the paralyzing despondency of those who believe or fear that they have been defeated and thwarted in life. Through the weaknesses and dangers of early life he had been shielded with loving vigilance. His mind and taste had been fostered with untiring care, and yet every new development praised as unstintedly as if all were of native growth. Fortunately he abounded in virile force and good sense, and so gradually passed from self-complacency and conceit to the self-reliance and courage of a strong man, who, while aware of his ability and vantage-ground, also recognizes the fact that nothing can take the place of skillfully directed industry in well-defined directions. The confidence that had been created by the favorable conditions of his lot had been increased far more by the knowledge that he could go out into the world and hold his own among men on the common ground of hard work and innate strength. He expected esteem, respectful courtesy—and even admiration—as a matter of course. They were in part his birthright and partly the result of his own achievement, and he received them as quietly as his customary income. Their presence was like his excellent health, to which he scarcely gave a thought, but their withdrawal would have affected him keenly, although he had never considered the possibility of such a thing.

What in him was confidence and self-reliance had been in Ida little else than vanity and pride, and these, circumstances had enabled him to wound unto death. He had, from the first, calmly and philosophically recognized the fact that he must break down, in part, the Chinese wall of her self-approval, before any elevating ideas and ennobling impulses could enter, and as much through unforeseen events as by his effort, this had been done

to a degree that threatened results that appalled him. He had been taught thoroughly that faulty and ignorant as she undoubtedly was, she was by no means shallow or weak. To his mind the depth of her despondency was the measure of her power to realize her imperfection, for he now supposed her depression was caused immediately by the fact that she had been so harshly misjudged, but in the main because of her resemblance to the flower he had tossed away and which he now remembered, with deep satisfaction, was in his note-book, ready to aid in the reassuring and encouraging work upon which he was eager to enter.

He did not dream that by tactics the reverse of those pursued by her numerous admirers he had won her heart, and that the apparent hopelessness of her passion had outweighed all other burdens.

Her kindest sentiment towards him, he believed, was the cold respect, mingled with fear and dislike, in which a sever but honest critic is sometimes held; and as he recalled his course towards her he now felt that she had little reason for even this degree of regard. He had awakened her sleeping mind not to an atmosphere of kindness and sympathy like that in which the beauty in the fabled castle had revived, but to a biting frost of harsh criticism and unjust suspicion. That there seemed, at the time, good reason for these on his part did not make it any easier for her to bear them; and in the fact that he had so misunderstood and wronged her, his confidence in his own sagacity received the severest shock it had ever experienced. He felt that he could never go forward in life with his old assured tread and manner.

Moreover the kindness and respect which he now proposed to show Ida were caused more by compunction and fear than by any warmer and friendlier motive. He wished to make amends for his injustice, to reassure the girl, to smooth over matters and extricate himself from his fateful office of critic. This experimenting with human souls for artistic purposes was a much more serious matter than he could have imagined. He had entered upon it as a part of his summer recreation, but had found himself playing with forces that had well-nigh destroyed him as well as the subject of his fancied skill. Hereafter he proposed to illumine faces with thought, feeling, and spiritual beauty on canvas only, so that, in case he should become discouraged or disgusted with his efforts and throw the work aside, there might be no such tragic protest as Ida Mayhew had almost offered. While he pitied, and now in a certain sense respected her, she filled him with the

uncomfortable dread and nervous apprehension which rash and unbalanced natures always inspire. The charge he had given Stanton revealed his opinion. She was one who must be watched over, not with the tender care and sympathy that he hoped to bestow on Jennie Burton, but with kind, yet firm and wary vigilance, in order to prevent action dangerous both to herself and others; and a heavy, anxious task he believed such care would be.

His aim was not to heal the wounds he had made by a decided manifestation of kindness and respect which should be as sincere as possible in view of his knowledge of her faults; and if her present good impulses were anything more than passing moods, to encourage them, as far as he could, and then retire from the scene as soon as circumstances permitted. He had been too thoroughly frightened to wish to continue in the role of a spiritual reformer, and he had a growing perception that, with his present motive and knowledge, the work was infinitely beyond him. He began to fear that he was like certain physicians, whose skill consists chiefly in their power to aggravate disease rather than to cure it. He had found Ida a vain, silly girl, apparently. He had parted the previous evening from a desperate woman, capable of self-destruction, and her letter inseparably linked him with the marvelous change. Thus he gained the uneasy impression that there was too much nitro-glycerine in human nature in general, and in Ida Mayhew in particular, for him to use such material in working out metaphysical and artistic problems.

At the end of his long morning walk he concluded:

“Poor child! after her eyes were opened she could not help seeing a great deal that was exceedingly depressing. In regard to her parents, she is far worse off than if orphaned. In regard to herself, she finds that her best years are gone, and she has neither culture of mind nor heart—that her beauty is but a mask that cannot long conceal the enduring imperfection and deformity of her character. She associates these discoveries with me because I first disturbed her vanity; but the beauty of Jennie Burton’s life, the dastardly behavior of Sibley, and the deep humiliation received through him, with other circumstances, have all combined to bring about the revelation. And yet, confound it all! I did act the stupid Pharisee on several occasions, and I might as well own it both to her and myself. A Pharisee is a fool ‘per se.’ Well, I’m sorry to say, her outlook for life is dark at best, even if she were not so fearfully rash and unbalanced. As it is I expect to

hear some sad story of Ida Mayhew before many years pass. I'll try to brighten a few days for her, however, before I go to town, and then the farther we can drift apart the better. How delightful, in contrast, is the sense of rest and security that Jennie Burton always inspires in spite of her sad mystery."

41. The Protestant Confessional

IDA'S SLEEP was almost as deep and quiet, and when her mother stole in to look at her from time to time the following morning, her face was as colorless, as if she had taken the drug which Van Berg's heel had ground into the earth; but Mrs. Mayhew observed with satisfaction that her respiration was as regular and natural as that of a little child. Wronged nature will, to a certain extent, forgive the young and restore to them the priceless treasures of health and strength they throw away. Ida had been a sad spendthrift of both lately, but now that the evil spell was broken, the poor worn body and mind sank into a long and merciful oblivion, during which a new life began to flow back from the, as yet, unexhausted fountain of youth.

She awoke late in the morning, and it was some moments before she could recall all that had happened. Then, as she remembered her dreadful purpose, there came a strong rush of grateful feeling that she HAD awakened—that life and its opportunities were still hers.

For a moment she portrayed to herself what she had supposed would have happened that day—she imagined herself lying white and still—the people coming and going on tiptoe and speaking in hushed tones, as if death were but a troubled and easily broken sleep; while they looked at her with faces in which curiosity and horror were equally blended; she saw her father staring at her in utter despair, and her mother trying, in a pitifully helpless way, to think how appearances might still be kept up and a little shred of respectability retained. She saw the artist looking at her with stern, white face, and heard him mutter: “What were you to me that you should commit this awful deed and lay it at my door, thus blighting a life full of the richest promise with your horrible shadow?”

“Thank God, thank God!” she cried passionately. “It's all like a dreadful dream and never happened.”

“Why, Ida, what IS the matter?” said Mrs. Mayhew, coming in hastily.

“I had a bad dream,” said Ida, with something like a low sob.

“Ida, I want you to see the doctor, today. You haven’t acted like yourself for over two weeks.”

“Mother, what time is it?”

“Ten o’clock and after.”

“Please draw the curtain. I want to see the sunlight.”

“The sun is very hot today.”

“Is it?” Then under her breath she murmured: “Thank God, so it is.”

She arose and began making her toilet slowly, for the languor of her long sleep and excessive fatigue was on her still. But thought was very busy. The subject uppermost in her mind was the promised visit to old Mr. Eltinge, and she resolved to go at once, if it were a possible thing. Mrs. Mayhew having again referred to her purpose of sending for a physician, Ida turned to her and said, decisively:

“Mother, do you not realize that I am not a child? What is the use of sending for a doctor when I will not see him? I ask—I insist that you and Mr. Stanton interfere with me no longer.”

“My goodness, Ida, shall not I, your own mother, take any care of you?”

“It is too late in the day now to commence taking care of me. You have permitted me to grow up so wanting in mental and moral culture that you naturally suspect me of the vilest action. Henceforth I take care of myself, and act for myself;” and she abruptly left the room and went to Mr. Burleigh’s office, requesting that the light phaeton and a safe horse, such as she could drive, should be sent around to the door at once.

“Miss Ida, you’ve not been well. Do you think you had better go out in the heat of the day?” asked Mr. Burleigh, kindly.

She looked at him a moment, and then said, a little impulsively, “Mr. Burleigh, I thank you for speaking to me in that way. Yes, I wish to go, and think I shall be better for it.”

As she entered the large hall, Van Berg, who had been on the watch, rose to greet her, but she merely bowed politely and distantly, and passed at once into the dining room. After a hasty breakfast she returned to her room by a side passage, and prepared for her expedition, paying no heed to her mother’s expostulations.

Van Berg was on the piazza when she came down, but she passed him swiftly, giving him no time to speak to her, and springing into the phaeton, drove away. His anxiety was so deep that he took pains to note the road she took, and then waited impatiently for her return.

After driving several miles, and making a few inquiries by the way, Ida found herself approaching an old-fashioned house secluded among the hills.

It was on a shady side road, into which but few eddies from the turbulent current of worldly life found their way.

The gate stood hospitably open, and she drove in under the shade of an enormous silver poplar, whose leaves fluttered in the breathless summer air, as if each one possessed a separate life of its own.

As she drew near to the house she saw old Mr. Eltinge coming from his garden to greet her.

“I had about given you up,” he said, “and so you are doubly welcome. Old people are like children, and don’t bear disappointments very well.”

“Did you really want to see me very much?” Ida asked, as he assisted her to alight.

“Yes, my child,” he replied, gravely, holding her hand in a strong, warm grasp. “I felt, from your manner last evening, you were sincere. You come on an errand that is most pleasing to my Master, and I welcome you in his name as well as my own.”

“Perhaps if you knew all you would not welcome me,” she said in a low tone, turning away.

“Only for one cause could I withdraw my welcome,” he said, still more gravely.

“What is that?” she asked in a lower tone, not daring to look at him.

“If you are not sincere,” he replied, looking at her keenly.

Giving him her hand again, and looking up into his face, she said, earnestly:

“Mr. Eltinge, I am sincere. I could not be otherwise with you after your words last night. I come to you in great trouble, with a burdened heart and conscience, and I shall tell you everything, and then you must advise me, for I have no other friend to whom I can go.”

“Oh, yes, you have, my child,” said the old man, cheerily. “The One they called the ‘Friend of sinners’ is here today to welcome you, and is more ready to receive and advise you than I am. I’m not going to do anything for you but lead you to him who said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden;’ and, ‘Whosoever cometh I will in nowise cast out.’”

“How much you make those words mean, as you speak them,” faltered Ida. “You almost lead me to feel that not far away there is some one, good

and tender-hearted, who will take me by the hand with reassuring kindness, as you have.”

“And you are right. Why, bless you, my child, religion doesn’t do us much good until we learn to know our Lord as ‘good and tender-hearted,’ and so near, too, that we can speak to him, whenever we wish, as the disciples did in old times. So don’t be one bit discouraged; see, I’ll fasten your horse right here in the shade, and by and by I’ll have him fed, for you must spend the day with us, and not go back until the cool of the evening. It hasn’t seemed hospitable that you should have stood so long here under the trees; and I didn’t mean that you should, but things never turn out as we expect.”

“It is often well they don’t,” thought Ida, as she looked around the quiet and quaintly beautiful spot, to which a kind Providence had brought her. It seemed as if her burden already were beginning to grow lighter.

“Now come in, my child, and tell me all your trouble.”

“Please, Mr. Eltinge, may I not go back with you into the garden?”

“Yes, why not? We can talk there just as well;” and he led her to a rustic seat in a shady walk, while from a tool-house near he brought out for himself a chair that had lost its back.

“I’ll lean against this pear-tree,” he said. “It’s young and strong, and owes me a good turn. Now, my child, tell me what you think best, and then I’ll tell you of One whose word and touch cures every trouble.”

But poor Ida had sudden and strong misgivings. As she saw the old gentleman surrounded by his flowers and fruits, as she glanced hesitatingly into his serene, quiet face, from which the fire and passion of youth had long since faded, she thought. “So Adam might have looked had he never sinned but grown old in his beautiful garden. This aged man, who lives nearer heaven than earth, can’t understand my wicked, passionate heart. My story will only shock and pain him, and it’s a shame to pollute this place with such a story.”

“You spoke as if you were alone and friendless in the world,” said Mr. Eltinge, trying to help her make a beginning. “Are you an orphan?”

“No,” said Ida, with rising color, and averting her face. “My parents are both living.”

“And yet you cannot go to them? Poor child! That is the worst kind of orphanage.”

“Oh, Mr. Eltinge, this place seems like the garden of Eden, and I am bringing into it a heart full of trouble and wickedness.”

“Well, my child,” replied the old gentleman, with a smile. “I’ve brought here a heart full of trouble and wickedness many a time, so you need not fear hurting the garden.”

“But I fear I shall pain and shock you.”

“I hope you will. I’m going to feel with and for you. What’s the good of my sitting here like a post?”

“Well,” said Ida, desperately, “I promised to tell you everything, and I will. If there is any chance for me I’ll then know it, for you will not deceive me. Somehow, what I am and what I have to say seemed in such sad contrast with you and your garden that I became afraid. You asked about my parents. My father is a very unhappy man. He seems to have lost hope and courage. I now begin to see that I have been chiefly to blame for this. I do nothing for his comfort. Indeed, I have been so occupied with myself and my own pleasure that I have given him little thought. He does not spend much of his time at home, and when I saw him he was always tired, sad, and moody. He seemed to possess nothing that could minister to my pride and pleasure save money, and I took that freely, with scarcely even thanks in return.

“I don’t like to speak against my mother, but truth compels me to add that she acts much in the same way. I don’t think she loves papa. Perhaps our treatment is the chief reason why life, seemingly, has become to him a burden. When he’s not busy in his office he drinks, and drinks, and I fear it is only to forget his trouble. Once or twice this summer he has looked like a man, and appeared capable of throwing off this destroying habit, and then by my wretched folly I made him do worse than ever,” and she burst into a remorseful passion of tears.

“That’s right, my child,” said Mr. Eltinge, taking off his spectacles that he might wipe his sympathetic eyes; “you were very much to blame. Thank god, there are no Pharisees in this garden. God bless you; go on.”

“This that I’ve told you about my father ought to be my chief trouble, but it isn’t,” faltered Ida. “I fear you won’t understand me very well now, and you certainly will never be able to understand how I could be tempted to do something at the very thought of which I now shudder.”

“No matter; my Master can understand it all if I can’t. He’s listening, too, remember.”

“It frightens me to think so,” said Ida, in an awed, trembling tone.

“That’s because you don’t know him. If you were severely wounded, would you be frightened to know that a good physician was right at hand to heal you?”

“But isn’t God too infinite and far away to listen to listen to the story of my weakness and folly? I dare not think of him. My difficulty is just this—he IS God, and what am I?”

“One of his little children, my dear. Yes, he is infinite, but not far away. In the worst of my weakness and folly he listened patiently, and helped me out of my trouble. How are you going to get over this fact? He has listened to and helped multitudes of others in every kind of trouble and wrong. How are you going to get over these facts?”

Ida slowly wiped her eyes. Her face grew very pale, and she looked at Mr. Eltinge steadily and earnestly, as if to gather from his expression and manner, as well as words, the precise effect of her confession.

“Mr. Eltinge,” she said, “at this time yesterday I did not expect to be alive today. I expected to be dead, and by my own hand. Will God forgive such wickedness?”

“Dead!” exclaimed the old gentleman, starting up.

“Yes,” said Ida, growing still paler and trembling with apprehension, but still looking fixedly at Mr. Eltinge as if she would learn from his face whether she could hope or must despair because of her intended crime.

“And what changed your awful purpose, my child?” he said, very gravely.

“Your words at the prayer-meeting last night.”

The old gentleman removed his hat and reverently bowed his head. “O God,” he murmured, “thou hast been merciful to me all my days; I thank thee for this crowning mercy.”

“But will God be merciful to ME?” cried Ida, in a tone of sharp agony.

The old man came to her side, and placing his hands on her head spoke with almost the authority and solemnity of one of God’s ancient prophets.

“Yes, my child, yes, he will be merciful unto you—he will forgive you. But in your deep need you require more than the assurance of a poor sinful mortal like yourself. Listen to God’s own word: ‘Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’”

"'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'

"'If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins; and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' God answers your question himself, my child."

"Oh, may He bless you for your kindness to me! It has saved me from despair and death," sobbed Ida, burying her face in her hands, and giving way to the natural expression of feeling that ever relieves a heart that has long been overburdened.

For a few moments Mr. Eltinge said nothing, but gently stroked the bowed head as he might caress a daughter of his own. At last he asked, with a voice that was broken from sympathy with her emotion,

"How about my Master, whose kind providence has brought all this about?"

Ida gradually became more quiet, and as soon as she could trust herself to speak she lifted her head and answered:

"Mr. Eltinge, I think I can learn to love God as you portray him to me. But in my imperfection and wickedness I have not dared to think of him till I came here."

"Now, isn't that just like the devil's work!" exclaimed Mr. Eltinge. "It was our imperfection and wickedness that brought Christ to our rescue, and yet you have been made to believe that your chief claim upon our Divine Friend is a hopeless barrier against you!"

"Mr. Eltinge," said Ida, slowly, as if she were trying to be sure that each word expressed her thought, "it was that word, FRIEND, as you used it last night, that caught my ear and revived my hopes. I now believe that if you had spoken only of duty or truth, or even of God in the ordinary way, I should now be"—she buried her face in her hands and shuddered—"I should not be in this sunny garden with the memory that your hands have rested on my hands in blessing. If I am to live, I shall need, above all things, a friend, and a very patient and helpful one, or else my burden will be heavier than I can carry. I have told you about my parents, and you thus know what I must look forward to in my own home. But such is my weakness and folly, I have a far worse trouble than that. You may smile at it and think that time will bring speedy relief. Perhaps it will—I hope so. I feel that I know so little about myself and everything else that I can never be sure of anything again. Mr. Eltinge, I have been so unfortunate as to give

my whole heart's love to a man who despises me. At first he seemed somewhat attracted, but he soon discovered how imperfect and ignorant I was, and coldly withdrew. He is now paying his addresses, I believe, to another lady, and I must admit that she is a lovely girl, and every way worthy of him. I think she will return his regard, if she does not already. But whether she does or not cannot matter, for he is so far my superior in every respect that he would never think of me again. In order to hide my foolish, hopeless passion, I received attentions from another man that I detested, and who has since proved himself an utter villain, but it so happened that my name became so closely associated with this low fellow, that when my heart was breaking for another reason, all thought that it was because I was infatuated with a man I loathed. Even Mr. Van Berg thought so, and I intended to compel him to respect me, or at least to think better of me, even if I had to die to carry out my purpose. I was desperate and blind with disappointment and despair. To a strong man, I suppose, these things do not count so greatly, but I'm inclined to think what with us poor women our heart-life is everything. I fairly shiver at the thought of the future. How can I carry this heavy burden, year after year? Oh, how can I bear it? How can I bear it?" and her eyes became full of desperate trouble again, at the prospect before her.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Eltinge in broken tones, "my heart goes out to you in sympathy as if you were my own daughter, but old James Eltinge can do but little towards curing your deep troubles."

"I do not hope to be cured," said Ida, despondently, "but I would be very glad if I could think my life would not be a burden to myself and others."

Mr. Eltinge pondered a few moments, and then brightened up, as if a pleasant thought had struck him.

"What do you think of this pear-tree against which I'm leaning?" he asked. "You remember I said it owed me a good turn, and perhaps I can get my best fruit from it today."

"I think it is a pretty tree," said Ida, wonderingly; "and now I notice that there are some fine pears on it."

"Yes, and they are about ripe. Let us see if we can't reverse the old story with which the Bible commences. The man shall tempt the woman this time, and this shall be a tree of the knowledge of good, not of evil. Poor child, you know enough about that already;" and the old gentleman climbed

up on his chair, and with his cane loosened a large yellow pear with a crimson blush on its sunny side.

“Take my hat and catch it,” he had said to Ida; and she did so.

“Now, I’ve made you an accomplice already, and so you may as well eat the pear while I tell you a bit of history concerning this tree. It may help me to suggest some very encouraging truths.”

But Ida held her pear and looked wistfully at the speaker. Her heart was still too sore to enter into the half-playful manner by which he sought to give a less gloomy cast to her thoughts.

“Some years ago,” said Mr. Eltinge, resuming his seat, “we had a night of darkness and violent storm like that through which you, poor child, have just passed. The garden fence was blown down, and some stray cattle got in and made sad havoc. This pear-tree was a little thing then, and when I came out in the morning it was in a bad plight, I can tell you. The wind had snapped off the top, and it lay withering on the ground. Worse than this, one of the cattle had stepped on it, bruising it severely, and half breaking it off near the root. I don’t know which of the young men you have named this unruly beast typifies—both of ’em, I’m inclined to think.”

Here Ida shook her head in protest against Van Berg being classed with Sibley, and at the same time could not forbear the glimmer of a smile at the old man’s homely imagery.

“Well, according to my creed,” continued Mr. Eltinge, “‘while there’s life there’s hope,’ so I lifted up the poor, prostrate little tree, and tied it to a stout stake. Then I got grafting wax and covered the bruises and broken places, and finally tied all up as carefully as I used to my boys’ fingers when the cut them, sixty odd years ago. And now mark, my child; I had done all that I could do. I couldn’t make the wounds heal or even a new twig start; and yet here is a stately young tree beginning to bear delicious fruit. Nature took my sorry-looking little case in hand, and slowly at first, but by and by with increased vigor and rapidity, she developed what you see. I have an affection for this tree, and like to lean against it, and sometimes I half fancy it likes to have me.”

“I should think it ought to,” said Ida, heartily, with tears in her eyes, but a smile on her lips.

“Well, now, my child, to go on with my parable, what nature was to this pear-tree, nature’s God must be to you. We cannot find in nature nor in the happiest human love that which can satisfy our deep spiritual need; but we

can find all in him who came from heaven in our behalf. Jesus Christ is the patient, helpful Friend you need. He brings more than joy—even the peace and rest that follow full trust in One pledged to take care of us and make everything turn out for the best. He says of those who come to him, ‘I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.’ If you will take this life from him it will never be a burden to you, and it will always be a blessing to others.”

“I fear I don’t quite understand you, Mr. Eltinge. What is this ‘eternal life’—this new, added life which you say Christ offers, and which I’m sure I’d be very glad to take if I knew how?”

“Let Jesus answer you himself, my child. He said plainly: ‘This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent.’ Perhaps I can make our Lord’s words clearer from your own experience, if you will permit me to refer to your feelings toward the man who, whether worthy or not has won your love. Suppose he is all you imagine, and that he lavished on you the best treasures of his heart; would not life at his side seem life in very truth, and life elsewhere but mere existence?”

“Yes,” said Ida, with bowed head and pale cheeks. “I begin to understand you now. It seems to me that I could welcome sorrow, poverty, and even death, at his side, and call life rich and full. But as it is—oh, Mr. Eltinge, teach me your faith, lest I give way to despair again!”

“Poor child! poor child! Don’t my white hairs teach you that I am on the threshold of the home in which ‘God shall wipe away all tears’?”

“I envy you,” cried Ida, almost passionately. “Think how far I am from that home!”

“Well, you are not far from the Divine Friend who leads to that home, and when you come to KNOW him and his love your life will begin to grow richer and sweeter and fuller to all eternity. This is eternal life. It’s know the God who loves us and whom we have learned to love. It’s not living on and on forever in a beautiful heaven, any more than the earthly life you crave is living on and on in a pleasant home such as the man of your heart might provide. The true life is the presence of the loved one himself, and all that he is to us and all that he can do for us; and if a mortal and finite creature seems to you so able to impart life, how infinitely more blessed will the life eventually be which comes from a God of boundless power and boundless love!”

“Alas, Mr. Eltinge, God seems too boundless.”

“Did God seem too boundless to the little children whom he took in his arms and blessed?”

“Oh that I had been one of them!” said Ida, with a sudden rush of tears.

“Come, my dear young friend, do not expect too much of yourself today. You cannot take in all this truth at once, any more than this young pear tree could take all the dew and sunshine, cold and heat (for autumn frosts are needed as well as spring showers) that nature had in store for it, but its life was assured from the moment it was able to receive nature’s restoring influences. So with greater certainty a happy, useful life is assured to you as soon as you receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour, Teacher, and Life-giver. ‘As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,’ and I assure you the Great King will look after his children right royally. But you don’t know him very well yet, and so cannot have the life which flows from his fulness of life. Suppose you come here mornings, and we’ll read together the story of Jesus, just as it is told in the New Testament, and I don’t believe it will be long before you will say to me that my Friend is yours also. Now, come up to the house and I’ll introduce you to my sister. You think me a saint; but I’ll show you what a human appetite I have.”

“I hear a brook near by,” said Ida; “may I not go to it and bathe my face?”

“Yes, do what you like best while here. Would you rather bathe in the brook than at the house?”

“Yes, indeed. Everything seems sacred here, and I can imagine the brook yonder to be a rill from the Jordan.”

“Don’t be superstitious and sentimental,” said the old gentleman, shaking his head gravely. “The life of a Christian means honest, patient work, and Christ’s blood alone can wash us till we are whiter than snow.”

Ida’s face grew earnest and noble as she stepped to the symbolic tree and placed her hand on one of its lower branches.

“Mr. Eltinge,” she said gently and gravely, “as this broken, wounded tree received all the help nature gave it, so I, more bruised and broken, will try to receive all the help Christ will give me to bear my burden and live a life pleasing to him. I shall be very glad indeed to come here and learn to know him better under your most kind and faithful teaching, and as I learn, I will try to do my best; but oh, Mr. Eltinge, you can’t realize how very weak and imperfect—how ignorant and full of faults I am!”

“Just so the poor little tree might have spoken if it had had a voice. Indeed I thought it WOULD die. But now look at the fruit over your head. You shall take some of it home, and every pear will be a sermon to you—a juicy one, too. If you will do as you say, my child, all will be well.”

She bathed her tear-stained face in the brook, and came back looking fairer than any flower in the garden. Then they went up to the old-fashioned house.

“My dear, this is my sister, Miss Eltinge,” he said, presenting a white-haired old lady, who still was evidently much younger than her brother. Then, turning suddenly around in comical dismay, he said, “Why, bless you, my child, I don’t know your name! Well, well, no matter! I know YOU. There are people whose names I’ve known half my life, and yet I don’t know them and don’t trust ’em.”

“My name is Ida Mayhew,” said the young girl simply. “I heard Mr. Eltinge speak at the prayer-meeting last night in such a way that I wanted to see him and ask his help and advice, and he has been very, very kind to me. He can tell you all.”

“Yes, if he chooses,” said the old gentleman with a laugh. “Sister knows me too well in my character of father confessor to expect me to tell everything.”

They made her at home as the simple and well-bred only can do.

After dinner Miss Eltinge tried to entertain her for a while, but at last said, with appreciative tact:

“My dear, I think you will best enjoy yourself if you are left to range the old house and place at will. After my brother has rested he will join you again.”

Ida was glad to be alone. She had made a promise of far-reaching and vital import that morning. Life was taking on new aspects that were so unfamiliar that she was bewildered. She went back to the garden, and, taking Mr. Eltinge’s seat, leaned against the emblematic pear-tree, which she curiously began to associate with herself, and for which she was already conscious of something like affection.

“Oh,” she sighed, “if my life would only come to abound with deeds corresponding to the fruit that is bending these boughs above me, it could not be a burden, though it might be very sad and lonely. I now begin to understand Jennie Burton—her constant effort in behalf of others. But HE will comfort her before long. Her dark days are nearly over. No matter how

deep or great her troubles may have been, they must vanish in the sunshine of such a man's love. I wonder if he has spoken plainly yet—but what need of words? His eyes and manner have told her all a hundred times. I wish she could be my friend, I wish I could speak to her plainly, for she is so kind and wise; but I must shun her, or else she'll discover the secret that I'd hide from her even more carefully than from him, if such a thing were possible. I wonder if they ever met before they came here. I never saw one human being look at another as she sometimes looks at him. I believe that deep in her heart she fairly idolizes him, although her singular self-control enables her, as a general thing, to treat him with the ease and frankness of a friend. Well, she may love him more deeply than I do because possessing a deeper nature. I can but give all I have. But I think my love would be like the little brook over there. It's not very deep or obtrusive, but Mr. Eltinge says it has never failed. Well, well! these are not the thoughts for me, though how I can help them I cannot tell. I will try to win a little respect from him before we part, and then my life, like this pear-tree, must be full of good deeds for those who have the best right to receive them," and taking a small pen-knife from her pocket she mounted the chair, and carved within the two lower branches where they could not easily be discovered the words,

"Ida Mayhew."

42. The Corner-Stone of Character

AFTER THE CHARACTERISTIC ACT by which Ida had identified the tree—once so bruised and broken—with herself, she sat down again at its foot and thought long and deeply. The deep hush and quiet of the quaint old garden was just what she needed after the delirium of her passion and despair. Her pulse began to grow more even, and her beautiful face sweet and noble with the better thoughts she now was entertaining. As she sat there leaning her head against the bole of the tree, the shadows of the leaves above deepening and brightening across her pale features, and her large, dark eyes often growing humid with sympathy with her thoughts, she made as fair a picture as could Eve herself, were she dreaming over her lost garden-home. At last she said slowly:

“I wonder if it will be possible for a Divine love gradually to supplant a human love? ‘Whom to know is eternal life.’ This hope seems to be my only hope—my only remedy, my one chance. I must soon go back to the city, where I cannot see good old Mr. Eltinge, where I will no longer have the excitement of occasionally meeting Mr. Van Berg, where I shall be faced with only the hard, prosaic difficulties that will abound in the world without, but especially in my own home. I plainly foresee that I shall become bitter, selfish, and reckless again, unless I find such a Friend as Mr. Eltinge describes, who will give me daily and positive help; a mere decorous, formal religion will be of no more use to me than pictures of bread to the famishing. I must have a strong, patient Friend who will see me through my troubles, or I’m lost. I may even grow as desperate and wicked as I have been again,” and she buried her face in her hands and fairly trembled with apprehension.

“Come, my child, cheer up! All will end well yet. Take an old man’s word for it. I’ve lived through several troubles that I thought would finish me, thanks to the good Lord, and here I am now, safe and sound and in the

possession of two good homes—this one and the better one over the river they say is so dark. I don't believe it's much more of a river to the Christian than yonder little brook; but I can tell you, my child, we'll find a wonderful difference between the two shores."

Ida found that the old gentleman had joined her unperceived, and she told him of her fears.

"Now, don't worry," he answered, "about what will happen when you go back to the city. Christ himself has said: 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Your whole duty is to do your best now, and he'll take care of the future. He did not call himself the 'Good Shepherd' for nothing, as I and millions of others, know from experience. He'll see you over all the hard places, if you ask him to, and just follow patiently. You may not be able to see the way or know where he is leading you, any more than the sheep; but the path, however flinty and thorny, will end in the fold. Of that be assured." And he gave her one or two sad chapters from his own life of which he could now speak calmly and understandingly.

As they were about to part, Ida said: "Mr. Eltinge, I'm so ignorant that I have not the remotest idea how to commence this Christian life. I greatly wish to form a character worthy of respect, but I don't know how to set about it."

"Commence by living simple and true, my dear. Truthfulness is the corner-stone of the character that men most respect and God will honor. None of us can be perfect, but we can all be honest, and pretend to be no better than we are. Just simply follow your conscience, pray daily for light and guidance, and do the best you can. Live up to the light as you get it, and remember the good Lord will be as patient with you as a mother with her baby that is just learning to walk. Be truthful and sincere as you have been with me today, and all will be well."

Then he brought a step-ladder, and filled a little basket with pears. "They'll ripen nicely in your drawer," he said, "and I shouldn't wonder if you found 'em kind of nourishing to your soul as well as body, now you know how they grew."

With a promise to come on the morrow Ida drove away more cheered and comforted than she had thought it possible ever to be again. But as she approached the hotel piazza, and saw the artist talking with Jennie Burton, she experienced a sinking of heart that taught her how difficult her path must be at best.

Van Berg hastened down eagerly to assist her to alight, for her reappearance lifted a terrible load of anxiety from his mind. In spite of herself the color rushed into the cheeks which of late had become so pale, and the hand she gave him trembled as he helped her from the phaeton.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you again. I've been oppressed with fear all day," he could not forbear saying, in a low tone.

"I suppose you naturally felt that you could not trust me," she replied, averting her face. "I've been spending the day with a friend."

"Forgive me," he said eagerly. "I seem fated to wound you, but I wish they might hereafter be the wounds of a friend."

She would not trust herself to look up till she became more composed, but could not resist the impulse to say: "Do friends give only wounds?"

Van Berg bit his lip and followed her slowly up the steps.

"I see from your basket," said Miss Burton, kindly, "that you have been foraging. I hope you had good success."

"Yes, I think I've been successful," replied Ida, who was desperately sorry that Miss Burton had intercepted her and must see her burning cheeks. "I have not found roses, as you did, but perhaps these are more in keeping with my prosaic and material nature;" and she lifted the cover and offered the fruit.

"You treat me better than I did you," said Miss Burton, smilingly, and ignoring an implied satire which Ida had not intended. "I did not give you any of my roses."

Ida shot a side glance at the artist which said to him plainly:

"But Mr. Van Berg did," and he flushed deeply.

Then she selected a superb pear, and after looking at it keenly a moment, handed it to him with the low words:

"I think you will find that no worm has been in that."

He took it with evident embarrassment and was about to speak eagerly, but she passed quickly in, and went to her room.

"I am justly punished," said Van Berg frankly. "Miss Burton, please let me explain her allusion."

"I would rather you would not," she replied promptly, "for Miss Mayhew made it in a low tone, showing that she intended it for your ear only."

"Well, then I must content myself by saying that standing near this spot, not long since, I acted like a fool."

“It’s an excellent sign of wisdom, Mr. Van Berg,” she said laughingly, “that you have discovered the fact. The only fools to be despaired of are those who never find themselves out.”

“Did you ever do a very foolish thing, Miss Jennie?”

“It would be a very foolish thing for me to listen to any more of such monstrous flattery. Or perhaps you are satirical and take this roundabout way of telling me that I’m human like yourself. I’m going down to supper, for I prefer Mr. Burleigh’s toast to such doubtful compliments.”

“Miss Jennie, I protest, I never offered you a compliment in my life,” he said, accompanying her.

“In the name of the King’s English, what are compliments, then?”

“Mere verbal sugar-plums, sweet, cloying, and often poisonous. My expressions of honest opinion are, like Mr. Burleigh’s toast you are so fond of, made of the finest wheat of truth, leavened by my irrepressible admiration, and done to the nicest shade of brown by the warmth of my FRIENDLY regard.”

“Oh, oh, OH! Your compliments are verbal balloons.”

“Yes, that figure might apply to them also, for these opinions of mine—not compliments, mark!—often carry me up above the clouds and vapors of earth.”

“Where you will find the atmosphere exceedingly thin and cold, I assure you,” said Miss Burton, with something like seriousness in her tone. “I must remind you, Mr. Van Berg, that even Jack Bunsby did not give his opinions till they were asked, and I will take some toast, if you please, in their stead.”

Stanton and Mrs. Mayhew now appeared, and the conversation became general, in which the former made rather futile efforts to conceal his dejection. His aunt had told him that Ida had merely said she had spent the day with a friend, and that she would explain her absence at the proper time. “She has such a dignified way of speaking, that you are made to feel it is an insult to ask a question, so I shall just take her at her word, and leave her to herself,” concluded the lady.

“She’ll never forgive me,” muttered Stanton.

A little later than the others, the object of his thoughts came down to supper. The deep color which the unexpected episode with the artist had caused now lingered only as a faint glow in her cheeks. She had fastened a few pear leaves in her hair, and wore no other ornament. Her thin white dress suggested rather than revealed the exquisite symmetry of her neck and

arms, and Van Berg was compelled to admit to himself that his trained and critical eyes could scarcely detect a flaw in her marvelous beauty, or in the taste shown in her costume.

But there was something about her manner which appealed to him more than her beauty even. The evening before she had chilled their hearts by her unnatural and icy words and bearing. Now there was an expression of humility and diffidence wholly unlike anything he had ever seen before. She did not seem inclined to enter into conversation, and yet she was not repellent and cold, but rather seemed to shrink from notice, and to indicate that past memories were embarrassing. But she would not look at her cousin, for she still felt a deep resentment towards him. She was no saint because she had cherished some good thoughts and impulses that day, and as for poor Stanton, he became so depressed that he lapsed into utter silence.

Miss Burton was becoming deeply interested in Ida. When she saw her crimson face as the artist hastened to the phaeton, a sudden light had flashed into her eyes, and the thought crossed her mind:

“Mr. Van Berg is the magician who is unwittingly practicing upon her and making her so unlike her former self,” and as she hurriedly recalled the past, she found there was much in Ida’s manner not inconsistent with this theory. Still it was not with any prying, gossipy interest, that she observed closely, in order to discover if there were good reasons for her surmise.

But Ida’s manner was so quiet and guarded it would have required keener eyes than even Jennie Burton’s to detect the hidden fire.

The meal promised to pass, with some constraint, it is true, but without any embarrassing incident, when Mrs. Mayhew was the means of placing poor Ida in a very painful dilemma. Under a general impulse to conciliate her daughter and make amends, and with her usual want of tact, she suddenly and sententiously said:

“Well, I think Ida’s very brave to be able to drive for herself.”

There was a moment of embarrassed silence after this unexpected remark, and then Miss Burton made matters far worse by saying, with the kindest intentions:

“After Miss Mayhew’s adventure in the stage no one can doubt her courage, and I’m sure I admire a brave woman much more than a brave man. Men are brave as a matter of course.” Then she saw from the sudden scarlet that flamed up into Ida’s cheeks, and the manner of the artist, who

suddenly became wholly absorbed in his supper, that she had made an unfortunate allusion. There was nothing to do but promptly change the subject, so she turned and asked:

“What is the greatest number of miles you have ever driven in a day, Mr. Stanton?”

“I beg your pardon!” said the preoccupied young man, starting at the sound of his name.

Miss Burton repeated her question. But in the meantime it was evident a severe conflict was going on in Ida Mayhew’s mind. How could she obey Mr. Eltinge’s injunction to be honest and true, if she let this false impression concerning her behavior in the stage remain? How could she hope to win a particle of respect from Van Berg if she received again this undeserved praise? How could she look her kind old friend in the face if she continued silent? She felt she must either speak or take the pear leaves out of her hair. It was hard, bitter hard to speak then and there before them all, but her indecision soon gave place to the resolve to lay at once what Mr. Eltinge had called the corner-stone of character.

“Miss Burton,” she said abruptly, as Stanton was trying to collect his wits so as to make a suitable reply.

They all looked at her involuntarily. Her face was pale now, and had the white, resolute aspect often seen in those about to face great danger.

“Miss Burton, I am sorry to say you have a false impression of my conduct in the stage. So far from showing presence of mind and courage on that occasion, I was terror-stricken and, I believe, hysterical. With all my faults, I shall at LEAST try to tell the truth hereafter.”

“By Jupiter!” cried the impulsive Stanton, “that’s the pluckiest thing I ever saw a woman do, or man either. Ida, from this day I’m proud of you, though you have little occasion to be so of me.”

The poor girl had looked steadily at Miss Burton while speaking, but the moment the ordeal was over her lip quivered like that of a child, and she hastily left the table.

She had scarcely mounted half the stairs that led to her room before Van Berg was at her side.

“Miss Mayhew,” he said eagerly, “I did not sleep last night, nor can I tonight until assured of your forgiveness. Myself I can never forgive.”

Her heart was full and her nerves overstrained already. She could not speak, but she bowed her head on the rail of the balustrade, hiding her face

against her arm, and strove hard to check the rising sobs.

“Miss Mayhew,” he continued, in low, pleading tones, “in all my life I never condemned myself so bitterly as I have for my treatment of you. I can only appeal to your generosity. I NEED your forgiveness,” and he waited for her answer.

But she could not answer. It seemed as if she could not maintain even her partial self-control a moment longer. Her heart forgave him, however, and she wished him to know it, so without lifting her head she held out her hand in the place of the words she could not trust herself to utter. He seized it eagerly, and it so trembled and throbbed in his grasp that it made him think of a wounded bird that he once had captured.

“I take your hand, Miss Mayhew,” he said earnestly, “not as a sign of truce between us, but as a token of forgiveness, and the pledge of reconciliation and friendship. Your brave truth-telling to-night has atoned for your past. Please give me a chance at least to try to atone for mine.”

His only reply was a faint pressure from her hand and then she sped up the stairway. He did not see her again till she came down to breakfast the following morning, when she treated him with a quiet, distant, well-bred courtesy that did not suggest the sobbing girl who had fled from him the evening before, much less the despairing, desperate woman who had given him the drug with which she had intended to end her existence. They who see conventional surfaces only know but little of life.

Truthful as she was trying to be, she was puzzling him more than ever, although he was giving a great deal of thought to the problem.

43. A “Heavenly Mystery.”

WHILE IDA’S MANNER at the breakfast-table was quiet and self-possessed, she still maintained the same distant bearing which had been characteristic the evening before. It was evident to Van Berg, however, that pride, wounded vanity, and resentment were no longer the motives for the seclusion in which she sought to remain, even while under the eyes of others. It was the natural shrinking of one who would hide weakness, trouble, and imperfection. It was the bearing of one who had been deeply humiliated, and who was conscious of a partial estrangement towards those having a knowledge of this humiliation. Thus far he could understand her; and in the proportion she was depressed and withdrew from social recognition and encouragement, his sympathy and respect were drawn out towards her.

“She is not trivial and superficial, as I supposed,” he thought twenty times that morning. “There is not a sudden calm after the storm that has been raging, as would be the case were she in character like a shallow pool. Her manner now proves daily the largeness of the nature that has been so deeply moved, and which, like the agitated sea, regains its peace but slowly;” and the sagacious Van Berg, whose imagination was not under very good control began to react into the other extreme, and query whether Ida Mayhew’s moral nature, now that it was aroused, was not her chief characteristic.

Meanwhile, the subject of his many-colored speculations had driven away in the low basket phaeton, having first explained briefly to her mother that she intended to spend the morning again with the two old people she had visited the previous day.

Stanton volunteered this amount of information to his friend, and there was much surmise and curiosity in their minds in regard to these “old people,” and her motive in seeking them. But even Mrs. Mayhew had begun to realize that they must take Ida at her word and leave her to herself.

It was with something even more than hopefulness that Ida drew near to the garden again. She was alive; that fact, in contrast with what might have been, was like solid ground beneath her feet. Then, again, in the place of the cold, distant manner of the guests, after the departure of Sibley, she had already noticed friendly glances and an evident disposition to make amends. It also gave her not a little satisfaction that her cousin and the artist were experiencing such sincere compunctions, and were realizing the enormity of their offense. Ida was very human, and always would be. She was also a little elated over the fact that she had been able to tell the truth the evening before. The memory, however, that nestled most warmly in her heart was the assertion of Van Berg, "I NEED your forgiveness." "How much does that mean?" she asked herself again and again. "Does he really wish to be a friend, or is he only trying to smooth over matters and calm me down so he can leave me decorously, as after our hateful episode on the stage?"

Her wishes colored her thoughts. "He spoke too earnestly to mean so little," she said to herself, with a dreamy smile that Van Berg, as an artist merely, would have given much to see.

After all, perhaps one of the chief causes of her reviving spirits was in the fact she was young. She could not take a very sombre view of life that fresh summer morning, even in view of the past and the future, and her manner of greeting Mr. Eltinge and of telling her experiences since they parted suggested to him that she was gaining in self-complacency, earthly hope, and youthful spirits, rather than in the deep and lasting peace and moral strength which is built up from the Living Rock. She was finding relief from depression and suffering from causes as transient as they were superficial. Chief of all, she had not realized as he had supposed the shadow of the awful crime that was resting upon her, and the need of God's forgiveness. Almost unconsciously the old man, wise and experienced in spiritual life, sighed deeply as she finished her story.

Her quick ear caught the sigh, and her woman's intuition gathered from his face that the outlook did not seem so encouraging to him. Her heart began to sink, and she said earnestly:

"Mr. Eltinge, I've tried to be true; I want you to be faithful to me. Don't hide anything from me."

Yes, my child," he replied gravely, "you are sincere—you hide nothing. I think I understand you. I thank God he gave you strength last night to tell the truth under very trying circumstances, and you have greatly increased

my respect for you that you did so. But, to use a little figurative language, if I were your doctor I might tell you that you don't realize how sick you are and have been. There have been some encouraging symptoms and circumstances, and your spirits and hope are reviving, and you are looking to these things rather than to him who taketh away the sin of the world. I tried to encourage you yesterday, my child, because I saw you were deeply depressed; and to discourage us is one of the chief aims of the Evil One. I do not wish to discourage you today—far from it—but I wish to realize that only the forgiveness and healing touch of the Son of God are equal to your need.

“My child,” he continued, with a solemnity that made her grow very pale, “suppose I should take you to a room in the house there, show you a fair girl with eyes that should look for her duty in life closed forever, and the hands that should faithfully and bravely do it paralyzed in death. Suppose I should tell you that I had given her a poisonous drug the night before, what would I be?”

“A murderer,” whispered the girl with eyes dilated with fear and horror.

“Yes,” said the old man, shaking his head sadly; “I would have destroyed a life that God had given, and destroyed endless chances for happiness and usefulness, and sent a poor soul to judgment, perhaps unforgiven and unprepared. My child, it cuts me to the heart to pain you so, but the physician's probe must go to the depth of the wound. It is no kindness to the patient to put on a soothing surface application and leave death to rankle in the blood. We have no reason to believe that in the eye of God he that destroys himself is any the less guilty than he that kills another, and even in the judgment of man it's a cowardly flight from misfortunes that should be triumphed over with courage and patience, or endured with fortitude and resignation. Mark my words, it is only a flight, not an escape, for every evil you sought to shun would have been intensified and rendered eternal. Now, the simple truth is, we hold our own lives in trust from God, to be used according to his will, and we have no more right to destroy the life he entrusts to us than the life he gives to others.”

Ida had buried her face in her hands and was trembling violently.

“I did not realize it before,” she murmured in a low, shuddering tone. “Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? Why doesn't the earth open and swallow me up?”

The old man came to her side again, and placing his right hand gently on her bowed head and holding a Bible in his left, continued in grave but very gentle tones:

“Take this Book, my child; it will tell you what to do. It will tell you that merciful and all-powerful arms are open to receive you, and not a hopeless grave. The Son of God has said to the heavy laden, ‘Come unto me,’ and ‘whosoever cometh I will in nowise cast out.’ Heaven is full, my child, of just such guilty souls as yours, but it was HE who saved them. It was His precious blood that washed them whiter than snow. When you seek for forgiveness and healing at His feet all will be well, but not till then, and not elsewhere.”

“O, Mr. Eltinge,” she sobbed, “you have pierced my heart as with a sword.”

“I have, indeed, my poor child—with the sword of truth; and what’s more, I can’t heal the wound I’ve made.”

“What shall I do? oh, what shall I do?” and she fairly writhed in the agony of her remorse.

“Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world,” he said gently but firmly, and his strong faith and the words of Holy Writ were like a rock, at which, from out of the overwhelming torrent of her remorseful despair, she grasped as her one chance, her one hope.

Lifting her streaming eyes to heaven, and clasping her hands, she cried passionately:

“O Christ, hope of the sinful, if there is mercy for such as I, forgive me, for my crime is like a falling mountain!”

A moment later she sprang up and put her arms around the old man’s neck.

“My friend, my more than father!” she sobbed, “I think—I almost believe God has heard me. It seems as if I had escaped from death, and—and—my heart was breaking; but now—oh, it’s all a heavenly mystery!”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Eltinge brokenly, and with answering emotion, “it is a heavenly mystery. ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.’”

Ida could never forget the remaining hours which she spent that day in the old garden. It was then and there that she experienced the sensations of those entering a new spiritual life and a new world; and with some, these

first impressions are very vivid; and with some, these first impressions are very vivid.

It was according to nature that it should be so in the instance of Ida Mayhew, for she was simple, positive, and warm in her feelings, rather than cold and complex. But she was sane, and abounded in the homely common sense which enabled her to understand herself and those about her. She formed fairly correct estimates of all whom she had met, and with the same simple directness she began to recognize the character of the Divine Man that Mr. Eltinge and the Bible they read together presented.

No earthly casuistry could ever lead her to doubt that he had heard her prayer that morning. She might reply simply to all cavil and questioning:

“I know he heard and answered me, and if I do not know this to be true, I cannot know anything to be true;” for never before had her consciousness made anything so distinct and real.

To say that she and multitudes of others are mistaken, is begging the whole question. It is baldly taking the ground of denial of everything outside of personal understanding and knowledge. The skepticism of very many would blot out the greater part of science, history, and geography. The facts of Christian experience and Christian testimony are as truly facts as those which are discovered by people who are hostile or indifferent to the Bible.

The broad, liberal man is he who accepts all truth and humbly waits till the fuller wisdom of coming ages reconciles what is now apparently conflicting. The bigot is he who shuts his eyes to truth he does not like, or does not understand; and he is as apt to be a scientist as the man who has learned that the God who made him can also speak to him, through his inspired word and all-pervading Spirit.

We are surrounded by earthly mysteries which the wisest cannot solve, and some of them are very sad and dark. Why should there not be, as Ida said, a heavenly mystery?

After all, it is a question of fact. The Christ of the New Testament offers to give peace and spiritual healing. Does he keep his word? We say yes, on the broad ground of human experience and human testimony—the ground on which is built the greater part of human knowledge.

If this be true, what a reproach is contained in the words of our Lord: “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life”!

44. “The Garden of Eden.”

“MR. ELTINGE,” Ida asked, as they were about to part, “have I a right to the glad sense of escape and safety that has come so unexpectedly?”

“Your right,” he replied, “depends on the character of the Friend you have found. Do you think he is able and willing to keep his word?”

“Oh, Mr. Eltinge, how plain you make it all!”

“No, my dear; it was made plain centuries ago. You have as much right to your happy feelings as to the sunshine; but never put your feelings in the place of Christ, and trust in them. That’s like putting faith in one’s gratitude, instead of the friend whose services inspired the gratitude. But come again tomorrow, and we’ll go on with the ‘old, old story.’ I’ve read it scores of times, but am enjoying it now with you more than ever. Good-by.”

As Ida drew near to the hotel, Stanton stepped from the roadside to meet her.

“Ida,” he said, “if you cannot forgive me (and perhaps you cannot), I’ll leave tomorrow morning—and perhaps I had better any way. I fear it was an evil day for us both when we came to this place.”

“I’ve thought so too, Cousin Ik,” she said kindly; “but I don’t now. I’m glad I came here, though it has cost me a great deal of suffering and—and—may—but no matter. I was better and worse than you thought me. I must in sincerity say that it has been hard to forgive you, for your suspicion wounded me more deeply than you’ll ever know. But my own need of forgiveness has taught me to forgive others; and I now see that I also have been very disagreeable to you, Ik. Let us exchange forgiveness and be friends.”

“Ida, what has come over you? You are no more like the girl that I brought to the country than I’m like the self-satisfied fool that accompanied you.”

“No, Ik, you are not a fool, and never were; but, like myself, you had a good deal of self-complacency, and not much cause for it. Pardon me for speaking plainly, but after what has passed between us we can afford to be

frank. You may not win Jennie Burton, but I believe she'll wake you up, and make a strong, genuine man of you."

"Ida," he said in a low tone, and with lips that quivered a little, "I'm not sorry that I love Jennie Burton, though in consequence I may never see another happy day. But good-by; I'm too confoundedly blue today to speak to another mortal. It's a great relief, though, that you have forgiven me. I wouldn't if I had been in your place, and don't think I forgive myself because you have let me off so easily;" and he turned hastily away, and was soon lost to her view in the shrubbery by the roadside.

If Ida had puzzled Van Berg in the morning, he was still more perplexed in the evening. Slight traces of her deep emotion still lingered around her eyes, but in the eyes themselves there shone a light and hopefulness which he had never seen before, and which he could not interpret. Moreover, her face was growing so gentle and womanly, so free from the impress of all that had marred it heretofore, that he could not help stealing glances so often that were Jennie Burton of a jealous disposition she might think his interest not wholly artistic. Although there was much of the shrinking and retiring manner of the morning, and she did not join in the general conversation, all traces of resentment and coldness towards her companions had vanished. She was considerate and even kind to her mother, but in reply to her questions concerning the people she had visited, said gently but firmly:

"I will take you there some day, mother, and then you can judge for yourself."

But with the exception of a promptness to check all reference to herself and the day's experiences, her manner was so different from what Mrs. Mayhew had been accustomed to, that she could not help turning many perplexed and curious glances toward her daughter, and was evidently no better able to understand the subtle and yet real change than was the artist himself.

Miss Burton, with her keen, delicate perceptions, recognized this difference more fully than any of the others; and her instinct, rather than anything she saw in Ida, enabled her to divine the cause in part. "I know of but one thing that can account for Miss Mayhew's behavior," she thought, "and though she guards her secret well, she cannot deceive a woman who has passed through my experience. I begin to see it all. She used Sibley as a blind, and she was blind herself, poor child, when she did so, to everything

save the one womanly necessity of hiding an unsought love. Well, well, my outspoken lover has eyes for her sweet, chastened beauty to-night. Perhaps he thinks he is studying her face as an artist. Perhaps he is. But it strikes me that he has lost the critical and judicial expression which I have noticed hitherto," and a glimmer of a smile that did not in the least suggest the "green-eyed monster" hovered for a moment like a ray of light over Jennie Burton's face.

"Mother," said Ida, in a low, sympathetic tone, "I see one of your headaches coming on. Let me bathe your head after tea."

"Ida," whispered Mrs. Mayhew, "you are so changed I don't know you."

The young girl flushed slightly, and by a quick, warning look checked all further remark of this tendency.

"She is indeed marvelously changed," thought Miss Burton. "I feel it even more than I can see it. There must be some other influence at work. Who are these friends she is visiting, and who send her back to us daily with some unexpected grace? Yesterday it was truthfulness—today an indescribable charm of manner that has banished the element of earthiness from her beauty. I think I will join my friend (who imagines himself something more) in the study of a problem that is becoming intensely interesting."

"Miss Mayhew," Van Berg found a chance to say after supper, "you are becoming a greater enigma to me than ever."

"Well," she replied, averting her face to hide the color that would rise at his rather abrupt and pointed address, "I'd rather be a Chinese puzzle to you than what I was."

"And I no doubt have appeared to you like a Chinese Mandarin, Grand Turk, Great Mogul, not name self-satisfied Pharisees, and all of that ilk."

"I can't say that you have, and yet I've keenly felt your superiority. I think the character you are now enacting is more becoming than any of those would be, however."

"What is that?" he asked quickly.

"Well," she said hesitatingly, "I hardly know how to describe it, but it suggests a little the kindness which, they say, makes all the world kin. Good-night, Mr. Van Berg."

"Miss Jennie," he said, later in the evening, "you have an insight into character which we grosser mortals do not possess. Do you think that there is a marked change taking place in Miss Mayhew?"

“And so you expect me to read Miss Mayhew’s secrets and gossip about them with you?” she answered with one of her piquant smiles.

“What a sweetbrier you are! Now tell me in your own happy way how you would describe this change which you see and understand far more clearly than I.”

“I’ll give you one thought that has occurred to me and then leave you to solve the problem for yourself. Have you ever seen a person who had been delirious or deranged become sane and quiet, simple and natural? Although Miss Mayhew’s expression and manner are so different from what we have seen hitherto, she looks and acts to-night just as one instinctively feels she ought always to appear in order to be her true self. Before there was discord; now there is harmony.”

“If I had your eyes I’d never read books. You suggest the effect perfectly, but what is the cause?”

“Was a man ever satisfied?”

“One certainly never is where you are concerned, but will always echo Oliver Twist’s plaintive appeal for ‘more.’”

“O constant moon! register that vow,” said Miss Burton, laughing. “Mr. Van Berg, one of the first rules that I teach my young ladies is to say good-evening to a gentleman when he grows sentimental,” and she smiling vanished through a window that opened on the piazza.

“Jennie Burton,” he muttered, “you are a wraith, an exquisite ghost that will haunt me all my days, but on which I can never lay my hands.”

The next morning the artist, in his kindling interest, was guilty of a stratagem. He took an early breakfast by himself, under the pretense that he was going on a sketching expedition; but he went straight to the brow of a little hill that overlooked the road which Ida must take should she visit her new-found friends again. He soon became very busy with his sketch-book, but instead of outlines of the landscape before him taking shape on the paper, you might have seen the form of a young girl on a stairway with her head bowed on her right arm that rested on the baluster rail, which she timidly held out her left hand in the pace of words she could not speak.

It was with a foreboding sigh that Ida realized how much she missed him at breakfast.

Before the meal was over a letter was handed to Mrs. Mayhew. It contained only these words from her husband: “In memory of my last visit I

conclude it will be mutually agreeable to us all that I spend Sunday elsewhere. You need not dread my coming.”

She handed the letter to her daughter with a frown and the remark: “It’s just like him.”

But Ida seemed much pained by its contents, and after a moment sprang up, saying: “Cousin Ik, may I speak with you?”

When they were alone she continued: “See what father has written. He must come to-night or I’ll go to him. Can’t I send him a telegram?”

“Yes, Coz, and I’ll take it over to the depot at once.”

“Ah, Ik, you are doing me a greater kindness than you know. But it’s a long drive.”

“The longer the better. Will you go with me?”

“I would had I not promised my old friends I visited yesterday I’d come again today. They are doing me good. I’ll tell you about it some time,” and she wrote the following telegram to her father:

“Come to Lake House today. Very important.”

“I wish Miss Burton would go with you,” she said looking up as the thought occurred to her. “Shall I ask her?”

Stanton’s wistful face proved how greatly he would enjoy such an arrangement, but after a moment he said decisively: “No. It would pain her to decline, but she would.”

“You are very considerate of her.”

“She is sorry for me, Ida. I can see that. She has never exulted a moment in her power over me. My love is only another burden to her sad life. I can’t help it, but I can make it as light as possible.”

Tears came into Ida’s eyes and she faltered: “Ik, I understand you.”

A little later they both drove off their different ways.

In spite of everything, Ida found that her heart would grow light and glad as she pursued her way along the quiet country road, now in the shade where the trees crowded up on the eastern side, and again in the sunlight between wide stubble fields in which the quails were whistling mellowly to each other.

Van Berg watched her coming with a heart that beat a little quickly for so cool and philosophical an investigator, and was glad that her quiet old horse resumed a slow walk at the first suggestion of the hill on which he had posted himself.

Ida leaned back in the phaeton with the abandon of those who think themselves alone, and sang a snatch from an old English hymn that Van Berg remembered as one his mother had crooned over him when a child. This melody, doubly sacred to him from its associations, would have grated harshly on his ear if it had been sung by Ida Mayhew a week before; but, strange to say, the girlish voice that floated up to him was all the sweeter for thus blending itself with some of his dearest memories.

When the ascent was half made the artist sprang down from his rocky perch, and horse and maiden were so startled that they both stopped instantly.

“Do not be alarmed,” said Van Berg, laughing; “I’m not a very vicious tramp, and am armed with nothing worse than a sketch-book. If I could only induce you to be an hour in coming up this hill I’d put you and the phaeton in it. I wish it were possible to put the song in, too. Why, Miss Mayhew! Am I an ogre, that I frighten you so?”

“I was not expecting to see you,” she faltered, deeply vexed that her cheeks would crimson and her hand that held the reins tremble so plainly. “You naturally think I have a very guilty conscience to be so frightened,” she added after a second, and regaining a little self-control.

“That quaint old hymn tune did not suggest a guilty conscience,” he said kindly.

“I think I must have heard it at church,” she replied. “It’s been running in my head all the morning.” (He now remembered with sudden pity that no memories of sacred words and song could follow her from her home and childhood.) “But I suppose you think it is strange I can sing at all, Mr. Van Berg,” she continued gravely. “You must think me very superficial that I do not appear to realize more a crime that makes it exceedingly kind of you even to speak to me, since you know about it. But I have realized the wickedness of that act more bitterly than you can ever know.”

“Miss Mayhew, I admit that I can’t understand you at all. You have become a greater mystery to me than ever. You see, I imitate your truthfulness.”

“There is no necessity of solving the problem,” she said in a low tone, and averting her face.

“Do you mean,” he asked, flushing slightly, “that my interest is obtrusive and not agreeable to you?”

“If inspired by curiosity—yes,” and she looked him steadily in the face.

“But if inspired by a genuine and earnest wish to be your friend and to atone for the unpardonable injustice which came about from my not understanding you?”

“If I believed that,” she said, with something like a smile, “I’d take you with me this morning and reveal all the mystery there is about my poor little self in one brief hour.”

“How can I prove it?” he asked eagerly.

“Say it,” she answered simply.

“I do say it’s true, on my honor,” he replied, giving her his hand.

“You may come, then, on one other condition. I would like you to draw for me a young pear-tree, and an old gentleman sitting under it.”

“I will agree to any conditions,” he said, springing in by her side. “Is it the tree that bore the pear you gave me? I hope you don’t think I was capable of eating that pear.”

“Did you throw it away?” she asked, with a shy glance.

“Miss Mayhew, I’ve something I wish you to see,” and he took out his note-book and showed her the rose-bud he had tossed away. “Do you recognize that?”

In spite of herself the blood rushed tumultuously into her face.

“I thought that was trampled into dust long ago,” she said in a low tone.

“I shall never forget your words as you left me that evening, Miss Mayhew. It was the severest and most deserved rebuke I ever had. I picked up the bud immediately, I assure you.”

“I thought you left it there,” she said, in a still lower tone, and then added hastily: “But I have no doubt you acted from a sense of duty.”

“I can’t say that I did,” he answered, dryly.

“Will you please give it to me?”

“Not unless you compel me to,” and he closed the book and returned it to an inside breast-pocket. “I would like to carry it as a talisman against Phariseeism, the most hateful of vices.”

“Oh, very well,” and she turned away her face again.

“But please tell me about this pear-tree,” he resumed.

“It won’t seem to you as it did to me,” she replied, with an embarrassed air, “and I’m sorry I spoke of it, but now that I have I may as well go on. To explain I must go back a little. Mr. Van Berg, I’m taking you to see the old gentleman who saved me from—from—” Her face was pale enough now.

“My dear Miss Mayhew, don’t pain yourself by referring to that.”

“I must,” she said slowly. “By some strange fate you have seen me at my worst, and since you say you care, you shall know the rest. It may relieve your mind of a fear that I’ve seen in your face since. I didn’t think I’ll ever be so wicked and desperate again, and I wish you to know my reasons for thinking so. Well, on that dreadful night the party I was with went into a prayer-meeting, more by the way of frolic than anything else. I did not wish to go in, but, strange as it may seem to you, I was afraid to walk home, and so had to follow my company. Good old Mr. Eltinge spoke to us. He said he knew from his own long experience that there was a Divine Friend who was able and willing to cure every earthly trouble, and he spoke so simply and kindly that he caught my attention and revived my hope. I felt when I entered that place I hadn’t a friend in the world or out of it. I was just blind and desperate with shame and discouragement, and—and—but perhaps you have read the letter I gave you?”

“Miss Mayhew, every word of it is burned into my memory. I scarcely moved after reading it till the morning dawned, and then I went out and walked for hours before I could compose myself and dared to meet any one. As I told you then, so I say again, I had a greater escape than you had.”

“I’m very, very sorry,” she replied, in a tone of deep regret.

“I too am very, very sorry, but it is for you.”

She looked up quickly, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

“I’m not ashamed of them in this instance, Miss Mayhew,” he said, dashing them away.

She looked at him wonderingly, and then murmured: “Oh, thank God it has all turned out as it has.” After a moment she added: “I’ve misjudged you also, Mr. Van Berg.”

“How? Please tell me, for I feel I have more cause to be disgusted with myself than you ever had.”

“Well—how shall I say what I mean? I thought you had more mind than heart.”

“It appears to me I’ve displayed a lamentable lack of both. I must have seemed to you like an animated interrogation point.”

“I soon learned you were very greatly my superior,” she said simply.

“Miss Mayhew, spare me,” he replied quickly, with a deprecatory gesture. “The story you were telling interests me more deeply than you will believe, and I think we shall be better acquainted before the day is over.”

“Well, the rest of my story is more easily told than understood, and perhaps your man’s reason may not find it very satisfactory. You know the old superstition that the sign of the cross puts to flight the Evil One. I don’t believe that, but I believe that the One who suffered on the cross puts him to flight. Mr. Eltinge’s simple, downright assertion that Jesus could remedy every earthly trouble—that he would be a patient, helpful Friend—broke the evil spell by which despair had blinded me, and I resolved to try and live if I could. After the old gentleman came out of the church I asked him to let me visit him, and he has been very, very kind. I told him everything. The first day he saw I was greatly discouraged, and told me the history of a young pear-tree against which he was leaning, and which was full of beautiful fruit. He said that on a stormy night it was broken by the wind, and trampled upon by some stray cattle, and he scarcely thought it could live, for it was prostrate on the ground, but he lifted it, and took care of it, and gave nature a chance to restore it. You would think nature was like a kind of mother, to hear him talk. Then he reasoned that Jesus, the Author of nature, would do for me what nature had done for the wounded tree, but that I must not expect too much at first—that I must be receptive and willing to grow patiently as the tree had done, in a new and better life. Thus the tree has become to me an emblem of hope, and I trust a prophecy of my future, although I do not expect ever to reach anything like the perfection suggested by the pear-tree and its delicious fruit. The facts that have impressed me most are that it was bruised, prostrate, and ready to die, and now it is alive and useful. Old Mr. Eltinge loves it, and likes to lean against it, as you will see.”

“The fact that has impressed me most in this allegory,” groaned Van Berg, “is that I was the brute that trampled on you.”

“You are too severe on yourself,” she said earnestly. “I shall have to take your part.”

“Please do. I throw myself wholly on your mercy.”

“I believe Shakespeare was right,” she said, with a shy laugh and averted face. “Mercy is always twice bless’d. But I have not told you all, Mr. Van Berg. Yesterday was the most memorable day of my life. On Thursday Mr. Eltinge saw I needed encouragement; yesterday he saw that I had not realized the crime I had almost committed, and that I was stopping short of him who alone could change my whole nature. Indeed, I think he saw that I was even inclined to become well pleased with myself, and content with my

prospects of winning back the esteem of others. He was faithful with me as well as kind. By an illustration, which you will pardon me for not repeating, he made it clear to me as the light that in the intent of my heart I had been guilty of murder. Mr. Van Berg, may you never know the agony and remorse that I suffered for the few moments I saw my sin somewhat as it must appear to God, and to good men like Mr. Eltinge. I was overwhelmed. It seemed as if my crime would crush me. I don't think I could have lived if the sense of terror and despair had lasted. But dear old Mr. Eltinge stood by me in that terrible moment. He put his hand on my head as a father might have done, and in tones that seemed like a voice from heaven, said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.' I felt that I could not bear my sin an instant longer; it was like a mountain of lead, and with a desperate impulse to escape, I looked to Christ—I just fled to him, as it were, and it was the same as if he had opened his arms and received me. From that moment I have felt safe, and almost happy. I can't explain all this to you, I only tell you what happened. It doesn't seem like superstition or excited imagination, as I've heard some characterize these things. It was all too real: Mr. Van Berg, the simple truth is—I've found a Friend, who is pledged to take care of me. I KNOW IT. I am reading the story of his life, under Mr. Eltinge's guidance, and that is why I come here. Now you know all the mystery there is about the faulty girl in whom circumstances have given you a passing interest. Since you knew so much that was against me, perhaps you will not think it strange that I was willing you should learn what is now in my favor. It is simply this—I've found a Divine Friend who will help me live a better life."

They had now reached Mr. Eltinge's gate, and Van Berg stepped out to open it. But before doing so, he turned to his companion, and with eyes moist with feeling, said earnestly:

"Miss Mayhew, circumstances might have given me but a passing interest in you, but YOU have won an abiding interest. You have been generous enough to forgive me, and now you will have to repel me resolutely, to prevent my being your friend. Indeed I shall be one in heart hereafter, even though you may not permit me to enjoy your society, for you may very naturally wish to shun one who cannot fail to remind you of so much that is painful. As for your story, it is a revelation to me. I may never possess your happy faith, but I will respect it;" and although he turned hastily away she could not fail to see that he was deeply moved.

Mr. Eltinge received the young man with some surprise, and did not seem to regard his presence as altogether welcome. The artist thought to disarm the old gentleman by a decided manifestation of frankness and courtesy:

“I feel that in a certain sense I am an intruder in your beautiful garden today. Miss Mayhew met me on the road, and I fear I must own that I had the bad grace almost the same as to invite myself hither. At least she saw that I was exceedingly anxious to come.”

“Do you know Miss Mayhew’s motive in coming hither?” asked Mr. Eltinge, gravely.

“I do, and I respect it.”

“You take safe ground there, sir,” said Mr. Eltinge, with increasing dignity. “Christianity is at least respectable. But do you believe it to be absolutely true and binding on the conscience?”

The artist was silent.

“Mr. Van Berg,” resumed the old gentleman, with a gravity that tended even towards sternness, “I would not fail in any act of courtesy towards you, especially her at my own home; but justice, mercy, and truth are above all other considerations. Both you and I know this child’s history sufficiently well to be aware that it is a dangerous thing to exert an influence at random on human lives. You say you know her motive in coming hither. Let me state the truth very plainly: she has turned her face heavenward; she is taking her first uncertain steps as a pilgrim towards the better home. In justice to you and in mercy to you both let me quote the words of him before whom we all shall stand;” and placing his hand on Ida’s shoulder he repeated with the aspect of one of God’s ancient prophets those solemn words that too many dare to ignore: “‘Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.’ Mr. Van Berg, in memory of the past, beware lest consciously or even unconsciously, through your indifference to her faith, you lay a straw in this child’s way. The weak and the helpless are very near to the heart of God, and the most dangerous act a man ever commits is when he causes one of these little ones to offend.”

Ida trembled beneath her friend’s hand and wished she had not permitted the artist to come, but the young man’s sincerity and good-breeding enabled

him to pass the ordeal. Removing his hat, he replied to Mr. Eltinge with a fine blending of dignity and humility:

“I honor you, sir,” he said, “for your faithfulness to the one who has come to you for counsel and in a certain sense for protection; and I condemn myself with bitterness that you will never understand, that I wronged her in my thoughts and wounded her by any manner. I am eager to make any and every atonement in my power. No language can express my gladness that she heard and heeded your words. Pardon me, sir, when I say I am not indifferent to her faith. It is, indeed, a mystery to me, but a noble mystery which I revere from the fruits that I have already witnessed. In my unpardonable stupidity and prejudice—in a Pharisaic pride—I have caused Miss Mayhew to offend. She has generously forgiven me. Myself I shall never forgive. If she will honor me with her friendship hereafter, I pledge you my word that no act of mine, so far as I can help it, shall ever cause you anxiety for one in whom you have so strong and natural an interest.”

Mr. Eltinge’s manner changed decidedly, and when Van Berg concluded he extended his hand and said cordially:

“After such manly, straightforward words I can give you the right hand of respect and confidence, if not of fellowship. To tell you the truth, sir, I was inclined to believe that my little friend here had a better opinion of you than you deserved, but now I can welcome you instead of scolding her for bringing you.”

At the reference to herself Ida, seemingly, had an impulse to pluck a flower that was blooming at a little distance. The moment he was unobserved Van Berg seized the old gentleman’s hand and said, earnestly, while tears sprang to his eyes:

“God bless you for the words you spoke to that poor child. I owe you more than she does. You have saved me from a life that I would dread more than death,” and then he, too, turned away hastily and pretended to be very busy in finding the materials for his sketch.

Ida returned shyly, and it would seem that some of the color of her flower had found its way into her cheeks.

“Mr. Eltinge,” she said, hesitatingly, “I don’t believe I can make you understand how much I would like a picture of this pear-tree and yourself sitting under it as I have seen you for the past two days. I must admit that the wish to have such a sketch was one of the motives that led me to bring Mr. Van Berg.” Then she added, with deepening color still, “my conscience

troubles me when I hear Mr. Van Berg condemn himself so harshly. I have learned that I misjudged him as truly as he did me, and I have since realized how sadly both facts and appearances were against me.”

“Well, Miss Ida,” said the old gentleman, musingly, “I am inclined to think there has been more of misunderstanding than of intentional and deliberate harshness. My long life has taught me that it is astonishing how blind we often are to the thoughts and feelings of others. But I warn everybody to be careful how they visit this old garden, for it’s a wonderful place for bringing out the truth. Nature is in the ascendant here,” and he looked keenly and humorously at the artist, who remained, however, unconscious of his scrutiny, for his eyes were following Ida. She had suddenly turned her back upon them both again, and was soon bending over the little brook whose murmur he faintly heard.

“These allusions to the past are all painful to her,” he thought, “and she refers to them only because, as she says, her conscience compels her to. It must be my task to make her forget the past in the present and future.”

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said, returning, “you have visited the Jordan I believe, but I doubt whether its waters did you more good than that little brook over there does me. That’s right,” she added, looking over his shoulder at the outlines he was rapidly tracing; “I’m glad you are losing no time.”

“I remember the condition on which you allowed me to come,” he replied, looking up with a smile into her face, “and I’ve already learned, as Mr. Eltinge suggests, that nothing will do in this garden but downright honesty.” Something in her face caused his eyes to linger, and he added hastily: “You’re right about the Jordan. The brook seems much more potent, for apparently it has washed your trouble all away, but has left—well you might think it flattery if I should tell you all I see. this garden seems to contain the elixir of life for you, Miss Ida. My heart was aching to see how pale you were becoming, but here—”

“Mr. Van Berg,” said Ida, abruptly, “will you pardon a suggestion?”

He looked up at her again a little wonderingly and bowed.

“There has been a sort of necessity,” she resumed, “that my faulty self should be the theme of our conversation today, but all the mystery in which you imagined me enveloped must have vanished since you came here. I now must ask that we dwell hereafter on more agreeable subjects than Ida Mayhew.”

“I must bring this tendency to personal allusions to an end at once,” she thought, “or else I shall betray myself to my bitter mortification.”

He looked up with a deprecating smile, “I am at your mercy,” he replied, “and as I said before I will submit to any conditions.”

“This is an easy one,” said Ida, with emphasis, and then she took up the Bible and began reading to Mr. Eltinge, who from his seat under the pear-tree had been watching them with a pleased and placid interest on his serene old face. Their young life appeared beautiful now, and full of hope and promise, but he did not envy it. The prospect before him was better than the best that earth could offer.

Van Berg never forgot the hour that followed. His pencil was busy but his thoughts were busier. He felt his artist life and power kindling within him in a way that was exhilarating and grand. While his themes were simple he felt that they were noble and beautiful in the highest degree. The tree—a pretty object in itself—had been endowed with a human interest and suggested a divine philosophy. Mr. Eltinge, who sat at its foot, became to him one of the world’s chief heroes—a man who had met and vanquished evil for almost a century. His white hair and silver beard were a halo of glory around the quiet face that was turned in kindly sympathy towards his companion, and Van Berg did his best to bring out the noble profile.

But the maiden herself—why did his eyes turn so often to her, and why did he, unasked, introduce her into the sketch with a care and lingering delicacy of touch that made even her pencilled image seem a living girl? When not affected or rendered conventional by society, her voice was singularly girlish and natural, and there would often be a tone in a plaintive and minor key that vibrated like a low, sweet chord in his heart rather than in his ears. It must be admitted that he gave little heed to the sacred words she read; but the flexible music of her voice, mingled with the murmur of the brook, the rustle of the leaves and the occasional song of a bird, all combined to form the sweetest symphony he had ever heard.

As an artist he exulted. His hand had not lost its cunning, and his ruling passion, which the strange experiences of the past few weeks had held in abeyance, was reasserting itself with a fuller, richer power than he had known before. That WAS Ida Mayhew’s face that was growing beautiful and full of her new and better life under his appreciative and skilful touch, and the consciousness of success in the kind of effort in which success meant to him so much, filled him with a strong enthusiasm.

Once or twice Ida glanced shyly at him, and his appearance did not tend to fix her thoughts wholly on the sacred text.

At last Mr. Eltinge said: "That will do for today. I think, under the circumstances, you have given most praiseworthy attention to what you have read, and to what little I could say in the way of explanation. Now for the picture, and I confess I'm as eager as a child to see it;" and they came and looked over Van Berg's shoulder.

Almost instantly Ida clapped her hands, exclaiming with delight: "The tree is perfect, and oh, Mr. Eltinge, I shall always have you now, with your dear kind face turned towards me as I have seen it today!" Suddenly her manner changed, and in a tone full of disappointment she added, "Oh, Mr. Van Berg, how could you spoil my picture? You have put me in it."

"Certainly," he replied demurely, "you were a part of the picture."

"Not a necessary part. I did not ask you to do that," she answered, in a way that proved her feelings were hurt.

"I am willing to do more than you ask, and if you insist on it I will efface your image, although I should much regret to do so."

"I protest against that," cried Mr. Eltinge. "So far from spoiling the picture, your being there makes it invaluable to me. I'm going to tax Mr. Van Berg's generosity, and ask for this in the hope that he will make another drawing of the old man and the tree only, for you."

"Would you like to have it so very much?" said Ida, much pleased with this arrangement.

"Yes, my dear, very much indeed, and I'll place it near my favorite chimney corner, where I can see you all winter. Mr. Van Berg, I congratulate you; I'm not much of a judge of art, but this is my little friend here, true to life. You have been very happy in catching the expression which I am learning to know so well."

"Your words have a fuller meaning than you think," replied the artist, heartily. "I have indeed been very happy in my work. I never enjoyed a morning more in my life."

"But I'm to go home without any picture," said Ida, trying to hide her pleasure by assumed reproachfulness.

"There is no picture yet, for any one," he answered, "this is only a sketch from which I shall try to make two pictures that will suggest a scene particularly attractive to one of my calling, to say the least."

As he placed the sketch in his book, the work he had been engaged on that morning when Ida met him by the roadside, dropped out, and she saw herself leaning on the baluster rail of the staircase, with her hand half extended as a token of forgiveness and reconciliation. Her cheeks flushed instantly, but she was able to remark quietly:

“I suppose that is the way you artists keep a memorandum of current events.”

He replied gravely, but with some answering color also: “Yes, Miss Mayhew, when the current is deep and strong.”

Van Berg felt himself happy in securing from Mr. Eltinge an invitation to come again. As they were riding home, Ida remarked, shyly:

“I did not know you could draw so well.”

“Nor did I either before. That old garden is enchanted ground.”

“Yes,” said Ida, “poor Eve was driven out of the Garden of Eden, but I feel as if I had found my way into it. I only wish I could stay there,” and her sigh was long and deep.

“Does the world outside seem very full of thorns and thistles?” he asked, kindly.

After a moment she replied, simply and briefly, “Yes.”

He looked at her sympathetically for a moment, and then said earnestly:

“Miss Ida, pardon me if I venture a prediction. Wherever you dwell, hereafter, all that is good and beautiful in life and character which the garden typifies will begin to take the place of thorns and thistles.”

“I hope so,” she faltered, “but that involves bleeding hands, Mr. Van Berg. I am not cast in heroic mold. I am weak and wavering, and as a proof I am dwelling on the very subject that I had forbidden. I trust that you will be too manly to take advantage of my weakness henceforth and will try to help me forget myself.”

“That may be a harder task than you think, but I will attempt whatever you ask,” and from her pleased and interested expression it would seem that during the next half hour he succeeded remarkably well. Suddenly, as if a happy thought had struck him, he said a little abruptly:

“I foresee that you and Miss Burton are destined to become great friends. You have not yet learned what a lovely character she possesses and how broad and deep are her sympathies.”

Ida’s silence caused him to turn and look at her, and he saw that the light and color had faded from her face, but she said, emphatically:

“Miss Burton is even more admirable than you think her to be, if that were possible.”

“I am pleased to hear one lady speak so strongly and generously of another. It is not usual. I shall do my utmost to make you better acquainted with each other, and in this pleasant task am sure I shall render you a very great service.”

“Mr. Van Berg, I beg you will not,” she exclaimed, hastily, and he saw with surprise that she appeared painfully embarrassed.

“Pardon me, Miss Mayhew,” he said; “I did not mean to be officious.”

Ida saw no way of extricating herself save by promptly changing the subject, and this she did; but she could not fail to observe that her companion was hurt by her apparent unfriendliness towards one on whom he believed he had bestowed the best a man could give. The remainder of the drive was not enjoyed by either of them as the earlier part had been, and something like constraint tinged the manner and words of both.

As they drove up to the hotel Stanton gave a low whistle of surprise, but was in no mood for his old-time banter.

45. Problems Beyond Art

WHEN VAN BERG LEFT the garden he thought he had learned to understand Ida almost as clearly as he saw the pebbly bed of the little brook through the limpid current that flowed over it, and yet within a brief half-hour another baffling mystery had arisen. Why did she dislike Jennie Burton? Why she HAD disliked her was plain, but it seemed to follow inevitably that one who could love old Mr. Eltinge must also find a congenial friend in the woman he so greatly admired.

As the remainder of the day passed, this new cloud darkened and seemed to shadow even himself. While he could detect no flaw in her courtesy, he could not help feeling that she made a conscious effort to avoid them both. At dinner she conversed chiefly with her cousin. Van Berg's eyes would wander often to her face, but she never looked towards him unless he spoke to her. When he or Miss Burton addressed her there was not a trace of coldness in her manner of responding; a superficial observer would merely think they were people in whom she was not especially interested.

"Poor child," thought Jennie Burton, "she acts her part well," and she puzzled the artist still further by taking less notice of Ida than usual.

"But when I think of it," he mused, "it's just like my unique little friend. Only those in trouble interest her, and Miss Mayhew is on a straight road to happiness now, she believes, although the young lady herself seems to dread a world full of thorns and thistles, and her father and mother, at least, will insure an abundance of both in her own home. But her repulsion from Miss Burton, the very one towards whom I supposed she would be attracted in her new life, is what perplexes me most. I imagine all women are mysteries when you come to scrutinize their motives and impulses closely. The two who have occupied my thoughts this summer certainly are, and I'll stick to painting if I ever get out of this muddle."

After dinner he found a chance to ask Stanton if Mr. Mayhew was expected that evening.

“Yes,” was the reply. “In memory of last Sunday he wrote he would not come, but Ida sent a telegram asking him to be here without fail. I took it over to the station for her, and made sure that my uncle received it. She will puzzle him more than she has the rest of us, I suppose, and I am quite curious to see the result.”

The artist made no reply, but went to his room and tried to work on his pictures. He was more than curious—he was deeply interested, but felt that he was trenching on delicate ground. The relations between the father and daughter were too sacred, he believed, for even sympathetic observation on his part.

He soon threw aside his work. The inspiration of the morning was all gone, and in its place had come an unaccountable dissatisfaction with himself and the world in general. He had left the garden with a sense of exhilaration that made life appear beautiful and full of richest promise. He had been saved from disaster that would have been crushing; his object in coming to the country had been accomplished, and the Undine he discovered HAD received a woman’s soul that was blending the perfect but discordant features into an exquisitely beautiful face. The result, certainly, had not been brought about as he expected, nor in a way tending to increase his self-complacency, but he felt that he would be a broader and better man for the ordeal through which he had passed. He also realized that the changes in Ida were not the superficial ones he had contemplated. He had regarded her face and character as little better than a piece of canvas on which there was already a drawing of great promise, but very defective. By erasures here and skillful touches there he had hoped to assist nature in carrying out her evident intentions. The tragedy that well-nigh resulted taught him that human lives are dangerous playthings, and that quackery in attempting spiritual reform involved more peril than ignorant interference with physical laws.

And yet that morning had proved that the desired change had been accomplished, even more thoroughly than he had hoped. The dangerous period of transition had been safely passed, and the beautiful face expressed that which was more than womanly refinement, thought and culture. These elements would develop with time. But the countenance on which he had seen the impress of vanity, pride, and insincerity, and later the despair of a wronged and desperate woman, had grown open and childlike again as she told him her story and read to Mr. Eltinge; and in it, as through a clear

transparency, he had witnessed the kindling light of the Christian faith his mother had taught him to respect at least, long years before.

He had left the garden with the belief that he had secured the friendship of this rare Undine, and that she would bring to his art an inspiration like that of which he was so grandly conscious while making the picture in which she formed the loveliest feature. He had expected with instinctive certainty that she would now be drawn towards the woman he hoped to make his wife, and that friendships would be cemented that would last through life.

But in suggesting this hope and expectation to Ida it had been as if a cloud had suddenly passed before the sun, and now the whole sky was darkening. Jennie Burton seemed more shadowy and remote than ever—more wrapped up in a past in which she had no part; and the maiden into whose very soul he thought he had looked became inscrutable again in the distant courtesy of her manner. Even during the brief hour of dinner he was led to feel that he had no inevitable place in the thoughts of either of the ladies, and this impression was increased as he sought their society later in the day.

Moreover, in his changed mood he again began to chafe irritably at Ida's associations. She herself had been thoroughly redeemed in an artistic point of view, and it was his nature to look at things in this light. While he shuddered at her terrible purpose he recognized the high, strong spirit which in its perversion and wrong had rendered the deed possible, and her dark design made a grand and sombre background against which the maiden he had sketched that morning was all the more luminous. Hitherto everything connected with her change of character had been not only conventional, but had appealed to his aesthetic temperament as singularly beautiful. The quaint garden with its flowers, brook, and allegorical tree were associations that harmonized with Ida's loveliness, while Mr. Eltinge, who had rendered such an immeasurable service to them both, realized his best ideal of dignified and venerable age.

But when he compared her spiritual father with the man she expected that night, he found his whole nature becoming full of irritable protest and dissatisfaction.

"This morning," he muttered, "she appeared capable of realizing a poet's dreams, but already I see the hard and prosaic conditions of her lot dwarfing her growth and throwing their grotesque shadows across her beauty. What

can she do while inseparable from such a father and mother? The more unlike them she becomes the more hideous they will appear. Mrs. Mayhew is essentially lacking in womanly delicacy, and mere coarseness is more tolerable than fashionable, veneered vulgarity. Mr. Mayhew is a spiritless wretch whose only protest against his wife's overbearance and indifference has been intoxication. Linked on either side to so much deformity, what chance has the daughter unless she escapes from them and develops a separate life? But are not the ties of nature too close to permit such escape, and would it not be wrong to seek it? It certainly would not be Christian, and I am confident Mr. Eltinge would not advise it. Her lot is indeed a cruel one. No wonder she clings to Mr. Eltinge and the garden, and that the outside world seems full of thorns and thistles. Well, I pity her from the depths of my heart, and cannot see how she will solve the harsh problem of her life. I imagine she will soon become discouraged and seek by marriage to obliterate her present ties as far as possible."

Having reached this unsatisfactory conclusion he threw his sketch impatiently aside and went down to the piazza. Ida and her mother were already there, for it was about time for arrivals from the earlier train. Van Berg felt almost sure that Ida must have been aware that he was standing near her, but she exhibited no consciousness of his presence. When a little later they met in promenade she bowed politely but absently, and in a way that would lead any who were observing them to think that he was not in her thoughts. So he was led to believe himself, but Miss Burton, who was reading in one of the parlor windows, smiled and whispered to herself, "Well done."

Ida was in hopes that her father would take the first opportunity of reaching the Lake House, and she was not disappointed. The telegram had flashed into his leaden-hued life that day like a meteor. Did it portend good or evil? Evil only, he feared, for it seemed to him that evil would ever be his portion. It was therefore with a vague sense of apprehension that he looked forward to meeting his wife and daughter.

As he emerged from the stage with the others he found Ida half-way down the steps to greet him.

"I'm so glad you've come!" she said in a low earnest voice, and she kissed him, not in the old formal way, as if it were the only proper thing to do, but as a daughter greeting her father. Then, before he could recover from his surprise, his light traveling bag was taken from him and the young

girl's arm linked lovingly in his, and he led to Mrs. Mayhew, who also kissed him, but in a way, it must be admitted, that suggested a duty rather than a pleasure.

Her husband scarcely gave to her a glance, however, but kept his eyes fixed on his daughter.

"Ida is bewitched," said Mr. Mayhew.

"And I hope you will find me bewitching, father, for I want as much of your society as you will give me during this visit." She tried to speak playfully and naturally, but tears were gathering in her eyes, for his expression of perplexity was singularly pathetic and full of the keenest reproach. "O God," she murmured, "what have I been that he should be speechless from surprise, when I merely greet him as a daughter should!"

Van Berg turned hastily away, for he felt that scenes were coming, on which he had no right to look. There was nothing yet to indicate a wish on Ida's part to avoid inartistic associations, and deep in his heart he was compelled to admit that she had never appeared so supremely beautiful as when she looked love and welcome into the eyes of the smirched and disheartened man to whom nature gave the best right to claim these gifts.

"Come with me, father," said Ida, trying to give him a reassuring smile, "and I will answer your scared and questioning glances in your room," and he went with her as if walking in a dream.

Tears now gathered in Jennie Burton's eyes, but she smiled again as she thought, "Better done still, Ida Mayhew, and Mr. Van Berg, who is stalking away so rapidly yonder, is not the man I think him, if you have not now made your best and deepest impression on his heart."

"Ida," her father faltered, after they had reached the privacy of his room, "what does your telegram mean? What is important?"

"YOU are to me. O father, please, please forgive me," and she put her arms around his neck and burst into a passion of tears.

The bewildered man began to tremble. "Can it—can it be that my daughter has a heart?" he muttered.

"Yes, father, but it's broken because of my cruel treatment of you; I now hope better days are coming for us all."

He held her away from him and looked into her face with a longing intensity that suggested a soul perishing for the lack of love and hope.

"Father, father, I can't bear that look. Oh, God forgive me, how I have wronged you!" and she buried her face on his shoulder again.

“Ida,” he said, slowly and pleadingly, “be very careful—be sure this is not a passing impulse, a mere remorseful twinge of conscience. I’ve been hoping for years—I would have prayed, if I dared to—for some token that I was not a burden to you and your mother. You seemed to love me some when you were little, but as you grew older you grew away from me. I’ve tried to forget that I had a heart. I’ve tried to become a beast because it was agony to be a man. why I have lived I scarcely know. I thought I had suffered all that I could suffer in this world, but I was mistaken. I left this place last Monday with the fear that my beautiful daughter was giving her love to a man even baser than I am, base and low from choice, base and corrupt in every fibre of his soul and body, and from that hour to this it has seemed as if I were ground between two millstones,” and he shuddered as if smitten with an ague. “Ida,” he concluded piteously, “I’m too weak, I’m too far gone to bear disappointment. This is more than an impulse, is it not? You will not throw yourself away? Oh, Ida, my only child, if you could be in heart what you were in your face as you greeted me to-night, I could die content!”

For a few minutes the poor girl could only sob convulsively on his breast. At last she faltered brokenly:

“Yes, father—it is an impulse—an impulse from heaven; but I shall pray daily that it be not a passing one. I—I have lost confidence in myself, but with my Saviour’s help, I will try to be a loving daughter to you and make your wishes first in everything.”

“Great God!” he muttered, “can this be true?”

“Yes, father, because God IS great, and very, VERY, kind.”

His bent form became erect and almost steely in its tenseness. He gently but firmly placed her in a chair, and then paced the room rapidly a moment or two, his dark eyes glowing with a strong and kindling excitement. Ida began to regard him with wonder and almost alarm. Suddenly he raised his hand to heaven, and said solemnly:

“This shall be no one-sided affair so help me God!”

Then opening his valise, he took out a bottle of brandy and threw it, with a crash, into the empty grate.

Ida sprang towards him with a glad cry, exclaiming, “O father, now I understand you! Thank God! thank God!”

He kissed her tearful, upturned face again and again, as if he found there the very elixir of life.

“Ida, my dear little Ida,” he said, huskily, “you have saved your father from a drunkard’s end—from a drunkard’s grave. I was in a drunkard’s hell already.”

Mr. Mayhew requested that supper should be served in his own room, for neither he nor his daughter was in a mood to meet strangers that evening. Ida called her mother, and tried to explain to her why they did not wish to go down, but the poor woman was not able to grasp very much of the truth, and was decidedly mystified by the domestic changes which she had very limited power to appreciate, and in which she had so little part. She was not a coarse woman, but matter of fact, superficial, and worldly to the last degree.

Van Berg could scarcely believe his eyes when Mr. Mayhew came down to breakfast with his family Sunday morning. The bondman had become free; the slave of a degrading vice had been transformed into a quiet, dignified gentleman. His form was erect, and while his bearing was singularly modest and retiring, there was nothing of the old cowering, shrinking manner which suggested defeat, loss of self-respect, and hopeless dejection. All who knew him instinctively felt that the prostrate man had risen to his feet, and there was something in his manner that made them believe he would hold his footing among other men hereafter.

The artist found himself bowing to the “spiritless wretch” with a politeness that was by no means assumed, and from the natural and almost cordial manner in which Mr. Mayhew returned his salutation, he was very glad to believe that Ida had not told him the deeper and darker secrets of her experience during the past week.

“This is her work,” he thought, and Ida’s radiant face confirmed the impression. She then felt that after her father’s words, “You have saved me,” she could never be very unhappy again. A hundred times she had murmured, “Oh, how much better God’s way out of trouble has been than mine!”

Mr. Mayhew had always had peculiar attractions for Miss Burton, and they at once entered into conversation. But as she recognized the marvelous change in him, the pleased wonder of her face grew so apparent, that he replied to it in low tones:

“I now believe in your ‘remedies,’ Miss Burton; but a great deal depends on who administers them. My little girl and I have been discovering how nearly related we are.”

Her eyes grew moist with her sympathy and gladness. "Mr. Mayhew," she said, "I'm inclined to think that heaven is always within a step or two of us, if we could only take the right steps."

"To me it has seemed beyond the farthest star," he replied, very gravely. "To some, however, the word is as indefinite as the place, and a cessation of pain appears heaven. I could be content to ask nothing better than this Sabbath morning has brought me. I have found what I thought lost forever."

Jennie Burton became very pale, as deep from her heart rose the query, "Shall I ever find what I have lost?" Then with a strong instinct to maintain her self-control and shun a perilous nearness to her hidden sorrow, she changed the subject.

It was touching to see how often Mr. Mayhew's eyes turned towards his daughter, as if to reassure himself that the change in her manner towards him was not a dream, and the expression of her face as she met his scrutiny seemed to brighten and cheer him like a coming dawn.

"What heavenly magic is transforming Miss Mayhew?" Jennie Burton asked of Van Berg, as they sauntered out on the piazza.

"With your wonted felicity, you express it exactly," he replied. "It is a heavenly magic which I don't understand in the least, but must believe in, since cause and effect are directly under my eyes. It has been my good fortune to witness as beautiful a scene as ever mortal saw. Since she refers naturally and openly to the friends whom she has visited during the past week, I may tell you about Mr. Eltinge's influence and teaching without violating any confidence," and in harmony with the frank and friendly relations which he now sustained to Miss Burton, he related his experience of the previous day, remaining scrupulously reticent on every point, however, that he even imagined Ida would wish veiled from the knowledge of others. "I cannot tell you," he concluded, "how deeply the scene affected me. It not only awoke all the artist in me, but the man also. In one brief hour I learned to revere that noble old gentleman, and if you could have seen him leaning against the emblematic tree, as I did, I think he would have realized your ideal of age, wholly devoid of weakness and bleakness. And then Miss Mayhew's face, as she read and listened to him, seemed indeed, in its contrast with what we have seen during the past summer, the result of 'heavenly magic.' It will be no heavy task to fulfill the conditions on which I was permitted to enter the enchanted garden. They expect more

pencil sketches, but I shall eventually give them as truthful a picture as I am capable of painting, for it is rare good fortune to find themes so inspiring.”

Guarded as Van Berg was in his narrative, Miss Burton was able to read more “between the lines” than in his words. He did not understand her motive when she said, as if it were her first obvious thought:

“The picture which you have presented, even to the eye of my fancy, is uniquely beautiful, and I think it must redeem Miss Mayhew in your mind, from all her disagreeable associations. But in my estimation she appeared to even better advantage in the greeting she gave her father last evening. Was there ever a more delicious surprise on earth, than that poor man had when he returned and found a true and loving daughter awaiting him? With her filial hands she has already lifted him out of the mire of his degradation, and today he is a gentleman whom you involuntarily respect. O Mr. Van Berg, I cannot tell you how inexpressibly beautiful and reassuring such things are to me! You look at the changes we are witnessing from the standpoint of an artist, I from that of poor wounded humanity; and what I have seen in Ida Mayhew and her father, is proof to me that there is a good God above all the chaos around me, which I cannot understand and which at times disheartens me. Their happier and ennobled faces are a prophecy and an earnest of that time when the sway of evil shall be broken, when famishing souls and empty hearts shall be filled, when broken, thwarted lives are made perfect, and what was missed and lost regained.”

She looked away from him into the summer sky, which the sun was flooding with cloudless light. There were no tears in her eyes, but an expression of intense and sorrowful longing that was far beyond such simple and natural expression.

“Jennie Burton,” said Van Berg, in a low, earnest voice, “there are times when I could suffer all things to make you happy.”

She started as if she had almost forgotten his presence, and answered quietly: “You could not make me happy by suffering. Only as I can banish a little pain and gloom here and there do I find solace. But I can do so very, very little. It reassures me to see God doing this work in his grand, large way. And yet it seems to me that he might brighten the world as the sun fills this sky with light. As it is, the rays that illumine hearts and faces glint only here and there between the threatening clouds of evil. Mr. Van Berg, you do not know—you never realized how shadowed humanity is. Within a mile of your studio, that is full of light and beauty, there are thousands who are

perishing in a slow, remorseless pain. It is this awful mystery of evil—this continuous groan and cry of anguish that has gone up to heaven through all the ages—that appalls my heart and staggers my faith. But there—after what I have seen today I have no right to such gloomy thoughts. I suppose my religion seems to you no more than a clinging faith in a far-away, incomprehensible God, and so is not very attractive? I wish I could suggest to you something more satisfactory, but since I cannot I'll leave you to find better influences.”

“It does seem to me that rash, faulty Ida Mayhew has a better faith than this,” he thought; “she believes she has found a near and helpful Friend, while my sad-eyed saint has only a God, and is always in pathetic doubt whether her prayer can bridge the infinite distance between them. Who is right? Is either right? I used to be impressed with how much I knew; I'm glad the opposite impression is becoming so strong, for, as Miss Burton says, the hopeless fools are those who never find themselves out.

“She was right. Ida Mayhew will ever appear to better advantage in aiding her poor father to regain his manhood, than by the most artistic combination of circumstances that I could imagine. All the man in me recognizes the sacredness of the duty and the beauty of its performance. And yet but yesterday I was stupid enough to believe that her best chance for development was to escape from her father and live a separate life. It has taken only a few hours to prove how superficial was my philosophy of life. Guided simply by the instinct of love and duty, this faulty girl has accomplished more than I had supposed possible. But her mother will continue a thorn in her side,” and Van Berg was not far astray.

46. A Resolute Philosopher

MR. MAYHEW attended church with his family that morning—a thing that he had not done for years—and in the afternoon Ida took him to see her spiritual birthplace, and to call on her spiritual father. The welcome that old Mr. Eltinge gave, and the words he spoke, did much towards establishing in the man who had been so disheartened, hope that a new and better future was opening before him.

When about to part he put his left arm around his daughter, and giving his hand to Mr. Eltinge, said, with a voice broken by his feelings:

“I am bewildered yet. I can’t understand my happiness. Yesterday I was perishing in a boundless desert. Today the desert has vanished, and I’m in this sweet old garden. There are no flowers or fruits in it, however, that can compare with the love and truth I now see in this child’s face. I won’t speak of the service you have rendered us both. It’s beyond all words.”

It was indeed greater than he knew, for Ida had concluded never to speak again of her terrible secret. God had forgiven her, and nothing was to be gained by any reference to a subject that had become inexpressibly painful. “Remember,” said the staunch and faithful old man as they were about to drive away, “nothing good lasts unless built up from the Author of all good. Unless you act on this truth you’ll find yourself in the desert again, and all you are now enjoying will seem like a mirage.”

Poor Mr. Mayhew could not endure to lose a moment of his daughter’s society, for the long thirst of years was to be slaked. They took a round-about way home, and the summer evening deepened into twilight and dusk before they approached the hotel.

“See, father, there is the new moon, and it hangs over your right shoulder,” cried Ida, gleefully.

“It’s over your right shoulder, too, and that thought pleases me better still. I wish I could make you very happy. Tell me what I can do for you.”

“Take me to New York with you tomorrow,” said Ida, promptly.

“Now you are trying to make a martyr of yourself for me. You forget how hot and dusty the city is in August.”

“I’m going with you,” she said decisively, “unless you say no.”

“I’m going to spend part of the time with you until your vacation begins next month, and then we’ll explore every nook and corner of this region.”

“There Ida, say no more today. My cup is overflowing now, and the fear is already growing that such happiness won’t last—can’t last in a world like ours.”

“Father,” said Ida, gently, “I’ve found a Friend that has promised me more than present happiness. He has promised me eternal life. He is pledged to make all seemingly evil result in my final good. How it can be I don’t see at all, but I’m trying to take him at his word. You must not worry if I’m not always in good spirits. I suppose every one in the world has a burden to carry, but I don’t think it can crush us if our Saviour helps us carry it. My faith is very simple, you see; I feel I’m like one of those little children he took in his arms and blessed, and I’m sure his blessing is not an empty form. It has made me love and trust him, and that’s all the religion I have or know anything about. You must not expect great things of me; you must not watch me too closely. Just let me take my own quiet way in life, for I want my life henceforth to be as quiet and unobtrusive as the little brook that runs through Mr. Eltinge’s garden, that is often in the shade, you know, as well as in the light, but Mr. Eltinge lets it flow after its own fashion; so you must let me. I’ll always try to make a little low, sweet music for you, if not for the world. So please do not commence puzzling your poor tired brain how to make me happy or gay, or want to take me here and there. Just leave me to myself; let me have my own way for awhile at least; and if you can do anything for me I promise to tell you.”

Ever since her drive with Van Berg the previous day, there had been a deep undercurrent of thought in Ida’s mind, and she had at last concluded that she could scarcely keep her secret with any certainty while under his eyes, and especially those of Miss Burton. She was too direct and positive in her nature, and her love was too strong and absorbing for the cool and indifferent bearing she was trying to maintain. Her eyes, her cheeks, her tones, and even words, might prove traitors at any time and betray her. She longed to be alone, and the large empty city house seemed the quiet refuge that she needed. At the same time it would give her deep satisfaction to be

with her father after his return from business, and make amends for years of neglect.

He looked at her wistfully, feeling, in a vague way, that he did not understand her yet. There was a minor chord in her voice, and there had been a sadness in her eyes at times which began to suggest to him that he had not learned all the causes that were so marvelously transforming her from her old self. Her mother would question and question. He, on the contrary, would wait patiently till the confidence was given, and so he merely said gently,

“All right, little girl; I’ll try to make you happy in your own way.”

Van Berg, going out for a walk after tea, again heard the girlish voice singing the quaint hymn tune that had awakened the memories of his childhood the previous day. He instantly concealed himself by the roadside, and in a moment or two Ida and her father drove by. He was able in the dusk to note only that her head rested on her father’s shoulder, and her voice was sweet and plaintive as she sang words that he could not hear distinctly, but which were as follows, as far as he could catch them:

I know not the way he is leading me But I know he is leading me home;
Though lonely the path and dark to me, It is safe and it wends to my home.

Home of the blest, Home that is rest
To the weary pilgrim’s feet, to
the weary pilgrim’s heart.

and then her words were lost in the distance.

With an impulse he did not think of resisting he followed them back to the hotel and waited patiently till she and her father came out from supper.

“Miss Mayhew,” he said, a little discontentedly, “I have scarcely had a chance to say a word to you today, and it seems to me that I have a great deal to say.”

She looked at him with some surprise as she replied, “Well, I think I might at least become a good listener.”

“Do you mean a patient one?”

“I never had any patience,” she answered, with something like a smile.

“And I was never so possessed by the demon of impatience as I have been this afternoon. There hasn’t been a soul around that I cared to talk with, and if you knew how out of conceit I am with my own company, you would feel some commiseration. How I envied you your visit to the garden this afternoon, for I felt sure you took your father thither. May I not go with

you again tomorrow, or soon? I wish to make my sketch more accurate before beginning your picture.”

She hesitated a moment, and he little know how he was tempting her. Then she replied, so quietly and decisively as to seem almost cold, “Mr. Eltinge, I’m sure, will be very glad to see you, but I shall go to the city with my father in the morning and remain in town all the week.” She was puzzled at his unmistakable expression of regret and disappointment, and added, hastily, “Mr. Van Berg, you are taking far too much trouble. I would be more satisfied—I would be delighted with such a sketch as you made today, with the omission of myself.”

“But if, instead of being trouble, it gave me great pleasure to make the picture with the utmost care?”

“I suppose,” she replied, “that you have a high artistic sense that must be satisfied, and that you see imperfections that I cannot.”

“You are too severe upon me, Miss Mayhew, but since you have such good reason, I cannot complain. Still, in justice to myself, I must say that satisfying my artistic sense was not my motive.”

“I did not mean to be severe—I do not mean what you think,” Ida began, very eagerly. Then she checked herself and added, after a moment, with a slight tinge of sadness in her tone, “I fear we are fated to misunderstand each other. Good-night, Mr. Van Berg,” and she turned decisively away and joined her father who was talking with Stanton.

The artist was both hurt and perplexed, and he abruptly left the hall and started again on the walk which had been so unexpectedly interrupted. He strode away through the starlight with a swiftness that was scarcely in harmony with the warm, still summer night. Before he was aware of it he was a mile away. Stopping suddenly he muttered:

“I won’t be so baffled and puzzled. I will learn to understand this Ida Mayhew before this summer is over. It’s ridiculous that I should be so dull and stupid. She says she fears we are ‘fated to misunderstand each other.’ I defy such a blind stupid fate. I used to have some brains and tact before I came to this place, and I scarcely think I’ve become an idiot. I am determined to win that girl’s friendship, and I intend to follow her career and watch the rare and beautiful development of her character. That one hour in the garden yesterday taught me what an inspiration her exquisite beauty can be in my profession, and surely with the vantage-ground I

already possess I ought to have skill enough to win a place among her friends,” and he walked back almost as quickly as he had stalked away.

Ida had seen his departure and recognized the fact that she had hurt his feelings. It was strange that so little a thing could depress her so greatly, for she felt that the first real Sabbath she had ever spent and which had been in truth a SUN-day to her thus far, was now ending in shadows darker than the night. “How weak I am,” she thought; “I must go away as soon as possible, or else I shall be sorry. The companionship that he can give so easily and frankly when Miss Burton is not at hand to occupy him is impossible for me, and would only end in the betrayal of a secret that I would hide even more anxiously than the crime I could not conceal from him. My duty and my father must be everything hereafter,” and she turned resolutely to him, saying:

“Father, take a seat in the parlor while I go and find mother. I want these people to see that you have a family who at least show that they appreciate all the luxuries and comforts you are providing for them.”

Mr. Mayhew was more deeply gratified by her words than she could understand, for any recognition of his manhood and rightful position which was quiet and unobtrusive, was balm and healing to his wounded self-respect. Hitherto he had believed correctly that his family wished to keep him out of sight, and at no time before had he realized the change that had taken place in Ida more keenly than when she made this simple and natural proposition. His grateful smile as he complied with her request did her good, but she soon discovered that in her mother she had a very difficult subject to manage. She found that lady in her room wearing a gloomy and injured expression.

“You have condescended at last to come and see whether I was alive, I see,” she said, as Ida entered the room.

Her daughter went directly to her and kissing her replied, “We haven’t intended to leave you so long or to neglect you in the least, and I’ll explain.”

“Oh, no need of explaining. Excuses always make matters worse. Here is the fact—I’ve been left all the afternoon to myself.”

“Have you noticed no other fact today, mother?” asked Ida, gravely.

“Yes, I’ve noticed that you and your father have been so wrapped up in each other that I’m nobody, and might as well be Mrs. John Smith as Mrs. Mayhew.”

“Pardon me, mother, you are exaggerating,” said Ida, firmly. “Father was very polite to you at breakfast and dinner, and he went to church with you this morning, and I can scarcely remember when he has done this before. I am chiefly to blame for keeping him away so long this afternoon, for I wanted him to see and talk with my friend Mr. Eltinge, who has done me so much good. I thought he might help father too, and I truly believe he has. I repeat to you again, in all sincerity and love, that we have not intended to neglect you, and father now wishes you to come down and join him in the parlor, so that we can, as a family, at last appear as we ought before the world. In the name of all that is sacred, encourage dear father now that he is trying to be what we have so often wished.”

But Mrs. Mayhew’s pets were like spells of bad weather and would run their course. She only looked more gloomy and injured than ever as she replied:

“It’s all very well to talk. Mr. Mayhew must be encouraged and coaxed to do what any man ought to do. I might have enjoyed a ride this evening as well as your father.”

“You said it was too warm to go out after dinner.”

“Well, you might have waited till it wasn’t too warm.”

A sudden scarlet burned in Ida’s cheeks, and there came an ominous sparkle in her eyes. “Mother,” she said so abruptly and sternly that the lady looked up wonderingly, and encountered an expression in her daughter’s face that awakened an undefined fear. In tones that were low, indignant, and authoritative Ida continued:

“I request—I demand that you cease this nonsense at once. As a Christian woman you ought to be on your knees thanking God that your husband is not lying intoxicated on that sofa, as he was last Sunday at this time. You ought to be thanking God that he is becoming his former self, and winning respect by acting like a true gentleman. It was our unutterable folly that was destroying him, and I say this folly must and shall cease. I will not permit my father’s sensitive nature to be wounded as it has been. You shall not spoil this first bright day he has had after so many years. If you care for him why don’t you try to win his affection? and whoever heard of a heart being won by whining and fault-finding? But of this be sure, you shall not spoil this day. I charge you as a wife and a lady to cease this childish petulance, and come down at once.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Mayhew, rising mechanically, “if you are going to make a scene—”

“I am going to prevent scenes,” said Ida, with all her old time imperiousness. “I insist that we appear in the future like a quiet, well-bred family, and I warn you that I will permit my father to be trifled with no longer. He SHALL have a chance. Wait, let me help you make a more becoming toilet for Sunday evening.”

Ida was very strongly aroused, and the superior nature mastered the weaker. Mrs. Mayhew became as wax in her hands, although she made many natural and irritable protests against her daughter speaking to her as she had done. Ida paid no heed to her mother’s words, and after giving a few finishing touches to her dress relieved her sternness by a judicious compliment, “I wish you to take the seat father is reserving for you,” she said, “and appear the charming lady that you know how to be so well;” and without further parley they went down together.

Once in the social eye it would be Mrs. Mayhew’s strongest impulse to make a good impression, and she behaved beautifully. Something in Ida’s manner puzzled her father, but she smiled so reassuringly that he gave himself up to the quiet enjoyment of the situation that was so natural and yet so novel. He listened with a pleased expression to the music, and noted, with deep satisfaction, the friendly and respectful bearing of those near, towards both his wife and himself; but he exulted in the evident admiration that his daughter excited. The people at the Lake House had already discovered that there was a decided change for the better in the Mayhew family, and they greeted the improvement with a kindly but well-bred and unobtrusive welcome that was creditable to human nature. Of course there was a great deal of whispered surmise, but nothing offensive to the eye.

Stanton came and asked Ida to join in the singing at the piano, but she shook her head decidedly.

“Who has been hurting your feelings?” he asked, in a low tone.

By a scarcely perceptible gesture, she put her finger on her lips and said quietly, “They are waiting for you, Cousin Ik.” Then she added, with a smile, “Somewhere I’ve heard a proverb expressing surprise that Saul should be among the prophets. I hardly think it will be in good taste for me to appear among them just yet.”

“And I once believed her to be a fool,” thought Stanton as he returned to his place.

Again, on this Sunday evening, keen eyes were watching her from the dusky piazza, but so far from being wolfish and ravenous, they were full of sympathy and admiration.

As Van Berg approached the parlor windows after his return, he saw Stanton standing by the piano at Jennie Burton's side, and she was looking up to him and speaking in a very friendly manner. He was not conscious of any appropriate pangs of jealousy, and indeed did not miss their absence, but he looked eagerly around for the problem his philosophical mind was so bent on solving.

At first the favorable impression made by the reunited family caught his attention, and he muttered, "There is some more of her magic. But what is the matter with Miss Mayhew herself. Her eyes are burning with a fire that is anything but tender and sacred, and there are moments when her face is almost stern, and again it is full of trouble."

Some one discovered him on the piazza, and there was a general wish expressed that he should sing with Miss Burton a duet that had become a favorite. After this and one or two other pieces, he again sought his place of observation. The color and fire had now wholly faded from Miss Mayhew's face, and she looked pale and sad. Her father turned to her, and said:

"Ida, I fear you don't feel well."

"I'm very tired, and think I had better go to my room."

He rose instantly, and gave her his arm, but on the way she reassured him: "A night's sleep, and the rest I shall have with you in the city are just what I need; so don't worry, for I shall be ready to take the train with you in the morning;" and Mr. Mayhew rejoined his wife, and completed a happier day than he ever expected to see again.

But poor Ida, when left alone, buried her face in her hands and sobbed, "I've wounded HIS feelings, I've given way to my old passionate anger, I've spoken to mother as a daughter never should. What will ever become of faulty Ida Mayhew? The worm-eaten emblem is true of me still."

Then, as if whispered to her by some good angel, the words Mr. Eltinge had spoken recurred to her. "Your Saviour will be as tender and patient with you as a mother with her baby that is learning to walk."

"Oh," she cried, in a low, passionate tone, "that is the kind of a God I need!"

She also remembered the reassuring words that Mr. Eltinge had quoted—"As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you," and the

promise was made good to her.

“Stanton,” said Van Berg, a little abruptly, before they parted that evening, “I fear, from your cousin’s appearance, she was ill when she left the parlor.”

“I’ve given up trying to understand Ida. When she came down with her mother, she looked like an incensed goddess, and when she returned she reminded me of the fading white lily she wore in her hair. I give it up,” concluded Stanton, whose language had become a trifle figurative and poetic of late.

“I don’t,” muttered the artist, after smoking the third consecutive cigar in solitude.

47. The Concert Garden Again

VAN BERG had scarcely ever known a day to pass more slowly and heavily than Monday. He had taken pains to be present at Ida's departure with her father, and it had depressed him unaccountably that she had been so quiet as to seem even a little cold in her farewell. She would not look towards him, nor could he catch her eye or obtain one friendly expression. He did not know that the poor girl dared not smile or speak lest she should be too friendly, and that she avoided him with the instinct of self-preservation. His conclusion was: "She finds, after thinking it all over, that she has far more to forgive than she thought, and my presence reminds her of everything she would be glad to forget."

He tried once or twice to find Jennie Burton, but did not succeed. She made no apparent effort to avoid him, and was so cordial in her manner when they met that he had severe compunctions that he did not seek her society resolutely and press his suit. "The summer is drawing to a close," he muttered, "and nothing is settled. Confound it all! I'm the least settled of anything. The best chance I shall ever have is passing swiftly. Ever faculty I possess assures me that she is the one woman of all the world. I honor her, I reverence her, I admire her and everything she does and says. I trust her implicitly, even though she is so shrouded in mystery. What the mischief is the matter with my old water-logged heart that it should be so heavy and dumpish?"

But so it was. Jennie Burton smiled on him and others as brightly as ever, and yet he knew her heart was breaking, for she was growing slier and more spirit-like daily. His desire to comfort her, however, by a life-long effort ebbed away, till he was cursing himself for a fickle, cold-blooded wretch. "I had better shut myself up in my studio," he said to himself. "I may make a painter, but I never will anything else;" and early on Tuesday he went doggedly to work on Mr. Eltinge's picture.

His perplexed and jarring thoughts gradually ceased their discord as he became absorbed in his loved and familiar tasks. Sweet and low at first, and

in the faint, broken suggestion of his kindling fancy, the symphonic poem he had heard in the garden began again, but at last his imagination made it almost real. He listened once more to Ida's girlish, plaintive voice blending with the murmur of the brook, the sighing wind and rustling leaves, and the occasional trill of a bird. He leaned back in his chair, and his eyes became full of deep and dreamy pleasure. Gradually a heavy frown contracted his brow, and his face grew white and stern as he repeated words that she once had spoken to him: "I meant to compel your respect, and I thought there was no other way."

"Pharisee, fool that I was! If I had been kind and trustful at the time her family wronged her, she would not now shrink from me as if I summed up in my person the whole of that wretched experience. Even Stanton appreciated my unutterable folly, for he said: "You looked at her in a way that would have frozen even Jezebel herself," and now whenever I glance towards her she is reminded of that accursed stare. Would it be possible, in painting her likeness for Mr. Eltinge, to make her face so noble, womanly, and pure, that she would recognize my present estimate of her character, and so forgive me in very truth?"

The care and earnestness with which he filled in the outlines of his sketch proved how zealously he would make the effort. In the afternoon he drove over to the garden again, and made a careful drawing of the tree and of Mr. Eltinge sitting beneath it, for Ida, and he determined to go to the city the following day the he might avail himself of the resources of his studio, and by the aid of this hasty sketch make as fine a crayon picture as would be possible, before her return on Saturday.

The old gentleman's heart was naturally warm towards his protege, whom they both missed greatly, and he spoke of her often. He could not help noticing that the artist was ever an excellent listener at such times and would even suspend his work for a moment that he might not lose a word. "It seems to me he takes a wonderful deal of interest in her for a man who is seeking to engage himself to another lady," mused Mr. Eltinge. "I think the other lady had better be looking after him."

As Van Berg approached the hotel, he saw Miss Burton mounting the steps with a quantity of ferns in her hands. She evidently was returning from a long ramble, and when she came down to supper he saw that she had not been able to remove wholly all traces of grief. His conscience smote him sorely. He hesitated in his purpose of going to the city, and determined

to speak of it frankly, and abandon it, if she showed, even by the expression of her face, that she would prefer he would remain, but he found himself both surprised and relieved that, so far from manifesting the least reluctance to have him go, she encouraged the plan.

“You have a noble theme,” she said cordially, “and you can’t do it justice in the room of a summer hotel. Besides I do think you owe it to Miss Mayhew to make all the amends in your power, and a fine picture of that emblematic tree, and her kind old friend beneath it, may be of very great help to her in her new life. I hope you will take me to see Mr. Eltinge on your return.”

“I’ll wait over a day and take you there tomorrow,” he said promptly.

“No,” she replied decisively; “you have not enough time as it is, before Saturday, to do justice to your work, and I want you to make Miss Mayhew’s friend look as if he were speaking to her.”

“Miss Jennie,” said the artist rather impulsively, “you haven’t a drop of selfish blood in your little body.”

“I am under the impression that Mr. Van Berg’s estimates of his lady acquaintances are not always correct. Not that I was any wiser, but then such positive assertions seem hardly the thing from people who have shown themselves so fallible.”

“I’m right for once,” Van Berg insisted. “Do you know that Miss Mayhew and I nearly had a falling out. Indeed she has been rather cool towards me ever since, and you were the cause. I believed with absolute certainty that the new Ida Mayhew that I had learned to know in Mr. Eltinge’s garden would gravitate towards you as surely as two drops of dew run together when brought sufficiently near, and I began to speak quite enthusiastically of what friends you would surely become, when Miss Mayhew’s manner taught me I had better change the subject. Oddly enough, she has never liked you, and yet, in justice to her, I must add that she acted conscientiously, and I have never heard one lady speak of another more favorably and sincerely, than she spoke of you, though it seemingly cost her an effort.”

A sudden moisture came into Jennie Burton’s eyes, and she said under her breath: “Poor child! that was noble and generous of her to speak so of me. Oh, how blind he is!” But with mock gravity she answered him:

“Your rather sentimental figure of speech, Mr. Van Berg, shows where your error lies. Miss Mayhew and myself are not pellucid drops of dew that

you look through at a glance. We are women: and the one thing in this world which men never will learn to understand is a woman. I'm going to puzzle you still further. I am learning to have a very thorough respect for Miss Mayhew. I am beginning to admire her exceedingly, and to think that she is growing exquisitely beautiful; and yet were she here this week you would find that I would not seek her society. Give your mind to your art, and never hope to untangle the snarl of a woman's mind. Men, in attempting such folly, have become hopelessly entangled. Take a woman's word for it—what you see you can't reason out. I've no doubt but that Miss Mayhew has excellent reasons for disliking me, and the fact that you can't understand them is nothing against them."

"Miss Jennie," said Van Berg resolutely, "for once I cannot take your word for it. You two ladies have puzzled me all summer, and I'll never be content till I solve the mysteries which so baffle me. My interest is not curiosity, but friendship, to say the least, that I hope will last through life. You will tell me some day all your trouble, and you will feel the better for telling me."

She became very pale at these words, and said gravely: "I cannot promise that—I doubt it. You may have to trust me blindly till you forget me."

"I do not trust you blindly; I never will forget you," he began, impetuously.

"Good-night, Mr. Van Berg," she said, and in a moment he was alone on the piazza.

"She is an angel of light, he muttered," and not a woman. I could worship her, but I'm too earthy in my nature to lover her as I ought."

He took the earliest train to New York, and so had a long afternoon in his studio. He was surprised to find how absorbed he soon became in his work. "Miss Jennie is right," he thought; "I'm an artist, and not a reformer or a metaphysician, and I had better spend my time here than in trying to solve feminine enigmas;" and he worked like a beaver until the fading light compelled him to desist. "There," he said, "that is a fair beginning. Two or three more days of work like this will secure me, I think, a friendlier glance than Miss Ida gave me last." From which words it might be gathered that he was thinking of other rewards than mere success in his art.

In the evening the wand of Theodore Thomas had a spell which he never thought of resisting, and it must be admitted that there lurked in his mind

the hope that Ida and her father might be drawn to the concert garden also. If so, he was sure he would pursue his investigations.

He was rewarded, for Mr. Mayhew and his daughter soon entered and took seats in the main lobby, where he and Stanton had sat nearly three months before. Van Berg congratulated himself that he was outside in the promenade, and so had not been observed; and he sought a dusky seat from which he might seek some further knowledge of a character that had won and retained a deepening interest from the time of their first meeting, which now seemed an age ago. Events mark time more truthfully than the course of the sun.

At first she seemed only solicitous about her father, who lighted a cigar and said something to her that must have been very reassuring and pleasant, for a glad smile broke over her pale face. But it vanished quickly, and the artist saw that her habitual expression was sad, and even dejected. She did not look around with the breezy alertness natural to a young girl in such a place. The curiously diverse people around her excited no interest, and she appeared inclined to lapse into deep reveries, even when the music was light and gay, as was the character of the earlier part of the entertainment. At times she would start perceptibly when her father spoke to her, and hesitate in her answer, as if she had to recall her thoughts from far-off wanderings. It would seem that Mr. Mayhew was troubled by her sad face and absent manner. He justly felt that the brilliant music ought to enliven her like sunlight; and that it did not proved the presence of some intervening cloud.

Van Berg's sympathies and interest at last became so strong that he determined to speak to her at once, but before he could take a step towards her the orchestra began playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the very music she ignored for the sake of Mr. Minty's compliments when first she had so exasperated him by her marvelously perfect features, but disagreeable face. He had not looked at the programme, and that this symphony should now be repeated seemed such a fortunate coincidence that he could not resist the temptation of contrasting the woman before him with the silly and undeveloped girl he first had seen. Moreover, he knew that the music must remind her of him, and he might gain a hint of her present feelings toward him. Either the beauty or something familiar in the exquisite strains soon caught her attention, and she took up her programme, which hitherto had lain neglected on her lap. She crimsoned instantly, and

her brow contracted into a frown; a moment later an expression of intense disgust passed over her face.

“Now I know what she thinks of me,” he thought with a sinking heart. “I doubt whether I had better speak to her this evening, and at this place.”

“What’s the matter, Ida?” asked her father. “Don’t you like the music?”

“I have disagreeable associations connected with it. The fault is wholly in me, and not the music.”

“Ida, darling, you are making me so happy that I wish I could do as much for you.”

“Don’t worry, father,” she said, trying to smile. “I’m happier than I deserve. Listen!”

As the last exquisite cadences died away, Van Berg saw that there were tears in her eyes. What did they mean? “Stanton repeated my harsh words and she recalls them,” was the best explanation he could think of. “By the fates!” he exclaimed, “if there isn’t Sibley with a toilet as spotless as he is himself smirched and blackened. Curse him! he actually has the impudence to speak to Miss Mayhew,” and the artist started up threateningly, but before discovering himself, he remembered that Ida’s natural protector was at her side. And yet he fairly trembled with rage and protest, that this fellow should be so near her again. He also saw that Mr. Mayhew rose and looked very menacing. But Ida was equal to the emergency, and extricated herself with womanly dignity, for while she blushed scarlet with shame, she was quiet and self-possessed, and paid no heed to his eagerly proffered hand.

“I was not myself that hateful day, Miss Ida,” he said hastily.

“I fear you were, sir,” she coldly replied. “At any rate, I am not my old self, and until you win and maintain the character of a gentleman, we must be strangers. Good evening, sir;” and she turned her back upon him.

His face became fairly livid with rage, but on encountering the stern and threatening eyes of Mr. Mayhew he slunk away and left the building.

“That’s my peerless, noble Ida,” whispered her father. “Oh thank God! thank God! I could not have survived if you had realized the fears I once had about that low scoundrel.”

Ida’s lip quivered as she said, “Father, please take me home. I don’t enjoy myself here.” They had taken but a few steps toward the door when the artist confronted them with eyes aglow with admiration and sympathy.

Poor Ida had no time to mask her feelings or check her impulses, and she took his extended hand as if she were sinking, while the color and light of

welcome flashed brightly into her face. Then her beautiful confusion suggested that she felt her greeting had been too cordial, and she sought with indifferent success to regain her dignity.

“Please don’t go just yet,” said Van Berg eagerly. “The concert is but half over, and there are some pretty things still to come.”

Ida hesitated and looked doubtfully at her father.

“I shall be very glad to stay,” he said with a smile, “if you feel able to. My daughter is not very well, I fear,” he added in explanation to the artist.

“Perhaps it has been a little close here in the lobby,” suggested Van Berg, “and a walk in the open air will be agreeable. If you will trust your daughter to me, sir, I promise to bring her back before she is tired. I have much to tell her about her old friend, Mr. Eltinge, whom I visited yesterday, and the pictures. Perhaps you will go with us, for I know what I have to say will interest you also.”

“I think I’ll light another cigar and wait for you here,” Mr. Mayhew answered quietly. “Old people like to sit still after their day’s work, and if Ida feels strong enough I would enjoy hearing the rest of the concert.”

“It would be hard to resist the temptation to hear anything about dear old Mr. Eltinge,” said Ida, taking the artist’s arm, and feeling as if she were being swept away on a shining tide.

“You WERE glad to see me, Miss Mayhew, and you can’t deny it,” Van Berg began exultantly.

“You almost crushed my hand, and it aches still,” was her demure reply.

“Well, that was surely the wound of a friend.”

“You are very good to speak to me at all, after all that’s happened,” she said in a low tone and with downcast face.

“What a strange coincidence! That is exactly what I was thinking of you. I almost feared you would treat me as you did Sibley. How much good it did me to see him slinking away like a whipped cur! I never realized before how perfectly helpless even brazen villainy is in the presence of womanly dignity.”

“Why, were you present then?” she asked, with a quick blush.

“Not exactly present, but I saw your face and his, and a stronger contrast I scarcely expect to see again.”

“You artists look at everything and everybody as pictures.”

“Now, Miss Mayhew, you are growing severe again. I don’t carry the shop quite as far as that, and I have not been looking at you as a picture at

all this evening. I shall make known the whole enormity of my offense, and the if I must follow Sibley, I must, but I shall carry with me a little shred of your respect for telling the truth. I had a faint hope that you and your father would come to-night, and I was looking for you, and when you came I watched you. I could not resist the temptation of comparing the Miss Mayhew I now so highly esteem and respect, with the lady I first met at this place.”

“Oh, Mr. Van Berg,” said Ida, in a low, hurt tone, “I don’t think that was fair to me, or right.”

“I am confessing and not excusing myself, Miss Mayhew. I once very justly appeared to you like a prig, and now I fear I shall seem a spy; but after our visit to that old garden together, and your frankness to me, I feel under bonds to tell the whole truth. You said we were fated to misunderstand each other. I think not, for if you ever permit me to be your friend I shall be the frankest one you ever had;” at these words he felt her hand trembling on his arm, and she would not look up nor make any reply.

“Well,” said he, desperately, “I expect Sibley’s fate will soon be mine. I suppose it was a mean thing to watch you, but it would seem a meaner thing to me not to tell you. I was about to speak to you, Miss Mayhew, when by another odd coincidence the orchestra commenced playing music that I knew would remind you of me. I was gaining the impression before you left the country that as you came to think the past all over, you had found that there was more against me than you could forgive, or else that I was so inseparably associated with that which was painful that you would be glad to forget the one with the other. I must admit that this impression was greatly strengthened by the expression of your face, and I almost decided to leave the place without speaking to you. But I found I could not, and—well, you know I did not. You see I’m at your mercy again.”

Ida was greatly relieved, for she now learned that he had discovered nothing in his favor, and that she was still mistress of the situation.

“I do not think you are very penitent; I fear you would do the same thing over again,” she said.

“Indeed, Miss Mayhew, when I first met you here I thought I would always do the right and proper thing, and I fear I thought some things right because I did them. I’ve lived a hundred years since that time, and am beginning to find myself out. Didn’t you think me the veriest prig that ever smiled in a superior way at the world?”

“I don’t think I shall give you my opinion,” she replied, averting her face to hide a blush and a laugh.

“No need. I saw your opinion in your face when you looked down at your programme half an hour since.”

“You are mistaken; I was thinking of myself at that moment, for I could not help remembering what a fool I must have appeared to you on that occasion.”

He looked at her in surprise. “Miss Burton was right,” he ejaculated, “I never shall understand you.”

“Was she talking about me?” asked Ida, in a low tone.

“Yes, and she spoke of you in the most complimentary way, as you did of her. Why the mischief you two ladies do not become the warmest friends is beyond me. Sit down here a little while, Miss Mayhew, for you are growing tired;” and she was very glad to comply.

As she made no effort to continue the conversation he resumed, “You haven’t told me what my punishment is to be.”

“Are you so anxious to be punished?” she asked, looking up shyly at him.

“Well, my conscience troubles me greatly, and I feel I ought to do something for you in the way of expiation.”

“And so I gather that anything done for me would be such severe penance that your conscience would be appeased.”

“Now, Miss Mayhew,” he replied, looking earnestly into her face, “tell me truly, do you gather any such impression from my words and manner?”

But she kept her eyes resolutely on the ground, and said demurely, “Such was the obvious meaning of your words.”

“Do you know why I am in the city?” he asked after a moment.

“I have not presumed to think why.”

“Perhaps I can make a little inroad in your indifference when I tell you that I have spent several hours in my studio working on your picture, and that I intend to work the remainder of the week so as to have it ready for you Saturday evening.”

She looked up now with a face radiant with surprise and pleasure, “O Mr. Van Berg, I did not dream of your taking so much trouble for me.”

“That’s a small payment on an old debt. What can I do for you while I am in the city, to atone for my rudeness?”

She looked at him hesitatingly and wistfully a moment.

“I know you wish something, but fear to ask it,” he said, gently, “and I’m sorry to remember I’ve done so little to inspire your confidence.”

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said in a low tone, looking earnestly at him while she spoke, so as to learn from his expression how he received her request. “Your kindness does tempt me to ask a favor. Please remember I’m acting from an impulse caused by this unexpected talk we are having, and pardon me if I overstep the bounds of reserve or suggest a task that you might very naturally shrink from as disagreeable.”

“I pledge you my word at once to do what you wish.”

“No, don’t do that. Wait till you hear all. If when it comes easily and naturally in your way you will do a little towards helping me keep father the man he can be, my gratitude will be deeper than you can understand. I am studying him very carefully and I find that any encouraging recognition from those who have known his past, has great weight with him. At the same time it must be very unobtrusive and come as a matter of course as it were. You gave him your society one Sunday morning last June in a way that did him a great deal of good, and if I had only seconded your efforts then, everything might have been different. I can never remember that day without a blush of shame. I can’t help the past, but my whole soul is now bent on making amends to father. I fear, however, my deep solicitude has led me to ask more than good taste can sanction.”

“Miss Mayhew,” said the artist, eagerly, “this is one of the best moments of my life. You could not have made such a request unless you trusted me, unless you had fully forgiven me all the wrong I have done you. I doubted if I could ever win your friendship, but I think I can claim a friend’s place already in your esteem, since you are willing to let me share in so sacred a duty. I renew my pledge with double emphasis.”

He never forgot the smile with which she rewarded him, as she said, in a low tone, “That’s better than I thought. You are very kind to me. But I’m staying too long from father.”

“We’ll understand each other eventually,” he said gently. “Now I know why tears were in your eyes before the symphony was over.”

“No you don’t,” she whispered to herself.

As they took their seats by Mr. Mayhew he remarked with a smile, “Mr. Van Berg must have had a long budget of news from your good old friend.”

Ida looked at the artist in dismay, and was still more embarrassed as she saw a sudden flash of mirth and exultation in his eyes. But he turned to Mr. Mayhew and replied, promptly, "Two pictures are growing out of my visits to Mr. Eltinge and his garden. The one that is for Mr. Eltinge contains a portrait of Miss Mayhew as I saw her reading to him. I wish you and your daughter would visit my studio tomorrow and see the sketches, and if Miss Mayhew would give me one or two sittings, I could make a much better picture for Mr. Eltinge than now is possible, and I'm anxious to do the very best I can for him."

"I would be very glad to come," said Mr. Mayhew, and his pleased expression confirmed his words. "Will a visit before I go down town be too early?"

"Not at all. I am always at work early."

"Well, Ida, does Mr. Eltinge miss your visits very much? It's selfish in me to let you stay in the city."

"He does indeed, sir," said the artist answering for her. "He talked to me continually about her yesterday, although I can't say I tried to change the subject."

"Father, Mr. Van Berg shall not shield my short-comings," said Ida, with crimson cheeks. "I forgot to ask about Mr. Eltinge. To tell the truth, we were talking of old times. I met Mr. Van Berg here last June and I made a very bad impression on him."

"And I at the same time made a worse impression on Miss Mayhew," added the artist.

"Well," said her father, with a doubtful smile and a puzzled glance from one to the other, "one almost might be tempted to believe that you had been revising your impressions."

"Mine has not been revised, but changed altogether," said Van Berg, decisively.

"Come, father, let us go at once lest Mr. Van Berg's impressions change again," and her mirthful glance as she gave him her hand in parting revealed a new element in her character. She was not developing the cloying sweetness of honey.

48. Ida's Temptation

IF VAN BERG had given thought to himself that evening as he did to Ida Mayhew he might have discovered some rather odd phenomena in his varying mental states. Earlier in the summer he had been a very deliberate and conscientious wooer. He had leisurely taken counsel of his reason, judgment, and good taste; he mentally consulted his parents, and satisfied himself that Miss Burton would have peculiar charms for them, and so it had come to seem almost a duty as well as a privilege to seek that young lady's hand. The sagacity and nice appreciation of character on which he had so greatly prided himself led to the belief that fortune in giving him a chance to win such a maiden had been very kind. That his pulse was so even and his heart had so little to say in the matter was only a proof that he did not possess an unbalanced head-long nature like that of Stanton, who had soon become wholly mastered by his passion. He had at one time reasoned it all out to his satisfaction, and believed he was paying his suit to the woman he would make his wife in an eminently proper way. but now that he was merely trying to obtain a young girl's friendship, the cool and masterful poise which he had then been able to maintain, was apparently deserting him. He might have asked himself if he ever remembered being such an enthusiastic friend before. He might have considered how often he had kept awake and counted the hours till he should meet a friend from whom he had just parted. That these obvious thoughts and contrasts did not occur to him only proved that he was smitten already by that blindness which a certain spiritual malady usually occasions in its earlier stages.

As for poor Ida, she still felt that her little boat was being carried forward by a shining tide—whither she dared not think. She had come to the city to escape from the artist, and as a result she might spend long hours alone with him in his studio and see far more of him than if she had remained in the country. She had not sought it—she had not even dared to hope or dream of such a thing; but now that this exquisite cup of pleasure had been pressed to her very lips by other hands she could not refuse it.

Her father had watched her keenly but furtively since she had been his companion, and until the artist had accosted her the evening before had not been able to understand the depression which she could not disguise wholly from him; but the light and welcome that flashed into her face when greeting Van Berg had suggested her secret, and all that followed confirmed his surmise. The truth was plainer still when she came down to their early breakfast the next morning with color in her cheeks and a fitful light of excitement in her eyes.

As he realized the truth he fairly trembled with apprehension and longing. "Oh, if Ida could only marry that man I would be almost beside myself with joy," he thought; "but I fear it is rash even to hope for such a thing. Indeed, I myself am the obstacle that would probably prevent it all. The Van Bergs are a proud race, and this young man's father knows me too well. O God! I could be annihilated if thereby my child could be happy."

"Ida," he said, hesitatingly, "perhaps I had better not go with you this morning. I imagine Mr. Van Berg asked me out of politeness rather than from any wish to see me and—and—I think I had better not go."

She looked up at him swiftly, and the rich color mantled her face, for she read his thoughts in part. But she only said quietly:

"Then I will not go."

"That would not be right or courteous, Ida," but I think you young people will get on better without me."

"You are mistaken, Father; I never intend to get on without you, and any friend of mine who does not welcome you becomes a stranger from that hour. But I think you are doing Mr. Van Berg an injustice. At any rate we will give him a chance to show a better spirit."

"Ida, my child, if you only knew how gladly I would sacrifice myself to make you happy!"

She came to him and put her arms around his neck and looking up into his face said, with the earnestness and solemnity of a vow, "I will take no happiness which I cannot receive as your loving daughter. As long as you are the man you have been since Sunday I will stand proudly at your side. If you should ever be weak again you will drag me down with you."

He held her from him and looked at her as a miser might gloat over his treasure.

"Ida, my good angel," he murmured.

“Nonsense!” she exclaimed, trying to hide her feelings by a little brusqueness, “I’m as human a girl as there is in this city, and will try your patience a hundred times before the year is out. Come, let us go and visit this proud artist. He had better beware, or he may find an expression on my face that he won’t like if I should decide to give him a sitting.”

But the artist did like the expression of Ida’s face as he glanced up from his work with great frequency and with an admiring glow in his eyes that was anything but cool and business-like. Even her jealous love had not detected a tone or act in his reception of her father that was not all she could ask, and she had never seen the poor man look so pleased and hopeful as when he left the studio for his office. There had not been a particle of patronage in Van Berg’s manner, but only the cordial and respectful courtesy of a younger gentleman towards an elderly one. Mr. Mayhew had been made at home at once, and before he left, the artist had obtained his promise to come again with his daughter on the following morning.

“His bearing towards father was the perfection of good breeding,” thought Ida, and it would seem that some of the gratitude with which her heart overflowed found its way into her tones and eyes.

“You look so pleasantly and kindly, that you must be thinking of Mr. Eltinge,” said Van Berg.

“You are not to paint my thoughts,” said Ida, with a quick flush.

“I wish I could.”

“I’m glad you can’t.”

“You do puzzle one, Miss Mayhew. On the day of our visit to the old garden your thoughts seemed as clear to me as the water of the little brook, and I supposed I saw all that was in your mind. But before the day was over I felt that I did not understand you at all.”

“Mr. Van Berg, I’m astonished you are an artist.”

“Because of the character of my work?”

“No, indeed. But such a wonderful taste for solving problems suggests a metaphysician. I think you would become discouraged with such tasks. Just think how many ladies there are in the world, and I’m sure any one of them is a more abstruse problem than I am.”

The artist looked up at her in surprise and bit his lip with a faint trace of embarrassment, but he said, after a moment, “But it does not follow that they are interesting problems.”

“You don’t know,” she replied.

“And never shall,” he added. “I do know, however, that you are a very interesting one.”

“I didn’t agree to come here to be solved as a problem,” she said demurely, but with a mirthful twinkle in her eyes; “I only promised you a sitting for the sake of Mr. Eltinge.”

“Two sittings, Miss Mayhew.”

“Well, yes, if two are needful.”

“By all the nine muses! you do not expect me to make a good picture from only two sittings?”

“You know how slight is my acquaintance with any of those superior divinities, and in this sacred haunt of theirs I feel that I should express all my opinions with bated breath; but truly, Mr. Van Berg, I thought you could make a picture from the sketch you made in the garden.”

“Yes, I could make A picture, but every sitting you will give enables me to make a better picture, and you know how much we both owe to Mr. Eltinge.”

“I’m learning every day how much, how very much, I owe to him,” she said, earnestly.

“Then for his sake you will promise to come as often as I wish you to,” was his eager response, and it was so eager that she looked up at him in surprise.

“Really, Mr. Van Berg, I am becoming bewildered as to what that little sketch I asked you to make may involve.”

“Will it be so wearisome for you to come here?” he asked, with a look of disappointment that surprised her still more.

“I didn’t say that,” was her quick reply; “and I promise to come tomorrow. Perhaps you will find that sufficient.”

“I know it won’t be sufficient.”

“Cousin Ik has told me that you are very painstaking and conscientious in your work.”

“Thanks to Cousin Ik. When I get a chance to paint such a picture as this I do, indeed, wish to make the most of it.”

“But how long must Mr. Eltinge wait for it?”

“I think we can send it to him as a Christmas present.”

“We? You, rather, will send it.”

“No, WE; or rather, in giving me the sittings you give Mr. Eltinge all that makes the picture valuable to him.”

Ida's cheeks began to burn, for the artist's words suggested a powerful temptation that; in accordance with her impetuous nature, came in the form of an impulse rather than an insidious and lurking thought. The impulse was to accept of the opportunities he pressed upon her, and, if possible, win him away from Jennie Burton. At first it seemed a mean and dishonorable thing to do, and her face grew crimson with shame at the very thought. Van Berg looked at her with surprise. Conscious himself that while he meant that Mr. Eltinge should profit richly from her visits, it was not by any means for the sake of the old gentleman only that he had been requesting her to come so often, his own color began to rise.

"She begins to see that my motives are a little mixed, and that is what is embarrassing her," he thought as he bent over his work to hide his own confusion.

"Mr. Van Berg, I'm getting tired of sitting still," Ida exclaimed. "It's contrary to my restless disposition. May I not make an exploring tour around your studio? You have no idea what a constraint I've been putting on my feminine curiosity."

"I give you a 'carte-blanche' to do as you please. Have you much curiosity?"

"I'm a daughter of Eve."

"Well, I'm coming to the conclusion that there is a good deal of 'old Adam' in me," and he felt that as she then appeared she could tempt him to almost anything.

Now that her back was towards him she felt safer, and her mellow laugh trilled out as she said, "We may have to dub this place a confessional rather than a studio of you talk in that way."

"If I confessed all my sins against you, Miss Mayhew, it would, indeed, be a confessional." He spoke so earnestly that she gave him a quick glance of surprise.

"There is no need," she said, hesitatingly, "since I have given you full absolution," and she suddenly became interested in something in the farthest corner of the apartment. After a moment she added, "If I am to come here I must say to you again, as I did on the day I so disgusted you by my behavior in the stage—you must let by-gones be by-gones."

It was now the artist's turn to laugh, and his merriment was so hearty and prolonged that she turned a vexed and crimson face towards him and said, "I think it's too bad in you to laugh at me so."

“Miss Mayhew, I assure you I’m not laughing at you at all. But your words suggest a good omen. Didn’t that stage teach you that fate means us to be good friends in spite of all you can do? Before we met in that car of fortune I had been trying for a week or more to make your acquaintance, and made a martyr of myself in the effort. I played the agreeable to nearly every lady in the hotel, and perspired on picnics and boating parties that I did not enjoy. I played croquet and other games till I was half bored to death, and all in the effort to produce such a genial atmosphere of enjoyment and good-feeling that you would thaw a little towards me; but you wouldn’t speak to me, nor even look at me. At last I gave up in despair and went off among the hills with my sketch-book, and when returning that blessed old stage overtook me. Wasn’t I pleased when I found you were a fellow-passenger! and let me now express my thanks that you looked so resolutely away from me, for it gave me a chance to contrast a profile in which I could detect no fault with the broad, sultry visage of the stout woman opposite me. And then, thank heaven, the horses ran away. Whoever heard of stage horses running away before? It was a smile of fortune—a miracle. Submit to destiny, Miss Mayhew, for it’s decreed that we should be good friends,” and he laughed again in huge enjoyment of the whole scene.

In spite of herself Ida found his humor contagious and irresistible, and she laughed also till the tears came into her eyes.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she exclaimed, “I ought to be indignant, or I ought to be ashamed to look you in the face. I don’t know what I ought to do, only I’m sure it isn’t the proper thing at all for me to be laughing in this way. I think I’ll go home at once, for I’m only wasting your time.

His answer was not very relevant, for he said impetuously, “Oh, Miss Ida, I would give five years of my life to be able to paint your portrait as you now appear, for the picture would cure old melancholy himself and fill a prison-cell with light.”

“I won’t come here any more if you laugh at me so,” she said, putting on her hat.

“See,” he said, “I’m as grave as a judge. I will never laugh AT you, but I hope to laugh WITH you many a time, for to tell you the truth the experience has reminded me of the ‘inextinguishable laughter of the Gods.’ Please don’t go yet.”

“If I must come so often my visits must be brief.”

“Then you will come?”

“I haven’t promised anything except for tomorrow. Good-morning.”

“Let me walk home with you.”

“No, positively. You have wasted too much time already.”

“You will at least shake hands in token of peace and amity before we part?”

“Oh, certainly, if you think it worth the while when we are to meet so soon again. Oh! you hurt me. You did that once before.”

His face suddenly became grave and even tender in its expression, as he said, in a low, deep voice, “More than once, Miss Ida. Don’t think I forget or forgive myself because you treat me so generously.”

She would not look up and meet his eyes, but replied, in tones that trembled with repressed feeling, “I could forgive anything after your manner towards father this morning. Never think I can forget such favors,” and then she snatched away her hand and went swiftly out. Her tears fell fast as she sought her home by quiet streets with bowed head and veil drawn tightly down, and she murmured:

“I cannot give him up—I cannot, indeed, I cannot. If I lose him it must be because there is no help for it.”

Then conscience uttered its low, faint protest and her tears fell faster still.

When reaching her room she threw herself on the sofa and sobbed, “Would it be so very, very wrong to win him if I could? she can’t love him as much as I do. Why, I was ready to die even to win his respect, and now in these visits he gives me a chance to win his love. Is he pledged to Miss Burton yet? If he is, I do not know it. He does seem to care for me—there is often something in his face and tone that whispers hope. If he loves her as I love him he could not be here in New York all this week. But it’s her love that troubles me—I’ve seen it in her eyes when he was not observing, and I fear she just worships him. Alas, he gave her reason. His manner has been that of a lover, and no one—he least of all—would think of flirting with Jennie Burton. But does he lover her so deeply that I could not win him if I had a chance? Would it be very wicked if I did? Must I give up my happiness for her happiness? I came to New York to get away from danger and temptation and here I am right in the midst of it. What shall I do! Oh, my Saviour, I’m half afraid to speak to thee about this.”

“If I could only see Mr. Eltinge,” she murmured, after an hour of distracted thought and indecision. “There is no time to write—indeed, I could not write on such a subject, and—and—I’m afraid he’d advise me against it. He can’t understand a woman’s feelings in a case like this, at least he could not understand a passionate, faulty girl like me. I’ve no patience—no fortitude. I could die for my love—I think, I hope, I could for my faith,—but I feel no power within me to endure patiently year after year. I would be like the poor, weak women they shut up in the Inquisition and who suffered on to the end only through remorseless compulsion, because the walls were too thick for escape, and the tormentor’s hands and the rack were irresistible. My soul would succumb as well as my body. This would seem wild, wicked talk to Mr. Eltinge; it would seem weak and irrational to any man. But I’m only Ida Mayhew, and such is my nature. I’ve been made all the more incapable of patient self-sacrifice by self-indulgence from my childhood up. Oh, will it be very, very wrong to win him if I can?” and the passionate tears and sobs that followed these words would seem to indicate that she understood her nature only too well.

At last she concluded, in weariness and exhaustion, “I’m too weak and distracted to think any more. I hardly know whether it’s right or wrong. I hope it isn’t very wrong. I won’t decide now. Let matters take their own course as they have done and I may see clearer by and by.”

But deep in her heart she felt that this was about the same as yielding to the temptation.

She bathed her eyes, tried to think how she could spend the intervening hours before they would meet again. Then with a sense of dismay she began to consider, “If we are to meet so often what are we to talk about? He once tried to converse with me and found me so ignorant he couldn’t. It seemed to me I didn’t know anything that evening, and he’ll soon grow disgusted with me again as he sees my poor little pack of knowledge is like a tramp’s bundle that he carries around with him. I must read—I must study every moment, or I haven’t the remotest chance of success. Success! Oh, merciful heaven! it’s the same as if I were setting about it all deliberately and there’s no use of deceiving myself. I hope it isn’t very, very wrong.”

She went to her father’s library with flushed cheeks and hesitating steps, as if it were the tree from which she might pluck the fruit of forbidden knowledge. The long rows of ponderous and neglected books appalled her; she took down two or three and they seemed like unopened mines, deep and

rocky. She felt instinctively that there was not time for her to transmute their ores into graceful and natural mental adornments.

“Methuselah himself couldn’t read them all,” she exclaimed. “By the powers! if here isn’t more books than I can carry, on one subject. I suppose cartloads have been written about art. I’ve no doubt he’s read them all, but I never can; I fear my attempt to read up is like trying to get strong by eating a whole ox at once. Oh, why did I waste my school-days, and indeed all my life as I have!” and she stamped her foot in her impatience and irritation.

“Well,” she sighed at last, with a grim sort of humor; “I must do the best I can. It’s the same as if I were on a desert island. I must tie together some sort of a raft in order to cross the gulf that separates us, for I never can stand it to stay here alone. Since I have not time to spare I may as well commence with that encyclopaedia, and learn a little about as many things as possible; then if he introduces a subject he shall at least see that I know what he is talking about.” And during the afternoon the poor girl plodded through sever articles, often recalling her wandering thoughts by impatient little gestures, and by the time her father returned she was conscious of knowing a very little indeed about a number of things. “No matter,” she thought, compressing her lips, “I won’t give up till I must. It’s my one chance for happiness in this world, and I’ll cling to it while there is a shred of hope left.”

It was with an eager and resolute face that she confronted her father that evening, as they sat down to dinner. He thought she would descant on her experiences of the morning, and he was anxious for a chance to say how truly he appreciated Mr. Van Berg’s cordial manner, but she surprised him by asking abruptly:

“Father, when do we elect another president?”

He told her, and then followed a rapid fire of questions about the general and state government, and the names and characters of the men who held the chief offices. At last Mr. Mayhew laid down his knife and fork in his astonishment, and asked sententiously:

“How long is it since you decided to go into politics?”

Ida’s laugh was very reassuring, and she said, “Poor father! I don’t wonder you think I’ve lost my wits, now that I’m trying to use the few I have. Don’t you see? I don’t know anything that’s worth knowing. I wasted my time at school, for my head was full of beaux, dress, and nonsense. Besides, I don’t think my teachers took much pains to make me understand

anything. At any rate, my dancing-master, and perhaps my music-teacher—a little bit—are the only ones that have any reason to be proud of the result. Now I want you to brush up your ideas about everything, so you can answer the endless questions I am going to ask you.”

“Why bless you, child, you take away my breath. Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

“The way they built Rome will never answer for me. I must grow like one of our Western cities that has a mayor and opera-house almost before the Indians and wolves are driven out of town. Speaking of Rome reminds me how little I know of that city, and it’s a burning shame, too, for I spent a month there.”

“Well,” said Mr. Mayhew, with kindling interest, “suppose we take up a course of reading about Rome for the winter.”

“For the winter! That won’t do at all. Can’t you tell me something of interest about Rome this evening?”

“I’ve already mentioned the interesting fact—that it wasn’t built in a day. I think that’s the most important thing that you need to know about Rome and everything else this evening. Why, Ida, you can’t become wise as an ostrich makes its supper—by swallowing everything that comes in its way. You are not a bit like an ostrich.”

“An ostrich is a silly bird that puts its head under the sand and thins its whole great body hidden because it can’t see itself, isn’t it, father?”

“I’ve heard that story told of it,” replied Mr. Mayhew, laughing.

“Anything but an ostrich, then. Come, I’ll read the evening paper to you on condition you tell me the leading questions of the day. What is just now the leading question of the day?”

“Well,” said Mr. Mayhew, demurely, but with a sparkle of humor in his eye, “one of the leading questions of this day with me has been whether Mr. Van Berg would not enjoy dining with us tomorrow evening now that he is here alone in the city?”

Ida instantly held the newspaper before her crimson face and said:

“Father, you ought to be ashamed thus to divert my mind from the pursuit of useful knowledge.”

Her father came to her side and said very kindly: “Ida, darling, you are a little bit like an ostrich now.”

She sprang up, and, hiding her face on his shoulder, trembled like a leaf. “Oh, father,” she whispered, “I would not have him know for the world. Is

it so very plain?"

"Not to him, my child, but the eyes of a love like mine are very keen. So you needn't be on your guard before your old father as you must be before him and the world. You shall have only rest and sympathy at home as far as I can give them. Indeed, if you will let me, I'll become a very unobtrusive, but perhaps, useful ally. At any rate, I'll try not to make any stupid, ignorant blunders. I have like Mr. Van Berg from the first hour of our meeting, and I would thank God from the depths of my heart if this could be."

"Dear, good father, how little I understood you. I've been living in poverty over a gold mine. But father, I'm so ignorant and Mr. Van Berg knows everything."

"Not quite, you'll find. He's only a man, Ida. But you can never win him through politics or by discussing with him the questions of the day. These are not in your line nor his."

"What can I do, father. Indeed, it does not seem to me maidenly to do anything."

"It would not be maidenly, Ida, to step one hair's breadth beyond the line of scrupulous, womanly delicacy, and by any such course you would only defeat and thwart yourself. A woman must always be sought; and as a rule, she loses as she seeks. But I trust to your instincts to guide you here. You have only to be simple and true, as you have been since the happy miracle that transformed you. Unless a man is infatuated as I—but no matter. A man that keeps his sense welcomes truthfulness—a high delicate sense of honor—above all things in a woman, for it gives him a sense of security and rest. By truthfulness I do not mean the indiscreet blurting out of things that good taste would leave unsaid, but clear-eyed integrity that hides no guile. Then, again, unless a man is blinded by passion or some kind of infatuation he knows that the chief need of his life is a home lighted and warmed by an unwavering love. With these his happiness and success are secured, as far as they can be in this world, unless he is a brute and a fool, and has no right to exist at all. But I am growing preachy. Let me suggest some things that I have observed in this artist. He is a high-toned pagan and worships beauty; but with this outward perfection he also demands spiritual loveliness, for with him mind and honor are in the ascendant. He admired you immensely from the first, and since your character has been growing in harmony with your face he has sought your society. So, be simple, true, and modest, and

you will win him if the thing is possible. You will never win him by being anything else, and you might lose your own respect and his too.”

“I’ll suffer anything rather than that, father. I think you had better not invite him tomorrow evening.”

“I’ll be governed by what I see tomorrow,” he replied, musingly. “Both my business and my habit of mind have taught me to observe and study men’s motives and impulses very closely. You could order a suitable dinner after leaving the studio, could you not?”

“Yes, father.”

“Well, then, my Princess Ida, I’ll be your grand vizier, and I’ll treat with this foreign power with such a fine diplomacy that he shall appreciate all the privileges he obtains. But we will keep our self-respect hereafter, Ida, and then we can look the world in the face and ask no odds of it.”

“Yes, father, let us keep that at all events. And yet I’m only a woman.”

“You are the woman that has made me happy, and I think there is another man who will want to be made happy also. And now we will defer all other questions of the day, for I must go out for a time. Do not think I undervalue your craving for information, and you shall have it as fast as you can take care of it. You have grown pale and thin this summer, but I do not expect you to become plump and rosy again in a day.”

“Oh, I’m rosy too often as it is. Why is it that girls must blush so ridiculously when they don’t want to? That’s the question of the day for me. I could flirt desperately in old times, and yet look as demure and cool as if I were an innocent. But now, oh! I’m fairly enraged with myself at times.”

“They say blushes are love’s trail,” said Mr. Mayhew with a laugh, “and since he is around I suppose he must leave his tracks. If you wish for a more scientific reason let me add that physiology teaches us that the blood comes from the heart. I can assure you, however, that there are but few gentlemen who admire ladies that cannot blush, and Mr. Van Berg is not one of them.”

Ida spent the evening at her piano instead of over the encyclopaedia, but she sighed again and again.

“Simple and true! I fear Jennie Burton and Mr. Eltinge would say I was neither if they knew what was in my heart. But I can’t help it—I can’t give him up after what has happened since I came to the city, unless I must.”

But the music she selected was simple and true. Tossing her brilliant and florid pieces impatiently aside, she played or sang only that which was plaintive, low, and in harmony with her thoughts. It also seemed to have a

peculiar attractiveness to a tall gentleman who lingered some moments beneath the windows, and even took one or two steps up towards the door, and then turned and strode away as if conscious that he must either enter or depart at once.

49. The Blind God

THE MISS MAYHEW that crossed the artist's threshold the following morning might have been taken as a model of graceful self-possession, but she disguised a maiden with as fluttering a heart and trembling a soul as ever faced one of the supreme moments of destiny. Her father, however, proved a faithful and intelligent ally, and his manner towards Van Berg was a fine blending of courtesy and dignity, suggesting a man as capable of conferring as of receiving favors. His host would indeed have been blind and stupid if he had tried to patronize Mr. Mayhew that morning.

Although unconscious of the fact, Van Berg was for a time subjected to the closest scrutiny. Love had deep if not dark designs against him, and the glances he bent on Ida might suggest that he was only too ready to become a victim. He had welcomed to his study two conspirators who were committed to their plot by the strongest of motives, and yet they were such novel conspirators that a word, a glance, an expression even of "ennui" or indifference would have so touched their pride that they would have abandoned their wives at every cost to themselves. Were they trying to ensnare him? Never were such films and gossamer threads used in like entanglement before. He could have brushed them all away by one cold sweep of his eyes, and the maiden who had not scrupled at death to gain merely his respect, would have left the studio with a colder glance than his, nor would her womanly strength have failed her until she reached a refuge which his eye could not penetrate; but then—God pity her. The tragedies over which the angels weep are the bloodless wounds of the spirit.

But it would seem that the atmosphere of Van Berg's studio that summer morning was not at all conducive to tragedy of any kind, nor were there in his face or manner any indications of comedy, which to poor Ida would have been far worse; for an air of careless "bonhomie" on his part when she was so desperately in earnest would have made his smiles and jests like heartless mockery.

And yet, in spite of his manner the previous day, the poor girl had come to the studio fearing far more than she hoped, and burdened also with a troubled conscience. She was almost sure she was not doing right, and yet the temptation was too strong to be resisted. But when he took her hand in greeting that morning, and said with a smile that seemed to flash out from the depths of his soul, "I won't hurt you any more if I can help it," all scruples, all hesitancy vanished for a time, like frostwork in the sun. His magnetism was irresistible, and she felt that it would require all her tact and resolution to keep him by some careless, random word or act, from brushing aside the veil behind which shrank her trembling, and as yet, unsought love.

But Van Berg was even a rarer study than the maiden, and his manner towards both Ida and her father might well lead one to think that he was inclined to become the chief conspirator in the design against himself. He had scarcely been conscious of time or place since parting the previous day with the friend he was so bent on securing, and when at last he slept in the small hours of the morning he dreamt that he had been caught by a mighty tidal wave that was bearing him swiftly towards heaven on its silver crest. When he awoke, the wave, so far from being a bubble, seemed a grand spiritual reality, and he felt as if he had already reached a seventh heaven of vague, undefined exhilaration. Never before had life appeared so rich a possession and so full of glorious possibilities. Never in the past had he felt his profession to be so noble and worthy of his devotion, and never had the fame he hoped to grasp by means of it seemed so near. Beauty became to him so infinitely beautiful and divine that he felt he could worship it were it only embodied, and then with a strange and exquisite thrill of exultation he exclaimed: "Right or wrong, to my eye it is embodied in Ida Mayhew, and she will fill my studio with light again today and many days to come. If ever an artist was fortunate in securing as a friend, as an inspiration, a perfect and budding flower of personal and spiritual loveliness, I am that happy man."

The Van Berg of other days would have called the Van Berg that waited impatiently for his guests that morning a rhapsodical fool, and the greater part of the world would offer no dissent. The world is very prone to call every man who is possessed by a little earnestness or enthusiasm a fool, but it is usually an open question which is the more foolish—the world or the man; and perhaps we shall all learn some day that there was more of sanity

in our rhapsodies than in the shrewd calculations that verged towards meanness. Be this as it may in the abstract, Van Berg regarded himself as the most rational man in the city that morning. He did not try to account for his mental state by musty and proverbial wisdom or long-established principles of psychology. The glad, strong consciousness of his own soul satisfied him and made everything appear natural. Since he HAD this strong and growing friendship for this maiden, who was evidently pleased to come again to his studio, though so coy and shy in admitting it, why should he not have it? There was nothing in his creed against such a friendship, and everything for it. Men of talent, not to mention genius, had ever sought inspiration from those most capable of imparting it, and this girl's beauty and character were kindling his mind to that extent that he began to hope he could now do some of the finest work of his life. The fact that he felt towards her the strongest friendly regard was in itself enough, and Van Berg was too good a modern thinker to dispute with facts, especially agreeable ones.

The practical outcome of the friendship which he lost no chance of manifesting that morning, was that Mr. Mayhew, in an easy, informal manner, extended his invitation, and the artist accepted in a way that proved he was constrained by something more than courtesy or a sense of duty, and Conspirator Number Two walked down Broadway muttering (as do all conspirators): "Those young people are liable to stumble into paradise at any moment."

"How did you manage to get through a hot August day in town after you were released from durance here?" asked Van Berg.

"I do not know that it required any special management," replied Ida demurely. "I suppose YOU took a nap after your severe labors of the morning."

"Now you are satirical. My labor was all in the afternoon, for I worked from the time you left me till dusk."

"Didn't you stop for lunch or dinner?" exclaimed Ida, with surprise.

"Not a moment."

"Why, Mr. Van Berg, what was the matter with you? It will never do for me to come here and waste your forenoons if you try to make up so unmercifully after I'm gone."

"You were indeed altogether to blame. Some things, like fine music or a great painting or—it happened to be yourself yesterday—often cause what I

call my working moods, when I feel able to do the best things of which I'm capable. Not that they are wonderful or ever will be—they are simply my best efforts—and I assure you I'm not foolish enough to waste such moments in the prosaic task of eating."

"I'm only a matter-of-fact person. Plain food at regular intervals is very essential to me."

He looked up at her quickly and said: "Now you are mentally laughing at me again. I assure you I ate like an ostrich after my work was over. I even upset the dignity of an urbane Delmonico waiter."

Ida bit her lip as she recalled certain resemblances on her own part to that suggestive bird, but she said sympathetically: "It must be rather stupid to dine alone at a restaurant."

"I found it insufferably stupid, and I'm more grateful to your father for his invitation than you would believe."

Ida could scarcely disguise her pleasure, and with mirthful eyes she said:

"Really, Mr. Van Berg, you place me in quite a dilemma. I find that in one mood you do not wish to eat at all, and again you say you have the rather peculiar appetite of the bird you named. Now I'm housekeeper at present, and scarcely know how to provide. What kind of viands are best adapted to artists and poets, and—"

"And idiots in general, you might conclude," said Van Berg, laughing. "After sitting so near me at the table all summer you must have noticed that nothing but ambrosia and nectar will serve my purpose."

Ida's laughing eyes suddenly became deep and dreamy as she said: "That time seems ages ago. I cannot realize that we are the same people that met so often in Mr. Burleigh's dining-room, and in circumstances that to me were often so very dismal."

"Please remember that I am not the same person. I will esteem it a great favor if you will leave the man you saw at that time in the limbo of the past—the farther off the better."

"You were rather distant then," Ida remarked with a piquant smile.

"But am I now? Answer me that," he said so eagerly that she was again mentally enraged at her tell-tale color, and she said hastily: "But where am I to find the ambrosia and nectar that you will expect this evening?"

"Any market can furnish the crude materials. It is the touch of the hostess that transmutes them."

“Alas,” said Ida, “I never learned how to cook. If I should prepare your dinner, you would have an awful mood tomorrow, and probably send for the doctor.”

“I would need a nurse more than a doctor.”

“I know of an ancient woman—a perfect Mrs. Harris,” said Ida, gleefully.

“Wouldn’t you come and see me if I were very ill?”

“I might call at the door and ask how you were,” she replied, hesitatingly.

“Now, Miss Ida, the undertaker would do as much as that.”

“Our motives might differ just a little,” she said, dropping her eyes.

“Well,” said the artist, laughing, “if you will prepare the dinner, I’ll risk undertaker, ancient woman, and all, rather than spend such another long stupid evening as I did last night. I expected to meet you at the concert garden again.”

“That’s strange,” she said.

“I should say rather that I hoped to meet you and your father there. Would you have gone if I had asked you?”

“I might.”

“I’ll set that down as one of the lost opportunities of life.”

“Why didn’t you listen to the music?”

“Well, I didn’t. I thought I’d inflict my stupidity on you for awhile, and came as far as your doorsteps before I remembered that I had not been invited; so you see what a narrow escape you had.”

In spite of herself Ida could not help appearing disappointed as she said, a little reproachfully, “Would a friend have waited for a formal invitation?”

“A friend did,” replied Van Berg regretfully; “but he won’t again.”

“I’m not so sure about that; my music must have frightened you away.”

“I listened until I feared the police might think I had designs against the house. I didn’t know you were a musician. Miss Mayhew, I’m always finding out something new about you, and I’m going to ask you this evening to sing again for me a ballad the melody of which reminded me of a running brook. It took hold on my fancy and has been running in my head ever since.”

“Oh, you won’t like that; it’s a silly, sentimental little thing. I don’t wonder you paused and retreated.”

“Spare me, Miss Ida; I already feel that it was a faint-hearted retreat, in which I suffered serious loss. I have accounted for myself since we parted; how did YOU spend the time? Of course you yawned over your morning’s fatigue, and took a long nap.”

“Indeed I did not sleep a wink. Why should I be any more indolent than yourself? I read most of the afternoon, and drummed on the piano in the evening.”

“I know that I like your drumming, but am not yet sure about your author; but he must be an exceedingly interesting one, to hold your attention a long hot afternoon.”

Ida colored in sudden embarrassment, but said, after a moment: “I shall not gratify your curiosity any further, for you would laugh at me again if I told you.”

“Now, indeed, you have piqued my curiosity.”

“Since you, a man, admit having so much of this feminine weakness, I who am only a woman may be pardoned for showing just a little. What work was it that so absorbed you yesterday afternoon that you ceased to be human in your needs?”

“Miss Mayhew, you have been laughing at me in your sleeve ever since you came this morning. I shall take my revenge on you at once by heaping coals of fire on your head,” and he turned towards her a large picture, all of which was yet in outline, save Mr. Eltinge’s bust and face.

Ida sprang down on her knees before it, exclaiming: “O! my dear, kind old friend! He’s just speaking to me. Mr. Van Berg, I’ll now maintain you are a genius against all the world. You have put kindness, love, fatherhood into his face. You have made it a strong and noble, and yet tender and gentle as the man himself. I never knew it was possible for a portrait to express so much,” and tears of strong, grateful feeling filled her eyes.

Was it success in his art or praise from her lips that gave her listener such an exquisite thrill of pleasure? He did not stop to consider, for he was not in an analytical mood at that time. He was on the crest of the spiritual wave that was sweeping him heavenward, or towards some beatific state of which he had not dreamt before. His face glowed with pleasure as he said:

“Since it pleases you, it’s no more than justice that you should know that your visit was the cause of my success. Either your laugh or your kind parting words brushed the cobwebs from my mind, and I was able to do better work in a few hours than I might have accomplished in weeks.”

She tried to look at the picture more closely, but fast-coming tears blinded her. Then she rose, and averting her face hastily, wiped her eyes, as she said in a low tone: "I can't understand it at all, and the memory of Mr. Eltinge's kindness always overcomes me. Please pardon my weakness. There, I won't waste any more of your time," and she returned to her chair. But her face still wore the uncertainty of an April day.

"Your affection for Mr. Eltinge," he said gently, "is as beautiful as it is natural. No manifestation of it needs any apology, and least of all to me, for I owe to him far more than life. But I am paining you by recalling the past," he said regretfully, as Ida's tears began to gather again. "Let me try to make amends by returning at once to the present and to my work. Before I go on any farther with your portrait I want you to put this rose-bud in your hair," and from a hidden nook he brought a little vase containing only one exquisite bud. Ida had barely time to see that it was in color and size precisely like the emblem of herself that he had thrown away, and for a few minutes she utterly lost her self-control. She buried her face in her hands, and her low, stifled sobs filled Van Berg with the keenest distress and perplexity.

"Miss Ida," he said earnestly, "I would rather every tear you are shedding were a drop of my blood," but his words only made them flow faster still.

Suddenly she sprang up, and turning her back upon him, dashed away her tears almost fiercely. "Oh! this is shameful!" she exclaimed, in low, indignant tones. "Mr. Van Berg, what must you think of me? Please turn Mr. Eltinge's face away, for he is looking at me just as he did when my heart was breaking, and—and—I've lost my self-control, and I had better not come here till I can cease being so weak and foolish."

"Is it weak to be grateful?" he asked, gently. "Is it foolish to love one so thoroughly entitled to your love? I honor you for your deep and tender affection for Mr. Eltinge, and every tear you have shed proves to me that in this perfect flower I am now finding the true emblem of yourself."

"No," she said, almost passionately, "I have no right to it. The other one that you threw away is true of me, and always will be. This but mocks me with its perfection. I would be a hypocrite if I should put it in my hair, and smile complacently while you painted it. My heart clings to the other emblem, and I know I must develop as best I can, as that would have done after its destroyer was taken away. No, Mr. Van Berg. I have seen myself in

the strong, sharp light of truth. If you are willing to be my friend, please be an honest one. My faithful old friend in the country would scarcely take my portrait if this perfect flower were introduced with any such meaning as you attach to it, and I certainly would be ashamed to give it to him. Mr. Van Berg, we MUST let bygones be bygones, or we never can get on. See how absurdly I have acted both yesterday and today, and all through recalling the past. Indeed, indeed, it will never do for me to come here again, and if you can make such a marvelous likeness of Mr. Eltinge as you have, I scarcely think there will be any need.”

“My success with Mr. Eltinge’s portrait is the result of a few happy strokes that I might not be able to give again if I tried a year. Believe me, Miss Mayhew, I not only wish to be an honest friend, but a very considerate one. I promise never to urge you to do anything that will cause you pain. I can understand how the features of your kind friend have touched the tenderest chords of your heart, and I respect your study fidelity to your conscience in refusing to let me paint this bud in your hair; but you must also do me the justice to believe that I meant no hollow compliment when I searched for it among the florists. Must I throw this one away, too?” he asked, with a glance that was very ardent for a friend; “for since I obtained it for you, it must receive its fate at your hands only.”

“I’ll wear it, simply as your gift, with pleasure,” and she fastened it in her breastpin, so that its crimson blush rested against the snowy whiteness of her neck.

He looked her full in the eyes and said, with low, sad emphasis: “I do not deserve such respect.” Then the knowledge that she was harboring a purpose which troubled her conscience, but which she could not abandon, became the cause of a trace of her old recklessness of manner. She assumed a sudden gayety, as if she had stepped out of shadows into too strong a light, as she said:

“Mr. Van Berg, you may well hesitate to bring the appetite you say had last night to our house this evening, and if I stay a moment longer, you will get no dinner at all. I have not been after the crude material—as you call it—yet, and I’m told that there is not a man living so amiable and philosophical, but that a poor dinner provokes martyr-like expression, if nothing worse;” and with a smile and a piquancy of manner that seemed peculiarly brilliant against the background of her deep and repressed feeling, she again left him.

He tried to return to his work, but found himself once more possessed by the demon of unrest and impatience. The spiritual wave that had been lifting him higher and higher was changing its character and becoming a smoothly gliding current. It was so irresistible that he never thought of resisting. "Why should he resist?" he asked himself. Circumstances had interested him in this rare Undine before she received a woman's soul; circumstances had entangled his life and hers in what had almost been an awful tragedy; and now circumstances, or something far beyond, were swiftly developing before his eyes a spiritual loveliness that was the counterpart of her outward beauty, and he assured himself that it would be the greatest folly of his life to lose a trace of the exquisite process that he might be privileged to see. What artist or poet has not pictured himself the fair face of Eve as God first breathed into her perfect clay the breath of life, or has not, in imagination, seen the closed eyes opening in surprise and intelligence or kindling with the light of love? And yet the change in Ida Mayhew seemed to Van Berg far more wonderful and interesting; and to his fancy if, instead of lying in the beauty of her breathless, statuesque preparation for life, Eve had been possessed by a legion of distorting imps, she would have been the type of the maiden he first had recognized. But he had seen these evil spirits exorcised, and in their place was coming a noble, womanly soul—sweet, tender, and strong—and the perfect form and features seemed but a transparent mold, a crystal vase into which heaven was pouring a new and divine life. Why should he not long to escape from the dusty matter-of-fact world and witness this spiritual repetition of the most beautiful story of the past? Thus his philosophical mind was able once more to reason the whole matter out clearly and prove that his wish to annihilate the intervening hours before he could dare to present himself to Ida Mayhew, was the most natural and proper desire imaginable. He concluded that a walk through Central Park might banish his disquietude, and leave time for a careful toilet, since for some occult reason the occasion seemed to him to require unusual preparation.

He knew he was unfashionably early when he rang Mr. Mayhew's doorbell, but he had found it impossible to curb his impatience to see in what new aspect Ida would present herself that evening. A hundred times he had queried how she would appear in her own home, how she would preside as hostess, and whether the taste of the florid and fashionable mother would not be so apparent as to annoy him like a bad tone in the picture. yes, that

was Mrs. Mayhew's parlor into which he was shown. It did not suggest the maiden who had come to visit, nor the quiet, dignified gentleman Mr. Mayhew was seen to be when at the touch of love's wand a degrading vice fell away from him. But the artist could find no fault with the host who greeted him promptly, and when, a few moments later, there was a breezy rustle on the stairs and he turned to greet his hostess, his face flushed with admiration and pleasure. It became evident that the worshipper of beauty was in the presence of his divinity, and his every glance burned incense to her honor. She had twined a few rose-leaves in her hair, but wore no other ornament save the rose he had given her in the morning, which evidently had been kept carefully for the occasion, for it was unchanged, with the exception that it revealed its heart a little more openly, as did Ida herself. And yet she did her best to insure that her manner should be no more cordial than her character of hostess demanded.

But in spite of all she could do, the light of exultation and intense joy would flash into her eyes and tremble in her tones that evening. A maiden would have been blind indeed had she not been able to read the riddle of Van Berg's ardent friendship now, and Ida had seen that expression too often not to know its meaning well. In the morning she had strongly hoped, now she believed. She no longer walked by faith but in full vision, and she trod with the grace of a queen who knows her power in the realm that woman loves best. The glow of her eyes, her repressed excitement, that vitalized everything she said or did, mystified while they charmed her guest. "She has become true to nature," he thought, "and like nature is full of mysterious changes, for which we know not the cause. At one time it is a sharp north wind, again the south wind. This morning there was a sudden shower of tears, and before it was over the sunlight of smiles flashed through them. Now she appears like a June morning, and I pray the weather holds."

"Oh," thought Ida, in the wild, mad glee of her heart, "how can I behave myself and look innocent and unconscious, seeing what I do? He is my very good friend is he? I wish for only one such friend in the world. It wouldn't be proper to have another. Oh, but isn't it rich to see how unconscious he is of himself! He is passing into an exceedingly acute attack of my own complaint, and the poor man doesn't know what is the matter. I don't believe he ever looked at Jennie Burton as he looks at me. Ah, Jennie Burton!" The joyousness suddenly faded out of her face and she sighed

deeply. It seemed to Van Berg for a time that his June morning might become clouded after all, but while his face was turned towards her with the expression it now wore no sad thoughts or misgivings could shadow Ida very long.

50. Swept Away

THERE WAS NO VULGAR PROFUSION in the dinner which Ida had ordered, nor were its courses interminable; and as she gracefully and quietly directed everything, the thought would keep insinuating itself in Van Berg's mind, that the home over which she might eventually preside would be a near suburb of Paradise. He heartily seconded Ida's purpose that her father should take part in their conversation, and it was another deep source of her gladness that the one whom she had seen so depressed and despairing, now looked as she would always wish him to appear. "Oh, it's too good to last," she sighed, as her heart fairly ached with its excess of joy.

After dinner Mr. Mayhew asked Van Berg to light a cigar with him in his study, but the artist declined and followed Ida to the parlor.

"Mr. Van Berg," she said, with a great show of surprise, "how is it you don't smoke this evening? It seemed to me that you and Cousin Ik were drawn to a certain corner of Mr. Burleigh's piazza with the certainty of gravitation after dinner, and then you were lost in the clouds."

"On this occasion I have taken my choice of pleasures and have followed you."

"This is a proud moment for me," she said, with a mirthful twinkle in her eyes. "I never expected to rival a gentleman's cigar, and I don't think I ever did before."

"Another proof of my friendship, Miss Ida."

"Yes," she replied demurely, "an act like this goes a good way towards making me believe you are sincere."

"Miss Ida, you are always laughing at me. I wish I could find some way to get even with you, and I will too."

"You do me injustice. I, in turn, will lay an offering on the altar of friendship and will go with you this evening to the concert garden."

"I think you exceedingly, but will leave the offering on the altar, if you will permit me. I would much rather remain in your parlor."

“Why, Mr. Van Berg, you are bent on being a martyr for my sake this evening.”

“Yes, wholly bent upon it.”

“How amiable gentlemen are after dinner!” she exclaimed. “But where was your appetite this evening? Clearly our cook knows nothing of the preparation of ambrosia nor I of nectar, although I made the coffee myself.”

“Did you? That accounts for its divine flavor. Don’t you remember I took two cups?”

“I saw that your politeness led you to send me your cup a second time. I suppose you accomplished a vast deal again today after you were once finally rid of an embodiment of April weather?”

“I would lose your respect altogether if I should tell you how I have spent the afternoon. You would think me an absurd jumble of moods and tenses. I may as well own up, I suppose. I have done nothing but kill time, and to that end I took a walk through Central Park.”

“This hot afternoon! Mr. Van Berg, what possessed you?”

“A demon of impatience. It seemed as if old Joshua had commanded the sun to stand still again.”

“You must indeed be a genius, Mr. Van Berg, for I’ve always heard that the peculiarly gifted were full of unaccountable moods.”

“I understand the satire of your expression ‘PECULIARLY gifted,’ but my turn will come before the evening is over,” and he leaned luxuriously back against the sofa cushion with a look of infinite content with the prospect before him. “Bless me, what is this over which I have half broken my back,” he exclaimed, and he dragged out of its partial concealment a huge volume.

“Please let me take that out of your way,” said Ida, stepping hastily forward with crimson cheeks.

“Don’t trouble yourself, Miss Mayhew; fortune is favoring me once more, and I am on the point of discovering the favorite author you would not mention this morning. An encyclopedia, as I live! from A to B, with a hair-pin inserted sharply at the word Amsterdam. Really, Miss Ida, I can’t account for your absorbing interest in Amsterdam.”

“Mr. Van Berg, there is no use in trying to hide anything from you. You find me out every time and I’m really growing superstitious about it.”

“I wish your words were true; but, for the life of me, I can’t understand why you should crave encyclopaedias as August reading, nor can I see the

remotest connection between the exquisite color of your face and the old Dutch city of Amsterdam.”

“Well, the Fates are against me once more. Why I left that book there I don’t know, for I’m not usually so careless. Mr. Van Berg, I scarcely need to remind you of a fact that you discovered long ago—I don’t know anything. Do you not remember how you tried to talk with me one evening? You touched on almost as many subjects as that huge volume contains, and my face remained as vacant through them all as the blank pages in that book before the printed matter begins.”

“But now, Miss Ida, your face is to me like this book after the printed matter begins, only I read there that which interests me far more than anything which this bulky tome contains, even under the word Amsterdam.”

“You imagine far more than you see. I think artists are like poets, and are given to great flights. Besides, you are becoming versed in my small talk. When you tried it on the evening I referred to, you were just a trifle ponderous.”

“Yes, I can now see myself performing like a lame elephant. Did you propose to read this encyclopaedia entirely through?”

“I might have skipped art as a subject far too deep for me.”

“When you come to that let me take the place of the encyclopaedia. I will sit just here where you keep your book and give you a series of familiar lectures.”

“I never enjoyed being lectured, sir!”

“Then I’ll teach you after the Socratic method, and ask you questions.”

“I fear some of them might be too personal. You have such a mania for solving everything.”

“And did you fear that at some of the many sittings I shall need this fall I might again broach every subject under the sun, and so you were led to read an encyclopaedia to be prepared?”

“Is that what you mean by the Socratic method? I decline any lessons concerning art or anything else on that plan, for you would find out everything.”

“I shall, anyway. How long ago it seems since we took that stupid walk together on Mr. Burleigh’s piazza! We are nearer together now, Miss Ida, than we were then.”

“Oh! no, indeed,” she replied quickly; “I had your arm on that occasion.”

“But you have my sincere friendship and respect now. I can’t tell you how pleased I was when I saw how you had honored the little emblematic flower I gave you this morning. That you wear it to-night as your only ornament gives me hope that you do value my respect and regard.”

“I think I had better let the rose-bud answer you, and I confess I like to think how perfect it is when I remember the meaning you gave to it, though how you can respect me at all I cannot understand. Still, I am like father—next to God’s favor the respect of those I esteem does most to sustain and reassure me. But, oh! Mr. Van Berg, you can’t know what an honest sense of ill-desert I have. It is so hard just to do right, no matter what the consequences may be.”

“The trouble with me is that I am not trying as you are. But I know, with absolute certainty, that the strongest impulse of true friendship, or at least of mine, in this instance, is to render some service to my friend. You will make me very happy if you will tell me something I can do for you.”

“You are helping me very much in your manner towards father, and I do thank you from the very depths of my heart. In no way could you have won from me a deeper gratitude. And—well—your kindness almost tempts me to ask for another favor, Mr. Van Berg.”

He sprang to her side and took her hand.

Quickly withdrawing it, she said with a little decisive nod: “You must sit down and sit still, for I have along, tiresome story to tell, and a very prosaic favor to ask;” for she had resolved, “he shall go forward now with his eyes open, and he shall never say I won him by seeming what I was not. If I can’t deal right by Jennie Burton, I will by him.”

“I shall find no service prosaic; see, I’m all attention,” and he did look very eager indeed.

“That encyclopaedia suggests my story, and I may have to refer incidentally to myself.”

“Leave the book out; I’ll listen for ages.”

“I should be out of breath before that. Mr. Van Berg, I’m in earnest; I don’t know anything worth knowing. My life has been worse than wasted, and the only two things I understand well are dancing and flirting. Now I know you are disgusted, but its the truth. My old, fashionable life seems to me like the tawdry scenes of a second-rate theater, where everything is for

effect and nothing is real. I have hosts of acquaintances, but I haven't any friends except Mr. Eltinge."

"And Harold Van Berg," put in the artist, promptly.

"It's good of you to say that after such confessions," she continued, with a shy glance. "I hope it wasn't out of politeness. Well, I've waked up at last. I think you first startled me out of my insufferable stupidity and silliness at the concert garden, and I'm very much obliged to you for the remark you made to Cousin Ik on that occasion."

"Yes, I remember," Van Berg groaned. "I waked you up as if I were trying to put your shoulder out of joint. Well, I'm waking up also."

"You have no idea what a perfect sham of a life I led," and she told him frankly of her wasted school days and of her trip abroad, for which she had no preparation of mind or character. "A butterfly might have flown over the same ground and come back just as wise," she said. "But I have suddenly entered a new world of truth and duty, and I am bewildered; I am anxious to fit myself for the society of sensible, cultivated people, and I am discouraged by the task before me. I went to father's library yesterday and was perfectly appalled by the number of books and subjects that I know nothing about. The fact that I stumbled into that encyclopaedia, which gave you the laugh against me, shows how helpless I am. Indeed, I'm like a little child trying to find its way through a wilderness of knowledge. I blundered on as far as Amsterdam, and there I stopped in despair. I didn't know what was before me, and I was getting everything I had been over confused and mixed up in my mind. And now, Mr. Van Berg, with your thorough education and wide experience you can tell me what to read and how to read."

Van Berg's face was fairly alive with interest, and he said eagerly: "The favor you ask suggests a far greater one on my part. Let me go with you through this wilderness of knowledge. We can take up courses of reading together."

At this moment Mr. Mayhew entered, and the artist hesitated to go on with his far-reaching offers, and, indeed, he suddenly began to realize, with some embarrassment, how much they did involve.

But Ida maintained her presence of mind, and said, simply: "That would be impossible, though no doubt exceedingly helpful to me. Here, as in the instance of the pictures, your good-nature and kindness carry you far beyond what I ever dreamed of asking. I merely thought that in some of

your moments of leisure you could jot down some books and subjects that would be the same as if you had pointed out smooth and shady paths. You see, in my ignorance, I've tried to push my way through the wilderness straight across everything. Last evening I pestered my father with so many questions about politics and the topics of the day, that he thought I had lost my wits."

Mr. Mayhew leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily, as he mentally ejaculated: "Well done, little girl!"

"I will brush up my literary ideas, and do the best I can, very gladly," said Van Berg. "But you greatly underrate yourself and overrate my ability. I am still but on the edge of this wilderness of knowledge myself, and in crossing a wilderness one likes company."

"Oh, I could never keep up with your manly strides," said Ida, with a sudden trill of laughter. "Having secured my wish, I shall now reward you with some very poor music, which will suggest my need of lessons in that direction also."

Van Berg was not long in discovering that she would never become a great musician, no matter how many lessons she had. But she played with taste and a graceful rhythm, which proved that music in its simplest forms might become a language by which she could express her thought and feeling.

"Ida," said Mr. Mayhew, a little abruptly, "I wish to see a friend at the club. I'll be back before the evening is over."

"Please don't stay long," Ida answered, looking wistfully after him.

Then they found some ballad-music that they could sing together, and Van Berg expressed great pleasure in finding how well their voices blended.

"You have modestly kept quite all summer, and I am just finding out that you play and sing," he said.

"I would not have the confidence to do either at a hotel. I shall never be able to do any more than furnish a little simple home music to friends, not critics."

"I'm content with that arrangement, for I have finally dropped my character of critic."

"But true friends never flatter," she said. "If you won't help me overcome my faults I shall have to find another friend."

"As you recommended an ancient woman as nurse, so I will recommend the venerable friend you have already found, and ask you to let him do all

the fault-finding.”

She turned to him and said earnestly: “Mr. Van Berg, are you not a sufficiently sincere friend to tell me my faults?”

“Yes, Miss Ida, if you ask me to.”

“Only as you do so can you keep my respect.”

“You are very much in earnest. I never saw greater fidelity to conscience before; and I should be very sorry if, for any cause, your conscience were arrayed against me.”

She suddenly buried her face in her hands and trembled. Then turning from him to her piano again she faltered: “I disregarded conscience once and I suffered deeply,” and in the depths of her soul she added, “and I fear I shall again.”

“Miss Ida,” he said impetuously, “I cannot tell you what a fascination your new, beautiful life has for me as seen against the dark background of memories which neither you nor I can ever wholly banish. But I am causing you pain now,” for she became very pale, as was ever the case when there was the faintest allusion to the awful crime which she had contemplated. “Forgive me,” he added earnestly, “and sing, please, that little meadow brook song, of which I caught a few bars last evening. That, I think, must contain an antidote against all morbid thoughts.”

“You are mistaken,” she said. “It’s very silly and sentimental; you won’t like it.”

“Nevertheless please sing it, for if not to my taste, you will prevent it from running in my head any longer, as it has ever since I heard it.”

“You will never ask for it again,” she said, and she sang the following words to a low-gliding melody designed to suggest the murmur of a small stream:

’Twas down in a meadow, close by a brook, A violet bloomed in a shadowy nook. She gazed at the rill with a wistful eye—“He cares not for me, he’s hastening by,”

She sighed. In sunshine and shade the brook sped along, Nor ceased for a moment his gurgling song.

“’Twould sing all the same were I withered and dead”—And the blue-eyed violet bowed her head

And died.

But the rill and the song went on the same Till the pitiless frost of winter came, When the song was hushed in an icy chill, And the gay little brook at last stood still

And thought—“Oh, could I now see the violet blue that looked at me once with eyes of dew, I’d spring to her feet

and lingering stay Till sure I was bearing her love away,
Well sought.”

The song seemed to disturb the artist somewhat. “The stupid brook!” he exclaimed. “It was so stupid as to be almost human.”

“I knew you wouldn’t like it,” she said, looking up at him in surprise.

“I like your singing and the music, but that brook provokes me, the little idiot! Why didn’t it stop before?”

“I take the brook’s part,” said Ida. “Because the violet gazed at it in a lackadaisical way was no reason for its stopping unless it wanted to. Indeed, if I were the violet I should want the brook to go on, unless it couldn’t help stopping.”

“It did stop when it couldn’t help itself, and then it was too late,” said Van Berg, with a frown.

Ida trilled out one of her sudden laughs, as she said, “Don’t take the matter so to heart, Mr. Van Berg. When spring came the brook went on as merrily as ever, and was well contented to have other violets look at it.”

“Miss Ida, you are a witch,” said the artist, and with an odd, involuntary gesture he passed his hand across his brow as if to brush away a mist or film from his mind.

“Oh!” thought Ida, with passionate longing, “may my spells hold, or else I may feel like following the example of the silly little violet.” But she pirouetted up to her father, who was just entering, and said: “It’s time you came, father. Mr. Van berg has begun calling me names.”

“I shall follow his example by calling you my good fairy. Mr. Van Berg, I have been in paradise all the week.”

“I shall not join this mutual admiration society, and I insist that you two gentlemen talk in a sensible way.”

But Van Berg seemed to find it difficult to come down to a matter-of-fact conversation with Mr. Mayhew, and soon after took his leave. Before going he tried to induce Ida to come to the studio again, but she declined, saying:

“Mother has entrusted to me several commissions, and I must attend to them tomorrow morning. As it is, my conscience troubles me very much that I have left her alone all the week, and I shall try to make all the amends I can by getting what she wishes.”

“Oh! your terrible conscience!” he said.

“Yes, it has been scolding me all day for wasting so much of your time. Now don’t burden yours with any denials. Good-night.”

He turned eagerly to protest against her words, but she was retreating rapidly; she gave him a smile over her shoulder, however, that was at once full of mirth and something more—something that he could not explain or grasp any more than he could the soft, silvery light of the moon that filled the sky, and was as real as it was intangible. He walked away as if in a dream; he continued his aimless wanderings for hours, but swift as were his strides a swifter current of passion, deep and strong, was sweeping him away from Jennie Burton and the power to make good his open pledge to win her if he could. He still was dreaming, he still was lost in the luminous mists of his own imagination. But the hour of waking and clear vision was drawing near, and Harold Van Berg would learn anew that the cool, well-balanced reason on which he had once so prided himself was scarcely equal to all the questions which complex human life presents.

51. From Deep Experience

WITH THE NIGHT DREAMS began to vanish and the prose of reality gradually to take form and outline in Van Berg's mind. He was compelled to admit that the plausible theories by which he had hitherto satisfied himself scarcely accounted for his moods and sensations the past few days, and memory quietly informed him that it had never had any consciousness of such a friendship as he now was forming. But like many another man in the process of conviction against his will, he became irritable and angrily blind to a truth that would place him in an intolerable dilemma. He went to his studio, and worded with dogged obstinacy on the picture designed for Ida, giving his time to those details which required only artistic skill, for his perturbed mind was in no mood for any nice creative work.

He had agreed to meet Ida and her father on the afternoon boat; and his impatience, and the early hour he started to keep the appointment, was another straw which he was compelled to see in spite of himself; nor could he fail to note which way the current was bearing him.

"Well," he muttered, with the fatuity common in all strong temptations, "I'll spend a few more hours with this rare Undine, this genuine woman, who—ininitely more beautiful than Venus—is rising out of the dark waters of sorrow, shame, and despair, and then if I find that it will be wiser and safer to be only a somewhat unobtrusive and distant friend, showing my good-will more by deeds than by seeking her society, I can gradually take this course without wounding her feelings or exciting suspicion of the cause. She was right, although she little imagines the reason; we could never have those readings together, and I fear I must manage with far fewer visits to my studio than I had hoped for. What an accursed chaotic old world it is anyway! How grateful she is because I merely treat her father politely! It would be impossible to do anything else, now that he is himself again, and yet, by this simple, easy method, I have won a friendlier regard than I could by any other means. Like an idiot, I once thought she would have to withdraw from her father to develop her new and beautiful life. If even in

faintest suggestion I had revealed that thought to her, I don't believe she would have spoken to me again; and I foresee that I shall have to be exceedingly polite to Mrs. Mayhew also, for my Undine is developing a conscience that might become a man's implacable enemy. But what am I thinking about! If I do not intend to see much of the daughter, I shall not waste any time on the mother. I wonder if Miss Mayhew meant anything by that odd little ballad last evening. Could she have intended to remind me of blue-eyed Jennie Burton? No, for she was singing it by herself, when she did not know I was listening. The idiotic brook! If I had given my whole heart to the effort I might have won Jennie Burton by this time. Ida Mayhew was right; no woman that I wish to win will show a lover any favor till he cannot help stopping and staying, too."

A moment later he stopped short in the street. "Great God!" muttered he, "do I wish to win Jennie Burton? Whither am I drifting? Would to heaven I had not made this appointment this afternoon. Well, I'm in for it now," and he strode along as if he were going to battle, resolving to be guarded to the last degree, lest Ida should suspect his weakness.

He saw her come on the boat with her father at the last moment, her cheeks flushed with the heat and her eyes aglow with the hurry and excitement of the occasion. He saw one and another of her young gentlemen acquaintances step eagerly forward to speak to her and admiring eyes turning towards her on every side. "She won't lack for friends and companions now, and I soon will be little missed," he thought bitterly. One gentleman, in his impatience for her society, sought to obtain her small traveling-bag, and was assuring her that he could obtain seats for herself and father on the crowded boat, when, by her timid glance around, she showed that she was expecting some one, and Van Berg hastened forward and said quietly, "I have seats reserved in the pilot-house."

She gave him a glad smile of welcome; but almost instantly her face became grave and questioning in its expression; and she looked at him keenly as he cordially shook hands with her father. As they went away with him, as if by a prearrangement several guests of the Lake House looked at each other and nodded their heads significantly.

While on the way to the pilot-house, and during their conversation after arriving there, Ida often turned a quick, questioning glance towards Van Berg, and her expression reminded him of some children's faces he had seen as they tried to read the thoughts or intentions of those who had their

interests in keeping. He tried his best to be cordial and natural in manner—to be, in brief, the sincere friend that he had professed himself—and Mr. Mayhew did not notice anything amiss; but even at some inflection of his voice, or at a pause in the conversation, Ida would turn towards him this sudden, questioning, child-like look, which touched him deeply while it puzzled him. But she gradually began to grow “distract” and quiet, and to look less and less often. Van Berg had a deep affection for the noble river on which they were sailing, and had familiarized himself with its history and legends. By means of these he sought to entertain Ida and her father, and with the latter he succeeded abundantly; but he often doubted whether Ida heard him, for her eyes and thoughts seemed to be wandering beyond the blue Highlands which they now were entering. At last Mr. Mayhew left them for a while, and Van Berg turned and said gently:

“Miss Ida, you are not in good spirits this afternoon.”

She did not answer for a moment, but averted her face still further from him. At last she said, in a low tone: “Mr. Van Berg, did you ever have a presentiment of evil?”

“I don’t believe in such things,” he replied promptly.

“Of course not; you are a man. But I have such a presentiment this afternoon, and it will come true.”

“What do you fear, Miss Ida?”

“What does a woman always fear? Earthquakes, political changes, disturbances in the world at large, of course.”

“I have heard that a woman’s kingdom was her heart,” Van Berg was indiscreet enough to say.

“It is a pity,” Ida replied with one of her reckless laughs, “for it so often happens that she cannot keep it, and those who wrest it from her do not care to keep it, and so it comes to be what the geographies used to call one of the ‘waste places of the earth.’ As the world goes, I think I had better retain my kingdom, small as it is.”

He turned very pale, and swift as light he thought: “Has she, by the aid of her woman’s intuition, read my thoughts? Has she seen the beginnings of a regard for her far warmer than my professed friendship, and, remembering my suit to Jennie Burton, is she learning to despise me as fickle, or, worse, as a hypocritical specimen of that meanest type of human vermin—a male flirt?” and his face grew so white that Ida in her turn was not only perplexed, but alarmed.

But after a moment he said quietly: "It is not the size of the kingdom that makes its value, but what it contains. I hope you will keep treasures of yours till you find some one worthy to receive them, and I can scarcely imagine that such an idiot exists that he would not retain them if he could. That is Fort Montgomery yonder," and he resolutely continued the story of its defense and capture, until her father returned saying it was time to come down and prepare to land.

Ida had scarcely heard a word. Her heart almost stood still with dread and foreboding, and like a dreary refrain the words kept repeating themselves, "Oh, I'm punished, I'm punished. I thought to win him from Jennie Burton, and my reckless words will now make him true to her at every cost to himself. He knows that I must have seen how he won the kingdom of her heart, and he'll keep it now in spite of my love and something I thought love that I saw in his face. Oh, my punishment is greater than I can bear; but it is deserved, well deserved. If he had won my love first, what would I think of the woman who tried to win him from me? She would have suffered what I now must suffer. My bright but guilty dream is over forever."

Van Berg assisted her down to the gangway and out on the wharf with a grave and scrupulous politeness, but she felt even more than she saw that her words had stung his very soul. It was their apparent truth which he could never explain away that gave them their power to wound so deeply, and every moment brought to him a clearer realization of the fact that he had tried to win, and was pledged to win a woman whom to wrong even unwittingly would be an act for which he could never forgive himself. And yet his heart sank at the thought of meeting her; indeed, so guilty and embarrassed did he become in his feelings that he decided he would not meet her before others, and sprang out of the stage, saying to the driver that he preferred walking the remainder of the way. Mr. Mayhew looked at him in some surprise, for his manner had changed so now as to attract his attention and excite disagreeable surmises.

To Ida's great relief Stanton had come down to meet her with his light-wagon. He had seen Van Berg at her side again with surprise, and, after his fast horses had whirled them well away by themselves, he asked a little abruptly:

"Ida, have you seen Van this week?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said briefly: "Yes. We met at the concert-garden again, and he dined with us last evening."

Stanton turned and looked at her earnestly, and her color rose swiftly under his questioning eyes.

"My poor little Ida, we are in the same boat, I fear," he said compassionately.

She hid her face on his shoulder. "Oh, Ik, spare me," she faltered.

"It's just as I feared," Stanton resumed, with a deep sigh. "Maledictions on such a world as ours! The devil rules it, sure enough."

"Oh, hush, hush," Ida sobbed.

"I see it all, now; indeed, I've thought it all out this past week. You Sibley used only as a blind, poor child."

"Yes, Ik, I loathed and detested him almost from the first."

"And in the meantime the sagacious Van Berg and myself were trampling on you like a couple of long-eared beasts. How did you ever forgive us!"

"Oh, Ik, Ik, my heart is breaking. I've had such dreams the last two weeks. I've dared to think I had learned a little of God's love, and oh—was I blinded by my wishes, by my hopes, by the passionate longing of my heart?—I thought I saw love in his eyes, and heard it in his tones, last evening. Everything now is slipping from me—happiness, hope, and even my faith. But I deserve it all," she added in her heart. "I could almost curse the woman who tried to win him from me."

Stanton turned his horses off into a shady and unfrequented side road where they would not be apt to meet any one. "Good heavens!" he thought; "this is just the condition of mind that Van warned me to guard against, and, confound him, he is the cause of the evils he feared, and in their worst form. I be hanged if I can understand him. All through July he was Jennie Burton's open suitor—at least he made no secret of it to me, although his cool head enabled him to throw the people of the house off the scent—and now he follows another lady to New York, and leaves his first love on very flimsy pretexts. By Jove! I don't like it, even though it were possible for me to profit by his folly."

"My poor little Ida," he said gently, putting his arms around her, "you and I must stand by each other, for we are like to have rough weather ahead for awhile. It's no kindness to you now to hide the truth. I do not know that Van Berg has formally proposed to Miss Burton, but, as an honorable man,

he is committed to her, and I believe he has won her affections, although I confess I don't understand her very well. She has evidently had very deep sorrows in the past, and I am satisfied that she has felt his absence keenly this week."

"I deserve it all," Ida murmured again, but so low he could not hear her, and she gave way to another outburst of grief.

"It will pain even your heart, Ida, to see how slight and pale Miss Burton is becoming. She also appears strangely restless, and takes long walks that are far beyond her strength."

"It's all plain," groaned Ida. "How can she act otherwise! Well, she will be comforted now, no matter what becomes of me."

"You will be a brave woman, Ida, and pull through all right."

"No, Ik, I'm not brave. I could easily die for those I love; but I can't just suffer and be patient, at least I don't see how I can; but I suppose I must."

His arm tightened about her waist, and she felt it trembling. "Ida," he said, in a low solemn tone, "promise me before God that whatever happens you will never—"

"Hush!" she gasped, shuddering, "I will die in God's own way. I will endure as best I can."

He stooped down and kissed her tenderly as he said: "Ida, dear, from this hour I'm no longer your cousin merely, but a brother, and your companion in misfortune. I'm going to stand by you and see you through this trouble. Just count on me to shield you in every possible way. I don't care what the world thinks of me, but never a tongue shall wag against you again, or there will be a heavy score to settle with me. Van and I have been good friends, but he's on ticklish ground now. He'll find he can't play fast and loose with two such women as you and Jennie Burton. Curse it all! it isn't like him to do it either. But the world is topsy-turvey, anyhow."

"Ik, I plead with you, say nothing, do nothing. Be blind and deaf to everything of which we have spoken. Only help me hide my secret and get away from this place to some other where I am not known."

"Has your father any idea of all this?"

Ida explained in part her father's knowledge.

"We can easily manage it then," he said. "I had decided to leave next week. Miss Burton leaves for her college duties very soon also. The idea of that fragile flower being trampled on nine months of the year by a crowd of thoughtless, heedless girls! And so our disastrous summer comes to an end."

And yet I'm wrong in applying that term to my own experience. I wish you felt as I do, Ida. I haven't a particle of hope, and yet I would not give up my love for Jennie Burton for all the world; and I don't believe I ever shall give it up. I think she is beginning to understand me a little better now, although she does not give me much thought. One day, while you have been gone, I met her returning from one of her walks, and she looked so faint and sad that I could not endure it, and I went straight to her and took her hand as I said: 'Miss Burton, is there anything Ik Stanton can do to make you happier? It's none of my business, I suppose, but it's breaking my heart to see you becoming so sad and pale. I may seem to you very foolish and Quixotic, but there is no earthly think I would not do or suffer for you.' She did not withdraw her hand as she replied, very gently: 'Mr. Stanton, please do me the kindness to be happy yourself, and forget me.' I could only say, in honesty: 'You have asked just the two things which are utterly impossible.' Tears came into her eyes as she replied, with emphasis: 'Then, my FRIEND, you can understand me. There is one whom I can never forget.' She was kind enough to say some words about my having been generous and considerate of her feelings, etc., but no matter about them. We parted, and it's all over as far as she is concerned. When I left town last June I thought I'd be a bachelor always, because I loved my jolly ease. I've a better reason now, Ida. Of course Van must be the one referred to by Miss Burton. You have seen how she looks at him at times when thinking herself unobserved!"

"Yes," sighed Ida, "it's all right. God is just, and there is no use of trying to thwart his will."

"Well, Ida, I don't know. It's all a snarl to me. Sometimes I think the world goes on the toss-up-a-penny plan, and again it seems almost as if Old Nick himself was behind the scenes.

"Dear Brother Ik, don't talk to me that way. If I do lose ALL my faith now, I don't know what will happen."

"Forgive me, Ida, I will try to do better by you though I fear I shall prove one of Job's comforters. We'll stop in the village, get some supper there, and, thus you won't have to face anybody to-night, and by tomorrow you will be your own brave self."

"Oh," moaned Ida, "I am almost as sorry for father's sake as for my own. How can I keep him up when I am sinking myself?"

Mr. Mayhew stood on the piazza, waiting for Ida and wondering why she did not come, as Van Berg mounted the steps. The majority of the people had gone in to supper, but Miss Burton, who was a little late, recognized him from the hallway, and she came swiftly out to greet him. Her very cordiality was another stab, and he exerted the whole power of his manhood to meet her in like spirit.

“I did not know I should miss you so much,” she said, her eyes growing a little moist from her strong feeling. “I suppose we never value our friends as we ought till taught their worth to us by absence. But if you have been successful in your work I shall be well content.”

“Yes, Miss Jennie,” he replied, “I think I have been successful. The picture is far from being complete, but I’ve been able to obtain a much better likeness of Mr. Eltinge than I even hoped to catch.”

“Mr. Van Berg, you have been working too hard. You look exceedingly weary. What possessed you to walk all these miles? Leave us women to do the unreasonable things, and least of all are they becoming in you; come at once and get a good supper.”

He could not disguise the pain and humiliation that her words caused him, and said hurriedly, “I will join you in a few moments,” and then hastened to his room.

Mr. Mayhew, with the delicacy of a gentleman, had withdrawn out of earshot as they conversed, but the warmth of Miss Burton’s greeting had suggested a thought that was exceedingly disquieting. As if from a sudden impulse he went directly to the supper table, and his quiet courtesy masked the closest observation.

Van Berg stood in his room a moment and fairly trembled with shame and rage at himself. Then, with a bitter imprecation, he made the brief toilet the dust of his walk required, and his face was so stern and white one might think he was about to face an executioner instead of Jennie Burton’s blue eyes beaming with friendship at least. The thought of discovering anything warmer in their expression sent a mortal chill to her former wooer’s heart. He expected to meet Ida at the table, and the ordeal of meeting the woman to whom he was pledged in the presence of the woman he loved was like the ancient Trial by Fire.

“Curse it all,” he muttered, “they both can read one’s thoughts as if they were printed on sign-boards. I was scarcely conscious of what my ardent friendship for Miss Mayhew meant before she looked me in the face and

saw the whole truth, and she almost the same as charged me with winning Jennie Burton's heart then throwing it away, while in the same breath she hinted that I need not attempt any such folly and meanness in her case. If ever a man's pride and self-respect received a mortal wound mine has today. And now I feel with instinctive certainty, that Miss Burton will see the truth just as clearly, and then my burden for life will be the contempt of the two women whom I honor as I do my mother's name. Well, there is no help for it now, my ship is on the rocks already."

He was greatly relieved to find that Ida was not at the table, but, in spite of his best efforts, Miss Burton soon saw that something was amiss, and that it was difficult for him to sustain his part of the conversation. With her graceful tact, however, she was blind to all she imagined he would not have her notice, and tried to enliven both Mr. Mayhew and himself with her cheery talk—a vain effort in each instance now.

"How slight and spirit-like she is becoming!" groaned Van Berg, inwardly. "Great God! if I have wronged her, how awful will be my punishment!"

"She loves him," was Mr. Mayhew's conclusion, "and from his manner I fear he has given her reason. At any rate, for some cause, he is in great perplexity and trouble."

After supper Van Berg stood near the main stairway, still conversing with Miss Burton, when a light, quick step caused him to look up and he saw Ida who had entered by a side door. He knew she must have seen him and Miss Burton also, but she passed him with veiled and downcast face, and went swiftly up the stairway to her room. It seemed to him a cut direct. "she and Stanton have been comparing notes," he said to himself, and he crimsoned at the thought of what he must now appear to her. Miss Burton had been standing with her back towards the stairway and had not seen Ida at first, but Van Berg's hot flush caused her to glance around and see the cause, and then she understood his manner better. But it was her creed that people manage such things best without interference, even from the kindest motives, and she therefore made no allusion to Miss Mayhew that evening.

"Miss Jennie," said Van Berg, yielding to what he now felt had become a necessity, "I may seem more of a heathen to you tomorrow than ever. There is a distant mountain and lake that I wish to visit before I return to town, and I shall start early tomorrow. So if I do not come back very early you

need not think that the earth has swallowed me up or that I have fallen a prey to wild beasts. Good night," and he pressed her hand warmly.

She looked at him wistfully and seemed about to speak, for she was vaguely conscious of his deep trouble. She checked the impulse, however, and parted from him with a kindly smile that suggested sympathy rather than reproach.

Stanton called Mr. Mayhew aside and the two gentleman spoke very frankly together.

"Ida seems even more concerned about you than herself," said Stanton in conclusion, "and it would kill her, as she now feels, if you should give way to your old weakness again. She fears that she won't be able to sustain and cheer you as she intended, but I told her that we would both stand by her and see her through her trouble."

"I understand you, Ik," said Mr. Mayhew, quietly. "From my heart I thank you for your kindness to Ida. But you don't understand me. I had a deeper thirst than that for brandy, and when my child gave me her love, my real thirst was quenched, and the other is gone."

"That's noble; we'll pull through yet!" Stanton resumed, heartily. "Ida and I got our supper at a village inn—at least, we went through the motions—for I was bound no one should have a chance to stare at her to-night."

"No matter," said her father, decisively. "I have had prepared as nice a supper as Mr. Burleigh could furnish, and I shall take it to her room. She shall see that she is not forgotten."

Ida tried to eat a little to please him, but she soon came and sat beside him on her sofa, saying, as she buried her face against his shoulder, "Father, I shall have to lean very hard on you now."

"I won't fail you, Ida," was the gentle and simple reply, but they understood each other without further words. With unspoken sympathy and tenderness he tried to fill the place her mother could not, for if Mrs. Mayhew had gained any knowledge of Ida's feelings, she would have had a great deal to say on the subject with the best and kindest intentions. With heavy touch she would try to examine and heal the wound twenty times a day.

Mr. Mayhew was right when he said the Van Berghs were a proud race, and this trait had found its culmination, perhaps, in the hero of this tale. He was justly proud of his old and unstained name; he was proud of those who bore it with him, and he honored his father and mother, not in obedience to

a command, but because every one honored them; and if his sister was a little cold and stately, she embodied his ideas of refinement and cultivation; he was proud of his social position, of his talent—for he knew he had that much, at least—and of the recognition he had already won in the republic of art. But chief of all had he been proud of his unstained manhood, of the honor, which he believed had been kept unsullied until this miserable day. But now, as he strode away in the moonlight, he found himself confronting certain facts which he felt he could never explain to any one's satisfaction, not even his own. He had openly professed to love a poor and orphaned girl, and had pledged himself to win her if he could—to be her friend till he could become far more. Even granting that she still looked on him merely as a friend, that did not release him. It was while possessing the distinct knowledge that she cherished no warmer feeling than that he had made the pledge, and though she might not be able or willing today or tomorrow, or for years to come, to give up a past love for his sake, his promise required that he should patiently woo and wait till she could bury the past with her old lover, and receive, at his hands, the future that he was in honor bound to keep within her reach. Of course, if, after the lapse of years, she assured him she could not and would not accept of his hand in marriage, he would be free, but he had scarcely waited weeks before giving his love to another. For aught he knew, the hope of happier days, which he had urged upon her, might be already stealing into her heart.

It gave him but little comfort now to recognize the fact that he had never loved Jennie Burton—that he had never known what the word meant until swept away by the irresistible tide of a passion, the power of which already appalled him. To say that he did not feel like keeping his promise now, or that his feelings had changed, he knew would be regarded as an excuse beneath contempt, and a week since he himself would have pronounced the most merciless judgment against a man in his present position.

Before the vigil of that night was over, he decided that he could not meet either Ida Mayhew or Jennie Burton again. He believed that Ida Mayhew understood him only too well now, and that she thoroughly despised him. Indeed, from her manner of passing him, he doubted whether she willingly would speak to him again, for her veil had prevented him from seeing the pallor and traces of grief which she was so anxious to hide. In his morbidly sensitive state, it seemed a deliberate but just withdrawal of even her acquaintance. He felt that the brief dream of Ida Mayhew was over forever,

and that she would indeed keep the priceless kingdom of her heart from him above all others. He believed that now, after her conversation with Stanton, she clearly saw that the absurdly ardent friendship he had urged upon her was only the incipient stage of a new passion in a fickle wretch who had dared to trifle with a girl like Jennie Burton—a maiden that, of all others in the world, a man of honor would shield.

As for Miss Burton herself, now that he realized his situation, he felt that he could never look her in the face again. To try to resume his old relations seemed to be impossible. He never had and never could say to her a word that he knew was insincere. Besides, he was sure that such an effort would be futile, for she would detect his hollowness at once, and he feared a glance of scorn from her blue eyes more than the lightning of heaven. He resolved to leave the Lake House on Monday, and from New York write to Miss Burton the unvarnished truth, assuring her that he knew himself to be unworthy even to speak to her again. Then, as soon as he could complete his preparations, he would go abroad and give himself wholly to his art.

Having come to these conclusions, he stole by a side entrance like a guilty shadow to his room and tried to obtain such rest as is possible to those who are in the hell of mental torment. After an early breakfast the following morning, he started for the mountains, and no wild beast that ever roamed them would have torn him more pitilessly than did his own outraged sense of honor and manhood. He returned late in the evening, weary and faint, and with the furtiveness of an outlaw, again reached his room without meeting those whom he so wished to avoid. After the heavy, unrefreshing sleep of utter exhaustion he once more left the house early, with his sketch-book in hand to disguise his purpose, for it was his intention to visit the old garden before he finally left the scenes to which he had been led by following a mere freak of fancy. He learned from one of Mr. Eltinge's workmen that the old gentleman would be absent from home the entire day, and thus feeling secure from interruption, he entered the quiet, shady place in which had begun the symphony which was now ending in such harsh discord. Seeing that he was alone he threw himself into the rustic seat, and burying his face in his hands, soon became unconscious of the lapse of time in his painful reverie.

52. An Illumined Face

IDA'S EXPRESSION and manner when she came down to breakfast on Sabbath morning, reminded Miss Burton of the time when the poor girl believed that the man she loved, both despised and misjudged her. And yet there was a vital difference. Then she was icy and defiant; now, with all and more than the old sadness, there was an aspect of humility and gentleness which had never been seen in former times, but the woman who should have been so glad to cheer her and remove all misunderstandings found that she was absolutely unapproachable except by a sort of social violence of which Jennie Burton was not capable. Ida's effort—which was but partially successful—to be brave and even cheerful for her father's sake, caused Mr. Mayhew more than once to go away by himself in order to hide his feelings. Mrs. Mayhew became more and more mystified and uncomfortable. She had enjoyed, in her cold-blooded way, a tranquil, gossipy week during her daughter's and husband's absence, but now she felt as if some kind of a domestic convulsion might occur any moment.

"I don't see why people have to make such a fuss over life," she complained. "If they would only do what was stylish, proper and religious they wouldn't have any trouble," and the strong and not wholly repressed feeling of Ida and her father, of which she was uncomfortably conscious, seemed to her absurd and uncalled for. Like the majority of matter-of-fact people, she had no patience or charity for emotion or deep regret. "Do the proper thing under the circumstances and let that end the matter," was one of her favorite sayings.

Stanton learned from Mr. Burleigh that Van Berg had gone on a mountain tramp, and, when he told Ida, hope whispered to her, "If he loved Jennie Burton or felt that he could return to her side, he would not do that after his long absence."

But when he did not return to supper she began to droop and become pale like a flower growing in too dense a shade. She was glad when the interminable day came to an end and she could shut herself away from

every one, for there are wounds which the heart would hide even from the eyes of love and sympathy. It had been arranged during the day that Mr. Mayhew should find another place at which to spend his vacation, and that as early in the week as possible Stanton should take his wife and daughter thither.

When at last poor Ida slept she dreamt that she was sailing on a beautiful yacht with silver canvas and crimson flags—that Van Berg stood at her side pointing to a lovely island which they were rapidly approaching. Then a sudden gust of wind swept her overboard and she was sinking, sinking till the waters became so cold and dark that she awoke with a cry of terror. “Oh,” she sobbed, “my dream is true! my dream is true!”

Mr. Mayhew returned to the city in the morning, leaving his daughter very reluctantly, and Ida, as early as possible, set out again in the low phaeton to visit Mr. Eltinge, for never before had she felt a greater need of his counsel and help. Tears came into her eyes when informed of his absence. “Everything is against me,” she murmured; but she decided to spend some time in the garden before she returned. She had almost reached the rustic seat when a turn in the walk revealed that it was occupied. Her first impulse was to retreat hastily, but observing that Van Berg had not heard her light step, she hesitated. Then, his attitude of utter dejection so won her sympathy that she could not leave him without speaking, for she remembered how sorely in need she once had been of a reassuring word. Moreover, her heart said, “Speak to him;” hope cried, “Stay;” and her temptation to win him if possible, right or wrong, sprang up with tenfold power and whispered: “The man whom Jennie Burton welcomed so cordially Saturday evening would not wear this aspect if he had the power to return readily to her side again.” Still she hesitated and found it almost as hard to obtain words or courage now as when she saw him pulling apart the worm-eaten rosebud. At last she faltered:

“Mr. Van Berg, are you ill?”

He started to his feet with a dazed look and passed his hand across his brow—the same gesture she so well remembered seeing him make at the close of the happy evening he had spent at her home. As he realized that the maiden before him was flesh and blood, and not a creation of his morbid fancy, the hot blood rushed swiftly into his face, and his eyes fell before her.

“Yes, Miss Mayhew, I am,” he said, briefly.

“I am very sorry. Can I not do anything for you?” she asked, kindly.

He looked up at her in strong surprise, and was still more perplexed by the sympathetic expression of her face, but he only said, "I regret to say you cannot."

"Mr. Van Berg," said Ida, in tones full of distress, "your words and appearance pain me exceedingly. You look as if you had been ill a month. What has happened?" His aspect might trouble one less interested in him than herself, for his eyes were blood-shot, and he had become so haggard that she could scarcely realize that he was the man who but four days previous had compared his hearty merriment with the "laughter of the gods."

"Miss Mayhew," he said, bitterly and slowly, too, as if he were carefully choosing his words, "you had a presentiment last Saturday that some evil was about to happen. As far as I am concerned the worst has happened. I have lost my self-respect. I have no right to stand here in your presence. I have no right to be in this place even. I once tossed away a little flower that had been sadly marred, through no fault of its own, and as I did so I said in my pride and self-complacency that its imperfection justified my act. You understood me too well, and my accursed Phariseism wounded your very heart. You afterwards generously forgave my offense and a worse one, but God is just and I am now punished in the severest possible way. I perceive now that you do not understand me, or you could not look and speak so kindly. I thought you had learned me better, for you spoke words on the boat that pierced my very soul, revealing me to myself, and later you passed me without a glance. You were right in both instances. You are wrong now, and I shall not take advantage of your present ignorance, which circumstances will soon remove. I repeat it, Miss Mayhew, I have no right to be here and speaking to you, and yet"—he made a passionate and despairing gesture, and was about to turn hastily away, when Ida said, earnestly, with her eyes fixed on his face, as was her instinctive custom when she sought to learn more from the expression of the speaker than from his words:

"Mr. Van Berg, before we part, answer me one question. Have you deliberately and selfishly intended to do wrong, or to wrong any one?"

"No," he promptly replied meeting her searching look unhesitatingly. Then, with an impatient gesture, he added: "But no one will ever believe it."

"I believe it," she said with a reassuring smile.

“You? You of all others? But you are talking at random, Miss Mayhew. When you learn the truth you will look and speak very differently. And you shall learn it now. You once told me of a wicked and desperate purpose to which you were driven by the wrong of others. Your sin seems to me a deed of light compared with the act I have been led to commit, under the guidance of my proud reason, my superior judgment, my cool, well-balanced nature—infernally cool it was, indeed! Pardon me, but I am beside myself with rage and self-loathing. True, I have not been intentionally false, but there are circumstances in which folly, weakness, and stupid blundering are nearly as bad, and the results quite as bad. What can you say of the man who pays open suit and makes a distinct offer and pledge to a lady, and the retreats from that suit and breaks that pledge, and through no fault whatever in the lady herself? What can you say of that man when the lady is a poor and orphaned girl, whom any one with a spark of honor would shield with his life, but that he is a base, fickle wretch, who deserves the contempt of all good men and women, and that he ought to be—as he shall be—a vagabond on the face of the earth?”

Ida had buried her face in her hands as she learned how thoroughly Van Berg had committed himself to Miss Burton, and the artist concluded, abruptly: “One thing is certain, he has no right to be here. I shall not wait and see your look of scorn, or—worse—of pity, for I could not endure it,” and he snatched up his sketch-book and was about to hasten from the place, when Ida sprang forward and said passionately:

“Wait. This is all wrong. Answer me this—when you discovered the awful crime, which in heart I had already committed, how did you treat me?”

“Your purpose was wicked, but not base.”

“You have not intended to be either base or wicked,” she began.

“Hush!” he interrupted sternly, “you shall not palliate my weakness by smooth words, and to a man, weakness and stupidity, in some circumstances, are more contemptible than crime. Oh, how I envy Stanton! His course has been straightforward, noble, regal—I have acted like one of the ‘canaille.’”

“You deeply regret then, that your feelings have so changed towards Miss Burton?” said Ida, with her eyes again fastened upon his face.

“I do not think my feelings have changed towards her,” he replied; “she is admirable, perfect, and I honor her from the depths of my heart. Don’t

you see? I mistook my deep respect, sympathy, and admiration for something more, and I smiled complacently in my superior way and flattered myself that it was in this eminently well-bred and rational manner that Harold Van Berg would pay his addresses to a lady, and that Stanton's absorbing passion was only the result of ungoverned, unbalanced nature—accursed prig that I was! While in this very complacent and superior condition of mind I committed myself to a course that I cannot carry out, and yet my failure to do so slays my honor and self-respect. Now, I have been as explicit with you as you were with me, and with what you have seen of yourself, you know the whole miserable truth. By a strange fate we who only met a few months since have come to share a common, very sad knowledge. The memory of your own past, and I suppose, your Christian faith also, have made you very merciful and generous, but I shall tax these qualities no further.”

“What will you do, Mr. Van Berg?” Ida asked in sudden dread.

“I shall never look Miss Burton in the face again, and after I have written to her simply and briefly what I have told you, her regret will be small indeed. Good-by, Miss Mayhew. If I stay any longer I may speak words to you that would be insults, coming from me.”

“Stay,” she said, earnestly, “I have something very important to say to you.”

He hesitated and looked at her in strong surprise.

“Give me a few minutes to think,” she pleaded, and he saw, from the quick rise and fall of her bosom and the nervous clasp of her hands, that she was deeply agitated. She turned from him and looked wistfully at the young tree on which she had inscribed her name the day she had promised Mr. Eltinge to receive all heavenly influences and guidance. She soon lifted her eyes above the tree and her lips moved in earnest prayer as ever came from a human heart. She was facing the sorest temptation of her life, for she had only to be silent now, she believed, and the success of her efforts to win him from Jennie Burton would be complete. If left to himself in this wild, distracted mood he would indeed break every tie that bound him to her rival; but after time had blunted his poignant self-condemnation he would inevitably come back to her. The conscience whispered: “Who forgave you here? What did you promise here? What does that tree mean with its branches reaching out towards heaven? What would you think of Jennie Burton were she trying to win him from you?”

“O Friend of the weak! be though my strength in this moment of desperate need,” she sighed.

Van Berg watched her with increasing wonder, and his heart beat thick and fast as she at last turned to him with an expression such as he never had seen before on a human face. Was it the autumn sunlight that illumined her features? He learned eventually that it was the spiritual radiance of the noblest self-sacrifice of which a woman is capable.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said, in tones that were quiet and firm, “please take Mr. Eltinge’s seat, for I wish to speak to you as a friend.”

He obeyed mechanically, without removing his eyes from her face.

“I once took counsel of passion and despair,” she resumed, “and you know what might have resulted, but on this spot God forgave me and I promised to try to do right. With shame I confess I have not fully kept that promise, but I shall try to do so hereafter, be the consequences what they may. Pardon me for speaking so plainly, but you are now taking counsel of passion and turning your back on duty. While almost insane from self-reproach and wounded pride you are taking steps that may blast your own life and the lives of others. To my mind there is an infinite distance between the error you naturally fell into in view of Miss Burton’s loveliness of character and any base intent, but even if I should share in your harsh judgment—which I never can—I would still say that you cannot help the past, and you are now bound by all that’s sacred to ask only what is right, and to do that at every cost to yourself. You are pledged to Miss Burton, and you must make good your pledge.”

“What! I go to that snow-white maiden with a lie on my lips!” he exclaimed indignantly.

“No! go to her with truth on your lips and in your heart, except as in unselfish loyalty to her and to your word you may hide some truth that would give her pain. Mr. Van Berg, your word is pledged. You have won her love and this is your only honorable course. Thus far you have not done her intentional wrong, but if you rush away from duty now in cowardly flight you will do her a bitter and fatal wrong, for she loves you as only few women can love. She has grown wan and pale in your absence, and it touched me to the heart to see her yesterday, though she made such brave efforts to be cheerful and to encourage father. O God, forgive me that I—Go to her when you have become calm—your true self. Love like hers will take what you can give till you can give more, and surely one so lovely will soon

win all. If ever I have seen human idolatry in any face it has been in hers, and she will soon banish all this wild passion from your mind. But be that as it may you must keep your word if you would keep my respect, and I would not lose my respect for you for the world. I know you too well to doubt but that you will take up this sacred duty and seek to perform it with the whole strength of your manhood.”

Never for a moment had Van Berg removed his eyes from Ida’s face, and her words and manner seemed both to awe and control him. As she spoke, his expression became quiet and strong, and when she concluded he came to her side and said earnestly:

“Miss Mayhew, since it is still possible, I will keep your respect, for it is absolutely essential to me. God has indeed given you a woman’s soul, and he NEVER MADE A NOBLER WOMAN. You are a friend in truth and not in name, and you have saved me from madly destroying my own future, and perhaps the future of others, which is of far more consequence. If I fail in obeying both the letter and spirit of your words it will be because I cannot help myself.”

Her face, which had been so sweet and luminous with her generous impulse and noble thoughts, was growing very pale now, but she rose and gave him her hand, saying with a faint smile that was like the fading light of evening, “I knew you would not disappoint me; I was sure you were worthy of my trust. Let the honest right be our motto henceforth, and all will be well some day. Good-by.”

He pressed her hand in both of his as he said fervently, “God bless you, Ida Mayhew!” Then he turned and hastened away, flying from his own weakness and a womanly loveliness which at the moment far excelled any ideal he had ever formed.

He had scarcely reached the road before he remembered that he had left his sketch-book, and he went back for it, but as he turned the corner of the shady path he stopped instantly. The strong, clear-eyed maiden who had rallied the forces of his shattered manhood, and given him the vantage-ground again in life’s battle, had bowed her head on the arm of the rustic seat and was sobbing convulsively. Indeed, her grief was so uncontrollable and passionate that in his very soul he trembled before it.

“Oh, Jennie Burton,” she moaned, “it would have been easier for me to die for you than to give him up. God help him—God help me through the dreadful years to come!”

His first impulse was to spring to her side, but he hesitated, and then with a gesture and look of infinite regret he turned and stole silently away.

53. A Night's Vigil

AS VAN BERG left Mr. Eltinge's grounds he had the aspect of a man who had seen a vision. He had seen more, for the human face expressive of absolute, even though brief, mastery over evil is a nobler object than can be the serene visage of a sinless and untempted angel.

At last he understood Ida Mayhew. If he had deeply honored her when he supposed that as a sincere, honest friend only she had spoken her strong, true words, which might save him from wrecking his life from impulses of shame and wounded pride, how instantaneously was this honor changed into reverence and wonder as he recognized her self-sacrifice at the dictates of conscience. All was now perfectly clear. The truth of her love had flashed out from the dark cloud of her passionate grief, and in its white radiance all the baffling mystery of her past action was dissipated instantly. Now he knew why the brilliant music at the concert garden could not brighten her face, and the end of the symphony saw her in tears. Now he understood why she could not be Jennie Burton's friend, even though capable of becoming a martyr for her sake from a sense of duty. The despairing farewell letter she had once written to him now became fraught with a deeper meaning, and he saw that in throwing away the imperfect rose-bud, and in looking at her as a creature akin to Sibley, he had inflicted mortal wounds on a heart that gave him only love in return. In her desperate effort to conceal an unsought love she had sought the nearest covert, and the stains Sibley had left upon her were no more hers than if he had been a blackened wall. After all her woman's soul had come to her as in the old and simple times when even water nymphs had hearts, and love was still the mightiest force in the universe.

His feeling now was far too deep for his former half-frenzied excitement. There was not a trace of exultation in his manner, and there was indeed no ground for rapture. Only the knowledge that he carried away her respect, and that he was going to the performance of what he believed a sacred duty, kept him from despair.

He did not blame himself as bitterly as might have been supposed that he had not discovered her secret earlier, and it increased his admiration for her, if that were possible, that she had so carefully maintained her maidenly reserve. A conceited man, or at least a man whose soul was infested with the meanest kind of conceit—that of imagining that the woman who gives him a friendly word or smile is disposed to throw herself into his arms—would no doubt have surmised her secret before; but although Van Berg was intensely proud, as we have seen, and had been rendered self-complacent and self-confident by the circumstances of his lot, he had none of this contemptible vanity. The discovery of Ida's love caused him far greater surprise than when he recognized his own, and it was a source of deep satisfaction to him that this modern and conventional Undine had received a nature of such true and womanly delicacy that it had led her to conceal her love like the trailing-arbutus that hides its fragrant blossoms under fallen leaves.

The light had been so clear that he even saw the temptation which he unconsciously had suggested to her while in the city. Unlike the little violet that weakly bowed its head and died because the brook would not stop, she had resolutely set about the task of making him stop, and yet never let him suspect that she was even looking at him. Hence her attempt to penetrate the wilderness of knowledge which was at once so pathetic and comical; hence also her wish to learn the authors and subjects which interested him.

“And she had every reason to believe that she might have won me from the one honorable allegiance I can give,” he exclaimed, in deep humiliation, “and probably she would have done so eventually had she not acted like a saint rather than a woman. I've lost faith utterly in Harold Van Berg, and it will require a great many years to regain it.”

When he reached a dense tract of woodland through which the road ran, he concealed himself and waited till she should pass. Two hours elapsed before she did so. The passionate grief that had overwhelmed her was no slight and passing gust. He saw that she leaned back weakly and languidly in the phaeton, and had hidden her face by a veil of double thickness. He followed her at a distance far too great for recognition until she entered the hotel, and then sought to obtain a little rest and food at the nearest village inn; for he found now that his fierce paroxysm of rage and mental torment was over, he had become very faint and exhausted. After he had regained somewhat the power to think and act, he turned his steps towards a narrow,

secluded ravine, about a mile from the hotel, knowing that here he would find the deepest solitude in which to grow calm and prepare himself for the quiet self-sacrifice of which Ida had given the example, and which no eye must be able to detect save his to whom the secrets of all hearts are open.

He made no effort to follow any path, but sprang carelessly and rapidly down the steep hillside. When he had almost reached the bottom of the ravine, his foot slipped on a rock half hidden by leaves, and he fell and rolled helplessly down. Before he could recover himself, the rock, which had been loosely imbedded in the soil and which his foot had struck so heavily, rolled after him and on his leg and foot. In sudden and increasing dismay, he found that he could not extricate himself. The stone would have been beyond his ability to lift even if he had the full use of all his powers; but he was held in a position that gave him very little chance to exert his strength.

When he found that it was utterly impossible to push the stone away, he tried to excavate the earth, by means of sticks and his small pocket-knife, from under his leg, but soon found, with a sense of mortal fear, that his limb was resting in a little depression between two other large rocks deeply imbedded in the bottom of the ravine. This depression, and the soft, dry leaves which had covered it like a cushion, prevented the stone from crushing his limb and foot, but also held him in a sort of natural sock.

As these appalling facts became clear, he saw that he was in imminent danger of death by starvation. Then a worse fear than that chilled his very soul. He might die in that lonely spot and never be discovered. The prowling vermin of the night might tear away his flesh, and drag his bones hither and thither, till the leaves that now would soon fall covered them forever from sight and knowledge; but Ida Mayhew, and the orphan girl to whom his honor bound him, would think that he had broken his pledges, and was in truth a vagabond on the earth—eating and drinking, rioting, perhaps in ignoble obscurity. The prospect made him sick and faint for a time, for that which in his first blind sense of shame he had proposed to do, now that he had heard Ida's heaven-inspired words, seemed base and cowardly to the last degree. If she had not brought to him sane and quiet thought, he would have grimly said to himself that fate had taken him out of his dilemma in a fitting way, punishing and destroying him at one and the same time; but now to die and forever seem unworthy of the trust of the woman he so loved and revered was a kind of eternal punishment in itself.

He called and shouted with desperate energy for aid but the freshening wind of early September rustled millions of leaves in the forest around him and drowned his voice. He soon realized that one standing on the bank just above him would scarcely be able to hear, even though listening. Oh, why would that remorseless wind blow so steadily! Was there no pity in nature?

Then in a frenzy he struggled and wrenched his leg till it was bruised and bleeding, but the rocky grip would not yield. He soon began to consider that he was exhausting himself and thus lessening his chances of escape, and he lay quietly on his side and tried to think how long he could survive, and now deeply regretted that his wild passion for the past two days had drawn so largely on his vital powers. Already, after but an hour's duration, he was weak and faint.

Then various expedients to attract attention began to present themselves. By means of a stick he drew down the overhanging branch of a tree and tied to it his handkerchief. He also managed to insert a stick in the ground near him, and on its top placed his hat, but he saw that they could not be seen through the thick undergrowth at any great distance. Then more deliberately, and with an effort to economize his strength, he again attempted to undermine the rocks on which his leg rested, but found that they ran under him and hopelessly deep. At intervals he would shout for help, but his cries grew fainter as he became weak and discouraged.

"O God," he said, "there is just the bare chance that some one may stumble upon me, and that is all;" and as the glen fell into deeper and deeper shadow in the declining day, even more swiftly it seemed to him that the shadow of death was darkening about him.

At last the bark of squirrels and the chirp and twitter of birds that haunted the lonely place ceased and it was night. Only the notes of fall insects in their monotonous and ceaseless iteration were heard above the sighing wind, which now sounded like a requiem to the disheartened man. Suddenly a great owl flapped heavily over him, and lighting in a tree near by, began its discordant hootings.

"That's an omen of death," he muttered, grimly. Then at last, in uncontrollable irritation, he shouted, "Curse you, begone!" and the ill-boding bird flapped away with a startled screech, that to Van Berg's morbid fancy was like a demon's laugh. But it alighted again a little further off and drove him half wild with its dismal cries. At last there was a radiance among the trees on the eastern side of the ravine, and soon the moon rose

clear and bright; the wind went down, and except the “audible silence” of insect sounds all was still. Nature seemed to him holding her breath in suspense, waiting for the end. He called out from time to time till, from the lateness of the hour, he knew that it was utterly useless.

He began in a dreamy way, to wonder if Ida had missed him yet and was surprised that he had not returned. He thought how strange, how unaccountable even, his conduct must appear to Miss Burton, and how very difficult it would have been to explain it at best. “Ida was wrong, however, in thinking that it is for me that she is grieving so deeply,” he murmured, “although she may be right in believing that I have raised hopes in Jennie’s mind of a happier future, when time had healed the wounds made in the past. If I had lived, if by any happy chance I DO live, my only course will be to maintain the character of a friend until she gives up the past for the sake of what I can offer. In a certain sense we will be on equal footing, for her lover is dead and my love is the same as dead to me. But what is the use of such thoughts! I shall be dead to them both in a few hours more, and what is far worse, despised by them both,” and for the first time in all that awful vigil bitter tears rolled down his cheeks.

Then, slowly and minutely, he went over all that had occurred during that eventful summer. He found a melancholy pleasure which served to beguile the interminable hours of pain—for now his leg and unnatural position began to cause very severe suffering—in portraying to himself the changes in Ida’s mind and character from the hour of their first meeting, and it seemed to him very mysterious indeed that the thread of his life should have been caught in hers by that mere casual glance at the concert garden, and then that it should have been so strangely and intimately woven with hers only to be snapped at last in this untimely and meaningless fashion. He groaned, “its all more like the malicious ingenuity of a fiend seeking to cause the weak human puppets that it misleads the greatest amount of suffering, than like the hap-hazard of a blind fate, or the work of a kind and good God. Oh, if I had only waited till my Undine received her woman’s soul, what a heaven I might have had on earth! She would have filled my studio with light and beauty, and my life with honor and happiness. Never, never was there a more cruel fate than mine! I shall die, and my only burial will be the infamy which will cover my memory forever.”

Then, with a dreary sinking of heart, his mind reverted to the long future before him that was now so terribly vague and dark. In the consciousness of solitude and in order to break the oppressive stillness, he spoke aloud at intervals between his paroxysms of pain. "After all, what is dying? I know how deeply rooted in the human mind is the belief that it is only a departure to another place and a different condition of life. Can a conviction that has been universal in all ages and among all peoples be a delusion? Then whoever or whatever created human nature built it on a lie. This accursed rock has fallen on my body, and holds it as if it were a mere clod of earth, as it soon may be; but it does not hold my mind. My thoughts have followed father and dear, dear mother, and sister Laura across the sea a hundred times to-night. But oh, how strangely my thoughts come back from every one—everything to that dear saint who sacrificed herself for me today.—And yet I'm leaving her, I'm leaving all. Whither am I going? It's all dark, DARK; vague and dreary. Oh, that I had her simple faith! Whether true or no it would be an infinite comfort now. What did she say?—'I've found a Friend pledged to take care of me.' That is all I would ask. I would not be afraid to go out into this great universe if I only had such a Friend as she believes in, waiting to receive me. Who cares how strange a place may be if a loved friend meets and greets us. But to go alone, and away from so much to which my heart clings—oh, it is awful! awful!—

"A man can't die, ought not to die, like a stupid beast unless he is a beast only; nor should death drag us like trembling captives from the shores of time. And yet I must do one of three things: either wait helplessly and in trembling expectancy, or take counsel of pride, and stubbornly and sullenly meet the future, or else appeal to Ida's Friend. It seems mean business to do the last now in my extremity, but I well know that Ida would counsel it, and by reaching her Friend I may at some time in the future reach her again. I know well how my mother—were I dying—would urge me to look to him, whom she in loyal faith worships daily, and thus I may see her once more. The Bible teaches how many in their extremity looked to Christ and he helped them. But then they had not known about him, and coldly and almost contemptuously neglected him for years as I have. Oh, what has my reason, of which I have been so proud, done for me, save blast my earthly life with folly, and permitted the neglect of all preparation for an eternal life. If ever a self-confident man was taught how utterly incapable he was of meeting events and questions that might occur within a few brief days, I am

he, and yet, vain fool that I was! I was practically acting as if I could meet all that would happen to all eternity in a cool, well-bred, masterful way. Poor untrained, untaught Ida Mayhew said she had ‘found a Friend pledged to take care of her,’ and he has taken care of her. He has made her life true, noble, heroic, beneficent. I was content to take care of myself, and this is the result. God might well turn away in disgust from any prayer of mine now, but may I be accursed if I do not become a Christian man, if by any means I now escape death!”

But in his intense longing to see again those he loved so well, and tell them that he had not basely broken his pledges and fled like a coward from duty, he did pray with all the agonized earnestness of a soul clinging to the one hope that intervened between itself and utter despair, but the moon moved on serenely and sank among the trees on the western bank of the ravine. The night darkened again and the stars came out more clearly with their cold distant glitter. Nature’s breathless hush and expectancy continued, and there was no sound without and no answer within the heart of the despairing man. At last, in weakness and discouragement, he moaned:

“Well, thank God, brave Ida Mayhew put an honorable purpose in my heart before I died, and I meant to have carried it out. There’s no use of praying, for it seems as if I were no more than one of these millions of leaves over my head when it falls from its place. Nature is pitiless and God is as cold towards me as I was once to one who turned her appealing eyes to me for a little kindness and sympathy. O God! if I must die, let it be soon, for my pain and thirst are becoming intolerable.”

The dawn was now brightening the east. Nature as if tired of waiting—like some professed friends—for one who was long in dying, ceased its breathless hush. A fresh breeze rustled the motionless leaves, birds withdrew their heads from under their wings, and began the twittering preliminary to their morning songs; and two squirrels, springing from their nest in a hollow tree, like children from a cottage door, scrambled down and over Van Berg’s prostrate form in their wild sport, but he was too weak, too far gone in dull, heavy apathy to heed them.

At last he thought he was dying, and he became unconscious. He learned that it was only a swoon from the fact that he revived again, and was dimly conscious of sounds near him. It seemed to him that he was half asleep, and that he could not wake up sufficiently to distinguish whether the sounds were heard in a dream or in reality. But he soon became sure that some one

was crying and moaning not far away, and he naturally associated such evidences of distress with what he had seen last in Mr. Eltinge's garden. He therefore called feebly:

"Ida—Ida Mayhew."

"Merciful God!" exclaimed a voice, "who is that?"

His heart beat so fast he could not answer at once, but he heard a light, swift step; the shrubbery and low branches of the trees were swept aside, and Jennie Burton's blue eyes, full of tears but dilated with wonder and fear, looked upon him.

"O, Jennie Burton, good angel of God! he has sent you to me," cried the rescued man, who with a glad thrill of joy felt that life was coming back in the line of honor and duty.

"Harold Van Berg! what are you doing here?" she asked in wild amazement.

"I was dying till you came and brought me hope and life, as you have to so many others."

"Thank God, thank God," she panted, and she rushed at the rock that had held him in such terrible duration.

He struggled up and tried to pull her hands away.

"Don't do that, Jennie," he said, "you are not quite an angel yet, and cannot 'roll the stone away.'"

"O God!" she exclaimed, with a sharp cry of agony, "in some such way and place HE may have died," and she sank to the ground, moaning and wringing her hands as if overwhelmed with agony at the thought.

Van Berg reached out and took her hand, forgetting for a moment his own desperate need, as he said: "Dear Jennie, don't grieve so terribly."

"God forgive me, that I could forget you!" she said, starting up. "I must not lose a second in bringing you help."

But he clung feebly to her hand. "Wait, Jennie, till you are more calm. My life depends on you now. The hotel is a long way off, and if you start in your present mood you will never reach it yourself, and I had better die a thousand times than cause harm to you."

She put her hand on her side and her convulsive sobbing soon ceased. After a moment or two she said quietly: "You can trust me now, Mr. Van Berg; I won't fail you."

"Do you think you could bring me a little water before you go?" he asked.

“Yes, there’s a spring near; I know this place well,” and it seemed to him that she flitted back and forth like a ray of light, bringing all the water she could carry in a large leaf.

“Oh,” he said, with a long deep breath, “did ever a sweeter draught pass mortal lips, and from your hands, too, Jennie Burton. May I die as I would have died here if I do not devote my life to making you happy!”

“I accept that pledge,” she said, with a wan smile that on her pale, tear-stained face was inexpressibly touching. “It makes me bold enough to ask one more promise.”

“It’s made already, so help me God!” he replied fervently.

A faint, far-away gleam of something like mirth came into her deep blue eyes as she said, “I’ve bound you now, and you can have no choice. Your pledge is this—that you will make me happy in my own way. Now, not another word, not another motion; keep every particle of life and strength till I come again with assistance,” and she brought him water twice again, silencing him by an imperious gesture when he attempted to speak, and then she disappeared.

“That was an odd pledge that she beguiled me into,” he murmured. “I fear that in the wiles of her unselfish heart she has caught me in some kind of a trap.” But after a little time he relapsed again into a condition of partial unconsciousness.

54. Life and trust

IDA did not leave the refuge of her room for several hours after her return from the memorable visit to Mr. Eltinge's garden,—for far more than the long hot drive, her heroic, spiritual conflict with temptation, the sense of immeasurable loss, and the overwhelming sorrow that followed, had exhausted her. As she rallied from her deep depression, which was physical as well as mental, and found that she could think connectedly, she turned to her Bible in the hope of discovering some comforting and reassuring truths spoken by that Friend for whose sake she had given up so much.

These words caught her attention, and in accordance with the simplicity and directness of her nature she built upon them her only hope for the future: "HE THAT LOSETH HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE SHALL FIND IT!"

She sighed: "I have lost that which is life and more than life to me, and it was for Christ's sake. It was because he forgave me and was kind in that awful moment when my crime was crushing my soul. I could not have given up my chance of happiness just because it was right, but the thought that he asked it and that it was for his sake, turned the wavering scale; and now I will trust him to find my life for me again in his own time and way. As far as this world is concerned, my life probably will be an increasing care of father and others, who, like myself, have, or have had 'a worm i' the bud.' But be the future what it may, I've made my choice and I shall abide by it."

Then she turned to the xiv. chapter of St. John, that window of heaven through which the love of God has shone into so many sad hearts; and by the time she had read the words—"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"—she found that the peace promised—deep, quiet, sustaining—was stealing into her heart as the dawn turns night into day. Simple-minded Ida Mayhew believed that Jesus Christ had kept his word, for that was all faith meant to her. The rationalist practically

maintains that such effects are without causes, and the materialist explains that they are physical conditions to be accounted for, by the state of the nervous system.

Ida went down to supper, and spent the evening with her mother in the parlor. She resolved to take up her burden at once, and that there should be no sentimental sighing in solitude. Though so sorely wounded, she meant to keep her place in the ranks and win from society something better than pity. Jennie Burton looked at her wistfully and wonderingly many times, for the impress of the spiritual experience of that day was on her face, and made it more than beautiful. The blending of sadness and serenity, of quiet strength with calm resolve, was apparent to one possessing Miss Burton's insight into character. "Can it be," she thought, "that Van Berg has discovered her secret, and finds that while he can give her warm friendship and sympathy in her new life, he cannot give any more, and has made as much apparent to her by his manner? I thought I detected a different tendency in his mind before he went to the city. Something has occurred between them evidently, that to poor Ida means giving up a hope that is like life to a woman. I wish she would let me talk with her, for I think we could help each other. There is certainly a sustaining element in her faith which I do not possess or understand. Year after year I just struggle desperately to keep from sinking into despair, and the conflict is wearing me out. How to meet tomorrow with all its memories I do not know. I can see from the expression of Miss Mayhew's face how I ought to meet this anniversary of a day that once seemed to me like heaven's gate; but all I can do is just cling to my hope in God, while I cry like a child that has lost itself and all it loves in a thorny wilderness. I DO wish we could talk frankly, but she is utterly unapproachable."

Poor Stanton stalked up and down on the piazza without, smoking furiously and muttering strange oaths. If the troubles that preyed upon the two maidens towards whom his heart was so tender, were outward enemies, the smallest grain of discretion would have kept them out of his way that night, and if Van Berg had quietly walked up the piazza steps as Ida was expecting, he would have received anything but a friendly greeting. That he did not come was a disappointment to Ida, and yet deep in her heart there was a secret satisfaction that he found it so difficult to enter on the task that duty and honor demanded. "I shall see him at breakfast, however," she thought; "and he'll be quiet, sane, and true to his pledge."

But when she did not see him the next morning, and also learned from Stanton that he had not been in his room during the night, forebodings of some kind of evil began coming like prowling beasts of the night that the traveler cannot drive very far away from his camp-fire. Could he have broken his promise to her, and have fled from duty after all? She felt that she would love him no matter what he did—for poor Ida could not love on strictly moral principals, and withdraw her love in offended dignity if the occasion required; but her purer and womanly instincts made her fear that if he forfeited her respect her love might degenerate into passion.

Her wish that he would come grew more intense every moment, and from her heart she pitied Jennie Burton as she saw her turn away from an almost untasted breakfast, and with a face that was so full of suffering that she could not disguise it. “If he fails her utterly she’ll die,” murmured Ida, as she climbed wearily to her room. “Merciful Saviour, forgive me that I tried to tempt him from her.”

She watched from her window, but he did not come. She saw Jennie Burton hastening away on one of the lonely walks to which she was given of late. She saw Stanton drive off rapidly, and when a few hours later he came back, she went down to meet him, and asked hesitatingly:

“Have you seen or heard anything of Mr. Van Berg?”

“Confound him! no. I don’t see what the deuce he means by his course! Burleigh says he has not seen or heard a word from him since early Monday morning when he started off with his sketch-book, and Burleigh also says he seemed very glum and out of sorts when he joked him a little. I’ve been to the landing and depot, and no one has seen him. Unless Van can give a better account of himself than I expect, he and I will have a tremendous falling out.”

“No, Cousin Ik, you will leave him to himself, for anything like what you threaten would wound two hearts already sad enough.”

“Well, curse it all! I must do something or other, or I’ll explode, I can’t sit by and twirl my thumbs while two such women as you and Miss Burton are in trouble. When a man breaks a girl’s heart I feel like breaking his head.”

“Merciful heaven! See—quick—Miss Burton—she’s beckoning to you.”

Stanton sprang from the piazza at a bound, and was almost instantly at Jennie Burton’s side, who sank into a seat near, and gasped:

“Do as I bid—no words—a carriage, and a stout man with yourself—take brandy. Haste, or Mr. Van Berg will die.”

“O God! don’t say that,” Ida sobbed, kneeling at her feet with a low shuddering cry.

Jennie stooped over and kissed her and said: “Courage, Miss Mayhew, all will yet be well. Be your brave self, and you can help me save him. Tell Mr. Burleigh to come here. Have a physician sent for.”

Ida almost dragged the bewildered host from his office. Under the inspiration of hope her motions were lithe and swift as a leopard’s. Within five minutes after Miss Burton’s arrival, a carriage containing herself, Stanton, and two stout men, dashed furiously towards the ravine in which Van Berg was lying, and a buggy was sent with equal rapidity for a physician. Then came to poor Ida the awful suspense and waiting, which is so often woman’s part in life’s tragedies.

“Oh, can it be,” she thought, with thrills of dread and horror, “that he has attempted my crime?” and she grew sick and faint. Then she resolutely put the suspicion away from her as unjust to him. “Will they never return? O God, if they should be too late!”

She stood on the piazza with eyes dilated and strained, in one direction, caring not what any one saw or surmised; but in the increasing excitement, as the rumor spread and grew, she was unnoticed.

At last the carriage appeared, and it was driven so slowly and carefully that it suggested to the poor girl the deliberate and mournful pace of a funeral procession, when all need for haste is past forever, and she sprang down the steps in her intense anxiety, and took some swift steps before she controlled herself. Then pressing her hand on her side, she sank into the seat which Miss Burton had occupied a little before.

Jennie Burton waved a handkerchief—that meant life. “Thank God!” she murmured, and tears of joy rushed into her eyes. She now saw that Stanton was supporting Van Berg. She sprang up the steps again, broke through the excited and curious throng on the piazza, and was back with a strong arm-chair from the office by the time the carriage stopped at the door.

“That’s a sensible girl, Ida,” said Stanton, “that’s just the thing to carry him in. Now, Van, rally and do your best a few moments longer, and you’re all right.”

At the sound of Ida’s name he lifted his head and looked around till he met her eyes, and then smiled gladly. His smile satisfied her completely,

and she stepped quietly into the background. "He has not broken his pledge, even in thought," she murmured. "I can trust him still."

He was carried up the steps and stairs to his room, followed by all eyes. Ida stole to Jennie Burton, and kept near her as she sought to quietly gain her room by a side stairs.

"You are faint, Miss Burton," she said gently, "lean on me," and Jennie did lean on her more and more heavily until she reached her room, and then her blue eyes closed, and the day she so dreaded was over, as far as she had consciousness of it. So slight and fragile had she become that even Ida was able to carry her to her couch. Her swoon of utter exhaustion was long and deep, and when she rallied from it there were symptoms which led the physician to say that she must have absolute quiet and sleep, and he gave her strong opiates to insure the latter. Jennie only reached out her hand for Ida and whispered: "Don't leave me," and then passed into a slumber that seemed like death.

With her old imperious manner Ida silenced all who entered the room, or motioned them out if they had no business there.

Stanton whispered: "You know I will be within call any moment." But Ida's reply was: "If you love her, if you care for me, don't leave him; make him live." Thus, in restoring rest and patient vigils the night wore away. The physician found that while Van Berg's leg was much bruised and wrenched, it had received no permanent injury; and in regard to Miss Burton he said: "If she wakes quiet and sane, all danger will be past, I think."

His hopes were fulfilled. With the dawn her deep stupor passed into a light and broken slumber, in which she tossed, and moaned, and whispered, as if the light of thought were also streaming into her darkened mind. At last she opened her eyes and looked at Ida, who smiled reassuringly. In a few moments the events of the past day came back to her, and she started up and asked earnestly:

"Mr. Van Berg—is he safe?"

Ida stooped down and kissed her as she replied; "Mr. Van Berg is rallying fast, and is out of all danger."

Jennie leaned back among her pillows with a smile of deep content, and closed her eyes. When she opened them again Ida had gone, and Mrs. Burleigh had taken her place as watcher.

But the need of such care passed speedily. The doctor, after his morning call, said that the critical moment of danger had gone by. So it had, but his understanding of Jennie's case was superficial indeed, and he ascribed to his opiate a virtue that it had never possessed. The balm that had soothed her wounded spirit was the thought of saved life and the happiness that might result to those in whom she was deeply interested. The dreaded anniversary had passed, and she was profoundly grateful that it had ended in physical exhaustion rather than in vain and agonized regret. She readily obeyed the physician's injunction to keep very quiet for two or three days, for memory during the past few weeks had caused a fever of mind that was scarcely less wearing than would have been the disease against which rest was the best safeguard. The condition in which she found Van Berg suggested some light on the dark problem of her life, but she only sighed deeply: "I shall never know in this world why he does not come."

When told how Ida had taken care of her and watched till all danger was passed, she murmured to herself, "Brave, noble Ida Mayhew! but I may be able to reward her yet." She needed very little care, and felt no surprise that Ida now permitted others to render these attentions, contenting herself with brief but gentle inquiries concerning her welfare. Jennie only took pains to learn that Ida would not leave the Lake House till Monday of the following week, and then rested and waited. She was not sure of Van Berg, and until she was she would shield Ida as herself. But if it were true, as she surmised that Van Berg imagined that honor and loyalty bound him to her, while his heart was disposed to reward the maiden who had given him hers, she hoped that a little wise diplomacy on her part might do no harm. She very justly feared that Van Berg's gratitude to herself would be so strong that he would consider nothing else, and she also feared that in order to accomplish her kind intentions towards them, it might become necessary for her to tell him the sad story of her life—a story which she had never yet put in words. Therefore she sought to obtain the strength and tranquility of mind which this effort might tax to the utmost. She also imagined that if she could only see Ida and Van Berg together a few times, her course would be clearer.

Van Berg's vital forces had not been drained by weeks of mental distress, and he rallied rapidly. Stanton took care of him with a sort of grim faithfulness which his friend appreciated, but neither of them made any reference to the subject uppermost in their minds. On the afternoon of the day following his rescue, he was able to use crutches, and seated in his arm-

chair was carried down to the hotel parlor. The guests thronged around him with congratulations, and Ida came forward promptly with the others but her manner was the most undemonstrative and quiet of any who spoke to him. His earnest look and the pressure of his hand meant so much to her, however, that she soon retreated to the solitude of her room, and her smile was almost glad as she murmured:

“Oh, how much better it is to just take God at his word and do right! If I had yielded to my strong temptation I would not have won him, for now he is bound to Miss Burton by every motive. But by doing right I have kept his respect. Thank God for the glance I have just received, for it is worth far more than any expressions of dishonorable passion. My conscience is light, if my heart is heavy!”

In the quiet and friendly courtesy that Van Berg and Ida maintained towards each other, a casual observer would have seen nothing to excite remark, and the gossips at the house believed they had been misled by the facts that the artist had followed Ida to the city, and returned with her as if by arrangement. They now all agreed that he could not do less than bestow himself as a reward upon the “pretty little school ma’am,” as some of the tattling genus persisted in calling Miss Burton. Mr. Mayhew had written that unexpected business complications had arisen which required his whole attention, and as he was acting in trust for others he could not give his time just then to making the change that Ida had wished, but that he would arrange matters so he could enter on his vacation the following week, and then would take Ida wherever she wished to go. He wrote daily, and his letters were sources of double cheer to Ida, for she read between the lines her father’s deep sympathy and in the lines found increasing proof that he was a changed man.

Now that events had taken their strange and unexpected turn, she was not sorry to remain. She had no belief that change of place would make any difference in her feelings, and she found that her heart clung strongly to the scenes with which were associated her recent deep experiences. There was nothing in Van Berg’s manner now that made it embarrassing for her to meet him. While in his honest effort to keep his pledges, she saw that he apparently gave the most of his thoughts to Miss Burton, and daily had conveyed to her room the rarest flowers and fruits he could obtain, sending to the city for them as well as having the country scoured for its choicest treasures, she also occasionally caught a glimpse of the truth that he

honored and revered her from the depths of his heart. Although in her sincere diffidence she did not regard herself as worthy of such esteem, still the poor girl, who had been so deeply humiliated and discouraged, was comforted and sustained by his strong and silent homage. She would also be very sorry to forego her daily visits to Mr. Eltinge.

As Thursday was warm, Van Berg spent the greater part of it on the cool piazza, for he was now able to move about on crutches very well. He had no lack of company, but all found him reticent concerning his accident and the causes which had led to it. The most persistent gossip in the house learned no more than the bare facts, and was inclined to believe there was nothing more to learn. That Stanton was so distant was explained by the fact that he was an unsuccessful rival. Both Van Berg and Ida puzzled Stanton as far as he gave them thought, but in his honest loyalty his heart was in the darkened room in which poor Jennie was resting, more from her long passionate struggle with a sorrow she could not bury than from the exhaustion caused by her rescue of Van Berg.

Friday morning happened to be very warm, and Ida did not visit Mr. Eltinge, but ensconced herself in a distant corner of the piazza with a book, the pages of which were not turned very regularly. "I wonder," she thought, "when, if ever, we shall have another friendly talk. What a strange, deep hush, as it were, has come after the passionate joy and desperate sorrow and fear of the past week! It is the type of what my inner life will be. But I must not complain; thousands of hearts, no doubt, are the burial-places of as dear a hope as mine; and One is pledged to give me back my life in some way, and at some time.

"Miss Ida," said a voice that made her start and crimson in spite of herself, "may I come out and talk with you a little while?" and she saw that Van Berg was speaking to her through the window blinds of one of the private parlors.

"Yes," she said hesitatingly, "if you think it is best."

He went around and came openly to her side, bringing a small camp-chair with him. as he steadied himself against a piazza column in taking his seat, and leaned his crutches on the railing, her looks were very sympathetic. With a smile he took on of his crutches in his hands as he said:

"I have come to these very properly at last, and you must have seen their significance. It is my spiritual and moral lameness, however, that now troubles me most, Miss Mayhew. When lying at the bottom of that ravine,

expecting death, I vowed, like most sinners in similar circumstances, I suppose, that if I ever escaped I would become a Christian man. I intend to keep the vow if it is a possible thing. But I make no progress. I prayed then, and I have prayed and read my Bible since, but everything is forced and formal, and the thought will come to me continually, that I might as well pray to Socrates or Plato as to Christ. I wish you could teach me your faith.”

“Mr. Van Berg,” replied Ida, with a troubled face, “I’m not wise enough to guide you in such a matter. I would much rather you would talk with Mr. Eltinge or some learned, good man.”

“I shall be glad to see Mr. Eltinge, but I don’t care to go to the learned man just yet. We might get into an argument, in which of course I should be worsted, but I fear not convinced. I have never known anything so real as your faith has seemed, but I can obtain nothing that in the least corresponds with it. I ask, but receive no more response than if I spoke to the empty air. Then comes the strong temptation to relapse into the old materialistic philosophy, which I had practically accepted, and to believe that religious experiences are imaginary, or the result of education and temperament. At the same time I have found this philosophy such a wretched support, either in life or in the prospect of death, that I would be glad to throw it away as worthless.”

“I fear to speak to you on this subject,” she said, “and shall not for a moment attempt to teach you anything. They say facts are stubborn things, and I’ll tell you a few, which to my simple, homely common-sense are conclusive. To a man’s reason they may count for little. My religious experiences are not the result of education or temperament, but are contrary to both; and if they are imaginary, all my experiences are imaginary. Perhaps I can best tell you what I mean by an illustration that is a pleasant one to me. There is a partially finished picture in your studio that I hope to hang some day in my own sanctum at home. How shall I ever know that I have that picture? How shall I ever know that you have given it to me? I shall know it because you keep your promise and send it to me. I shall have it in my possession, and I shall enjoy it daily. Are not hope, patience, peace, when the world could give no peace, as real as your picture? Is not the honest purpose to overcome a nature that you know is so very faulty, as real a gift as any I could receive? If the Friend I have found promises me such things, and at once begins to keep his word, why should I not trust him? But remember, you must not expect from me very much at first, any more than

did Mr. Eltinge from the little pear-tree he lifted up and gave a chance to live. Now, with one more thought, my small cup of theology is emptied. To go back to my illustration: Suppose some person should say that he had not a picture of Mr. Eltinge; that would be no proof that I did not have one, or that you had not given one to me. I don't see, Mr. Van Berg, that the fact that you have no faith this morning, is anything against the fact that I and Mr. Eltinge, and so many others do have faith, with good reasons for it, and are able to say, 'I KNOW that my Redeemer liveth.' The testimony of other people counts for something in most matters. Why must such men as Mr. Eltinge be set down either as deceivers or deceived, when they state some of the most certain facts of their experience?"

"I knew you were the right one to come to," he said, looking at her so earnestly that her eyes fell before his; "but why is it, do you think, that I receive no answer?"

"As I told you, my little cup of knowledge is empty, but it seems to me that in your happy, wonderful rescue you were answered. You have promised to become a Christian, Mr. Van Berg. You certainly did not limit your effort to this week. Surely to be a Christian is worth a lifetime of effort."

"I understand you again," he said with a smile; "you leave me no other choice than to make a lifetime of effort. But I fear it will be awfully up-hill work. The Bible seems to me an old-world book. Many parts take a strong hold on my imagination, and of course I know its surpassing literary merit; but I don't find in it much that seems personally applicable or helpful. Do you? I admit, though, that when I read words this morning to the effect that 'a brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand.' I felt that the good old saint must have had his prophetic eye on me at the time of writing."

"You are as unjust towards yourself as ever, I see," she said. "I have found another Psalm that to me meant so much that I have committed the first part of it to memory. You can understand why the following words are significant," and in the plaintive tones that had vibrated so deeply in his heart when she read to Mr. Eltinge, she repeated:

"I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplication.

"Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.

"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell got hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow.

"Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.

"The Lord preserveth the simple: I was brought low and he HELPED me.

"Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.

"For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.

"And this is my conclusion, Mr. Van Berg, 'I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.' I am going to find plenty of good, live, wholesome work to do 'in the land of the living,' and I intend to do it as if I enjoyed it; indeed, I think I shall enjoy it," and she rose and left him with a genial and cheery smile.

But he sat still and thought long and deeply. At last he muttered in conclusion: "'By their fruits ye shall know them.' Once more, God bless Ida Mayhew for all she has been to me!"

When they were gathered at dinner, Jennie Burton walked in and took her seat in the most quiet and matter of course way possible.

Van Berg laid down his knife and fork and exclaimed: "You have stolen a march on us. We designed giving you an ovation when you came down."

"Will you please pass me the bread in its place, Mr. Van Berg?" she replied in her former piquant, mirthful way. "With the appetite that is coming back to me, one of Mr. Burleigh's good dinners is far more to my taste than an ovation which I now decline with thanks."

Very pale and slight she certainly had become, but they saw her old cheery, indomitable spirit once more looked out of her blue eyes and vibrated in the tones of her voice. With the changes indicated, she was the same bright little "enigma in brown" that had so fascinated Van Berg the first day of her arrival, and led him to make the half-jesting prediction to Stanton that had been so thoroughly fulfilled. In spite of themselves her irresistible grace, wit, and humor created continuous and irrepressible merriment at their table, which Ida seconded with a tact and piquancy but little inferior to that of Miss Burton herself. Straightforward and rather slow-witted Stanton rubbed his eyes and vowed between the first hearty laughs he had known for many a long day that he was practiced upon, and

that he intended to have Miss Burton indicted as a witch, and Ida as an accomplice.

But Jennie Burton could not escape the ovation, for she had won a secure and large place in the esteem, and in many instances, in the affections of her summer associates. After dinner, no matter which way she turned, hands were extended and hearty words spoken, and while at dinner even the colored waiters grinned approvingly whenever she looked towards them. Mr. Burleigh finally brought the congratulations and jollity to a climax by hoisting the flag and trying to drum "Hail Columbia" on a gong.

"That's his way," said Mrs. Burleigh in an aside to Jennie; "but would you believe it, the poor man has scarcely eaten or slept since you have been ill. If it had been any one else but you I'd been jealous."

But Van Berg knew well that all this geniality was like the ripple and sparkle that play above deep waters. Occasionally he found Miss Burton's eyes directed towards himself in a way that caused him deep anxiety, and he had an uneasy consciousness that she was reading his innermost thoughts. While he exerted his utmost power to banish everything from his mind that was not loyal to her, he made no effort to avoid Ida or say little to her at the table and during the afternoon, but rather took pains to treat her with frank and cordial courtesy; however, in spite of himself, he could not keep out of his eyes at all times the reverence and gratitude with which his very soul overflowed; for he felt that he owed to Ida, who had saved his manhood, far more than to Jennie, who had saved his life only.

Ida also observed Miss Burton's slight and carefully disguised scrutiny with a fluttering heart. "I suppose he does the best he can," she thought; "but she'll surely find him out; there is no use of trying to hide anything from a woman who loves. Well, well, let her but remain discreetly blind for a little time, and with her powers of fascination she will win him heart and soul."

Before Jennie slept that night her mind was clear as to her course. "I think," she murmured, "I understand them both now. His manner towards Miss Mayhew is certainly not that of a conventional lover; but as I have seen him look at her twice as if he could say his prayers to her, I think I'll venture on the only match-making I ever attempted. But what to do with Mr. Stanton, I don't know. Poor man! he might as well love a shadow as me, and yet he seems so simple, honest, and real himself. He is disappointing me daily, and I have wronged him very much. I thought him a

selfish man of the world, but he persists in offering me a chivalric, unselfish devotion, for which he asks nothing in return. Alas! I can give him nothing—nothing compared with what he gives.”

“I am going to make my last visit to Mr. Eltinge and the old garden,” said Ida to Van Berg as she passed him on the piazza the following morning.

He looked after her so wistfully, and sighed so deeply, that Jennie Burton, unseen herself, smiled as if she had discovered something that gave her deep satisfaction.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said a few moments later “can you give me a little of your valuable time today?”

“All of it,” he said promptly.

“Thanks. I shall take, then, all I want. Come with me to yonder shady rustic seat, for I long to be out of doors again; and you have learned to hobble so gracefully and deftly that you can manage the journey, I’m sure.”

He accompanied her, wondering a little at her words and manner. When they had reached the seclusion she sought her manner changed, and she became very grave and earnest, for she felt that it might be the crisis moment of two lives, and she was not one who could self-complacently and confidently seek to shape human destiny.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said, “I shall not use any tedious circumlocution, for your time is precious this morning; more so than you think at this moment. Nor shall I try to entrap you by guile and feminine diplomacy; but you made me a very explicit pledge when I found you last Tuesday morning.”

“Yes, Jennie Burton, I am yours, body and soul.”

“But how about your heart, Mr. Van Berg?”

“My heart overflows with gratitude to you,” he said promptly, but with rising color; “and as I said when you rescued me, so now I vow again, I dedicate my life to you. I do not ask you to forget the past all at once—I do not ask you to forget it at all—but only to let me aid you in taking the bitterness out of those memories that now are destroying as sweet and beneficent a life as God ever gave. I have suspected that you had some unselfish guile in that last promise you obtained from me, but I shall be loyal to the promise I intended to make, and which was in my mind; I shall be loyal to the promise I made you at first, to win you if I could, and I shall wait till I can.”

“What, then, will Ida Mayhew do?” she asked looking him full in the face.

He colored still more deeply, but meeting her searching gaze without blenching, he said, firmly and quietly: “She will always do what is right and noble, God bless her!”

Miss Burton appeared a little perplexed and troubled for a moment, and then said, slowly: “I called you my friend last July, and when I speak in the mood I was in then I mean all that I say. Friends should be very frank when the occasion requires, or else they are but acquaintances. I am going to be very frank with you today, and if I err, charge it to friendship only. Ida Mayhew loves you, Mr. Van Berg; she has loved you almost from the first; and now that her life has become so noble and beautiful, I am greatly mistaken if you do not return her affection. If this be true, what are you offering me?”

“I HAVE given you, Miss Burton, my truth and loyalty for all coming time. You may decline them now—you probably will—but you cannot change my attitude towards you or alter my course. I shall not attempt to hide anything from you. Indeed, to do so would be vain, and I have never been intentionally insincere with you.” Then he told her of the freak of fancy that had led him to follow Ida to the country in the first instance, and much that followed since, making no reference, however, to her dark purpose against herself. In conclusion he said: “Of late, for reasons obvious to you, she has had strong fascinations for me, but above and beyond these has been her influence on the side of all that’s right, manly, and true. I have never spoken of love to Miss Mayhew. Honor, loyalty, unbounded gratitude, and deep affection bind me to you, and shall through life. Please say no more, Miss Jennie, for if any question was ever settled, this is.”

“Then you propose to sacrifice yourself and Miss Mayhew for the shadowy chance of making me a little happier?”

“I shall not be sacrificed, and Ida Mayhew would justly reject me with scorn were I disloyal to you. I can give you more love, Jennie Burton, than I fear you will ever give me, but I shall wait patiently. When months and years have proved to you the truth of my words, you may feel differently. Let us leave the subject till then.”

“Oh, Mr. Van Berg, I shall have to tell you after all,” she said burying her face in her hands.

“You need not now,” he replied gently. “You have been ill and are not strong enough for this agitation. You never need to tell me unless it will make your burden lighter.”

“It will make my burden lighter today,” she said hurriedly. “Pardon me if I tell my story in the briefest and most prosaic way. You are the first one that has heard it. It may not seem much to you and others; but to me it is an awful tragedy, and I sometimes fear my life may be an eternal condition of suspense and waiting. You have been very generous in taking me so fully on trust, but now you shall know all. I am the only daughter of a poor, unworldly New England clergyman. My mother died before I can remember, and my father gave to me all the time he could spare from the duties of a small village parish. He and the beautiful region in which we lived were my only teachers. One June morning Harrold Fleetwood came to the parsonage with letters of introduction, saying that his physician had banished him from books and city life, and he asked if he could be taken as a lodger for a few weeks. Poor and unworldly as father was, for my sake he made careful inquiries and learned that the young man was from one of the best and wealthiest families of Boston, and bore an unblemished reputation. Then, since we were so very poor, he yielded to Mr. Fleetwood’s wishes, hoping thus to be able to buy some books, he said, on which our minds could live during the coming winter.

“To me, Harrold Fleetwood was a very remarkable character. While he always treated me with kindness and respect, he did not take much notice of me at first; and I think he found me very diffident, to say the least. But, as he had overtaxed his eyes, I began to read to him; and then, as we became better acquainted, he resumed a habit he had, as I soon learned, of speaking in half-soliloquy concerning the subjects that occupied his mind. He said that an invalid sister had indulged him in this habit, and he had tried to think aloud partly to beguile her weariness. But to me it was the revelation of the richest and most versatile mind I have ever known. At last I ventured to show my interest and to ask some questions, and then he gradually became interested in me for some reason.”

“I can understand his reasons,” said Van Berg emphatically.

“He did not know at first how much time father had given me and to what good uses we had put the books we had. Well, I must be brief. Every day brought us nearer together, until it seemed that we shared our thoughts in common. I ought not to complain, for perhaps in few long lives does

there come more happiness than was crowded in those few weeks. It was the happiness of heaven—it was the happiness of two souls attuned to perfect harmony and ranging together the richest fields of truth and fancy. Dear old father was blind to it all, and I had scarcely thought whither the shining tide was carrying me until last Tuesday five years ago, Mr. Fleetwood said to me, ‘Jennie, our souls were mated in heaven, if any ever were, and I claim you as the fulfillment of what must have been a Divine purpose.’ I found that my heart echoed every word he said.

"Then he appeared troubled and said that I must give him time to untangle a snarl into which he had drifted rather than involved himself. His family were wealthy and ambitious, and they had always spoken of his marriage with a cousin who was an heiress, as a settled thing. He had never bound himself by word or act, and often laughingly told his parents that they could not arrange these matters on strictly business principles, as did aristocrats abroad—that the young lady herself might have something to say, if he had not. But he was wrapt up in his studies—he was preparing for a literary life—and events drifted on until he found that every one of his household had set their hearts on this alliance. All that he could say against it was that he was indifferent. The lady was pretty and tried to make herself agreeable to him; while he felt that they had little in common, and was also led to believe that she would good-naturedly leave him to his own pursuits, and so he entered no protest to the family schemes, but drifted. That was the one defect of his character. He was a man of thought and fancy rather than of decision and action.

"When he returned home and told his parents of his attachment for me, they were furious, and wrote very bitter letters to both father and myself, accusing us of having intrigued to obtain a wealthy alliance. Thank God! father never saw the letter, as he died suddenly, before he knew how sore a wound I had received. Nor did I ever show the letter to Mr. Fleetwood, for my father had trained me too well to sow dissension between parents and son.

"An aunt took me to her home. She was a kindhearted old lady, but very matter-of-fact and wholly engrossed in her housekeeping, and I told her nothing. I waited till Mr. Fleetwood sought me out, which he soon did. I saw that his family were moving heaven and earth to break off his engagement with me, and it evidently pained him deeply that he must so greatly disappoint his parents. But the consideration that weighed most with

him was this: they urged upon him in every possible way that hopes had been raised in the heart of the young lady herself, and although he was always very reticent in regard to her. I think she seconded the family scheme, for the marriage would have joined two very large estates. Although my heart often stood still with fear while he apparently wavered a little, I can honestly say I left him free to make his own choice. They persecuted and urged him to that extent, and so confused his sense of right and wrong, that, in order to escape from his dilemma, he managed to get a lieutenant's commission in the army in spite of his physician's protest, and before his family realized what they regarded as an immeasurable disaster he was in the Union ranks at the front. It HAS proved an immeasurable disaster to me.

“He came to see me before he went south, and told me that he preferred death to any other bride than myself. In sad foreboding I begged him to give me up rather than go into that awful war with his imperfect health. But he went. The rest of my story is soon told. Life in the field seemed to brace him up every way. He wrote me that he had lived hitherto in books and dreams, and that contact with strong, forceful men was just what he needed. He wrote almost daily, and I lived on his letters. He grew strong and heroic in his exposure to danger and hardship, and won promotion on the simple ground of merit. At last, after an arduous campaign, he was slightly wounded and greatly worn, and he received a long leave of absence after the troops went into winter quarters. He wrote then that he was coming home to marry me, and no power on earth could prevent it except my ‘own little self,’ as he expressed it—oh! I can repeat all those letters word for word. He wrote me the very day and hour on which he would start, and I have waited ever since; and I have vowed before God that I will wait till he comes.” And she bowed her head, her eyes were tearless, and she went on still more hurriedly. “I afterwards learned from a brother officer, and also from the papers, that he left his regimental headquarters at the time he said, but that he had to ride through a region infested with guerrillas, and that is absolutely all I know. I am sure he wrote to his family of his intentions in regard to me, but they have never recognized me in the slightest way. The young lady to whom they would have married him wore mourning a year, and then was led to the altar by another man. But, as my Harrold said, God mated our souls, and I shall wait till he joins our lives. Your name startled me greatly when I heard it last June for the first time since I had spoken it

myself to one who has seemingly vanished but is ever present to me, and while you do not resemble him in appearance to any close extent, there is at times something in your expression that is singularly like his; and this fact must explain and excuse all the weak exhibitions of myself this summer. And now, my friend, permit me to say that your rather ardent words on one or two occasions never deceived me for a moment. You mistook your warm sympathy for love. I, who had seen and known the love of Harrold Fleetwood, could not make such a mistake. You do love Ida Mayhew, and she is worthy; and in no possible way could you do so much to add to my happiness, now and always, as by aiding that beautiful girl develop her new and beautiful life. Harold Van Berg, I would regard it as an insult if you ever spoke to me of love and marriage after what I have told you today. I shall always value your friendship very, very much, for I am now alone in the world, and I think I have found in you a friend in whom I can trust absolutely, and to whom I could go in case there should be need. Probably there never will be, for, in my simple, busy life, I have few wants. You may tell Mr. Stanton what you think best of my story after I am gone. I regret unspeakably that he should think of me as he does, for I have learned to respect him as a true, noble-hearted gentleman. It is one more of life's strange mysteries. Mr. Van Berg," she said, springing up, "you have made to me one pledge that you can keep—only one. You have promised to 'make me happy in my own way.' Brave Ida Mayhew caught me in her arms when I fainted last Tuesday, and she watched at my side till morning. Yes, she did; the noble and generous girl! But I promised myself the pleasure of rewarding her, if possible. Now, if you wish to do something for me that demands prompt, heroic action, scramble into a buggy and let one of Mr. Burleigh's men drive you to that old garden before she leaves it. She found her new spiritual life there, let her also find her happy earthly life in the same loved place. Not a word, but go at once if you have any regard for my feelings and wishes. As I have told my story, your sympathetic face has been more eloquent than any words, and leaves nothing to be said. I refuse to see you or speak to you again till you have fulfilled the only promise I ever asked or wished you to make," and she left him and quickly disappeared.

Ten minutes later Van Berg was being driven towards Mr. Eltinge's place, at a speed which threatened, in case of accident, to place him beyond the use of crutches. As he rode along in front of the house he saw that Ida's

old horse and low phaeton were still in the shade of the trees; therefore, dismissing his driver, he hobbled with singular alacrity across the lawn and suddenly presented himself before Mr. Eltinge and Ida, much to the surprise of the latter, who hastily wiped her eyes and sought to hide the fact that her thoughts had not been very cheerful.

“Pardon me,” he said, “but I left my sketchbook here some days since; and I especially wished to bid Mr. Eltinge good-by and to thank him with all the warmth and fulness that can be put into words.”

Mr. Eltinge was cordially and gravely kind in his reception, but Ida kept her face averted, for she knew that the traces of grief were too apparent.

After a few moments Mr. Eltinge said: “Since this is your last visit, I cannot think of letting either of you go back before dinner, and, if you will excuse me for a little time, I soon can see that our simple arrangements are made.”

“I shall be very glad to remain,” said Van Berg, so promptly that Ida turned and looked at him with surprise. She was still more surprised when, as soon as they were alone, he hobbled to the rustic seat and sat down beside her.

“Miss Ida,” he said, “you have always given me such admirable advice that I come to you again. Miss Burton refuses me absolutely and irrevocably, and in language that renders it impossible for me ever to address her again on the subject. You thus perceive what a forlorn object is before you—a rejected man and a cripple!”

“Miss Burton refused you!” exclaimed Ida in utter amazement. “You were but a cold wooer, I imagine,” she added reproachfully, and she rose from the seat and stood aloof from him.

“You know well, Miss Ida,” he said earnestly, “that a falsehood would be impossible in this place, and I assure you I honestly did the best I could. We have plighted our faith in a friendship that will be a brother’s love on my part, but she said solemnly that she would regard offers of marriage from me, now or at any future time, as an insult. In brief, she has at last told me her story. Her lover is dead, and it was because she detected certain resemblances in my appearance to him that she looked at me sometimes in the way you described. I had surmised as much before, but at one time hoped that this accidental resemblance might give me a vantage-ground in winning her from a past that I knew must have been very sad indeed. My resemblance was only an outward one, the man himself was immeasurably

my superior, and on the principle of contrast alone Jennie Burton could never think of me. But her love for Harrold Fleetwood is her life. It is a strange, unearthly devotion that time only increases. I felt weeks since that I could worship her as a saint far easier than I could love her as a woman, and I now know the reason. It would indeed be an insult for any man to speak to her of love and marriage, if he knew what I have learned today.”

“Then poor Cousin Ik has no chance either,” said Ida, with tears in her eyes.

“No, I do not think he has, although she has learned to appreciate him. She spoke of him as a ‘true, noble-hearted gentleman,’ and such terms from the lips of a woman like Jennie Burton are better than a king’s title. As far as my complacent and deliberate wooing of last summer is concerned, I believe that when it did not pain and annoy her she was rather amused by it. She had seen the genuine thing, you know, and thus I was the only one imposed upon by a sentiment which at the time received the unqualified approval of my infallible reason and judgment. The very superior Mr. Harold Van Berg once declined your acquaintance, as you may remember. Take your full revenge upon him now, for you see to what a battered and dilapidated condition of body and mind he has been reduced. He has developed a genius for blundering and getting himself and other people into trouble, that is quite sublime. If ever a man needed daily advice and counsel, he does, and the incalculable service that you have rendered him in this respect leads him to come to you again.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Ida, turning away with a crimson face, “I have no further advice to give you. Mr. Eltinge will soon be back; take him as your counsellor. I’m going to gather some flowers for dinner.”

He at once was on his crutches and in close pursuit, but she flitted away before him till in despair he returned to the rustic seat. Then she shyly and hesitatingly began to approach, apparently absorbed in tying up her flowers.

“Haven’t you observed that I am a cripple?” he asked.

“I have observed that you are a very nimble one.”

“I think you are very cruel to treat a helpless man in this style.”

“Indeed, sir, I have not taken away your crutches. When you spoke of a helpless man, to whom did you refer?”

“I thought you once said that mercy was ‘twice bless’d.’”

“That’s a truism that has become a little trite. Don’t you think Mr. Eltinge will like my bouquet?”

“Here is a flower that to me is worth all that ever bloomed. Come and tell me if you still recognize it,” and he took out the little note-book in which was pressed the imperfect and emblematic rose-bud.

“Poor little thing!” Ida sighed, looking over his shoulder, “how faded it has become!”

By a motion that was almost instantaneous he dropped the note-book and caught her hand. “Yes, Ida,” he said eagerly, it is faded, but it grows dearer to me daily, as you will long after the exquisite color has faded from your face. Ida Mayhew, the brook has stopped now because it cannot help itself, nor will it ever go on again, even in spring or summer, unless it bears you away with it.”

She turned and looked him full in his eyes, in accordance with her custom when she felt that she must know the innermost thoughts of the speaker.

“Mr. Van Berg,” she said very gravely, “let that little emblem there remind you that you are speaking to a very faulty and ignorant girl. I cannot regain in a few weeks what I have lost in a wasted life. You may regret—”

“Hush, Ida; for once I will not listen to you. When I believed myself dying my chief thought was of you, and when I heard sounds near me, in my half unconscious state I called your name.”

“Oh, that it had been my privilege to answer,” she sighed.

“You saved me when I was in far worse peril,” he resumed in words that flowed like a torrent. “You saved my honor, my manhood; you saved me from folly that would have blasted my life. I owe far more to you than to Jennie Burton, and I know at what cost to yourself. Ida, I shall never hide anything from you. I came back last Monday for my sketch-book, and I heard you say: ‘It would be easier for me to die than give him up for your sake, Jennie Burton.’ Then only I learned your secret; then for the first I understood your self-sacrifice for the sake of honor and duty. Until then I thought the struggle to forget would be on my part only. From that moment never did a man honor a woman more than I honor and reverence you. My mother gave me this ring and told me never to part with it until I found a woman that I could love and honor even more than her, and I never shall part with it till I put it on your hand,” and she had scarcely time to glance down, before she saw a diamond glittering on her engagement finger.

“I gave up that which was life to me for His sake, and thus soon He gives back to me far more,” Ida murmured, and she rested her head on Van

Berg's shoulder with a look of infinite content. A moment later she added: "Oh, I'm so glad for father's sake."

"Are you not a little glad for your own?"

"Oh, Harold! compare this—God's way out of trouble with the one I chose!"

"The past has gone by forever, Ida, and you have received your woman's soul in the good old-fashioned way. In my heart of hearts I have changed your name from Ida to Ideal."

They had not noticed that Mr. Eltinge had come down the garden walk to summon them to dinner. The old gentleman discovered that there had been a transformation scene in his absence, although he took off his spectacles twice, and wiped them before he seemed fully satisfied of its reality.

"Ahem! I fear our plain dinner will be a very prosaic interruption; but —" he began.

"Oh, Mr. Eltinge," cried Ida, springing to him, her cheeks putting to shame any flower of his garden, "I owe all this to you!"

"Mr. Van Berg," said Mr. Eltinge, with the stately courtesy of the old school, "with your permission I now shall take full payment," and stooping down he kissed her tenderly, with a fervent "God bless you, my child! God bless you both! I thought it would all end in this way."

It was late in the day when Ida drove up to the steps of the Lake House and assisted Van Berg to alight with a care and solicitude that Stanton, who was grimly watching them, thought a trifle too apparent. She gave a hasty side-glance to her cousin, but would not trust herself to do more in the presence of others.

"Mr. Van Berg, I would like to see you alone a few moments," said Stanton in a low tone.

The artist hobbled cheerfully into one of the small private parlors, and stretched himself out very luxuriously on the sofa, saying as he did so, "Take the rocking-chair, Ik."

"No, sir," said Stanton stiffly. "I shall trespass but a few moments on your time—only long enough to keep a promise and perform a duty. In circumstances that you can scarcely have forgotten, you assured me that I was in honor bound to give my cousin, Miss Mayhew, a brother's care. You asserted very emphatically that with her peculiar temperament she ought to be saved from any serious trouble. What I then promised from a sense of duty I now perform from warm affection. As far as a brother's love and care

is concerned, Ida Mayhew is my sister, and as a brother I insist, in view of your relations with Miss Burton, that you do not give to her so much of your society. Not that I mean to insinuate in the faintest possible way, that my cousin entertains for you anything more than an ordinary and friendly regard. It is my intention only to remind you that your course has been a little peculiar of late, to say the least, and that it is often far better to prevent trouble than remedy it.”

“The mischief is all done, Ik; you are too late.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Well, one thing at a time. Miss Burton has refused me absolutely.”

“I don’t wonder!” said Stanton indignantly.

“Nor I either, Ik. You are a hundredfold more worthy of her than I am or ever was. I once regarded myself as slightly your superior, Isaac, but circumstances have proved that you have enough good metal in you to make a dozen such men as I am.”

“I want explanations, not compliments,” said Stanton sternly.

“Sit down, and I’ll tell you everything. Then you can brain me with one of the crutches, if you wish,” and Van Berg related to Stanton substantially all that occurred between himself and Jennie Burton. “She said I could tell you after she was gone, but I think it is best you should know before. She understands and honors you, and you should understand her. Her heart is buried so deep in some unnamed, unmarked grave that it will find, I fear, no resurrection on earth. I told you the first day she came to this house that she had had an experience that separated her from ordinary humanity, and also predicted that she would wake you up and make a man of you. She has made you a prince among men. You are my elder brother, Ik, from this time forth, and I won’t put on any more airs with you. As I said, your remarks in regard to your cousin came a little late. You see, my ring is gone, and you know I have often laughingly told you that my mother gave it to me on conditions that made it very safe property. I have parted with it, however, and very honestly too; but you will see it again, soon.”

“Van,” said Stanton, with a slight quaver in his voice, and a very sickly attempt at his old humor, “I have forfeited my wager that followed your prediction, which I thought so absurd at the time; but I’ll forgive you everything, and bestow my blessing on you and Ida, if you will paint me a portrait of Miss Burton.”

“The best I can possibly make, Ik, and she shall look as she did when she called you a true, noble-hearted gentleman.”

Van Berg now found no difficulty in bringing about a friendship between Ida and Jennie Burton, and the two maidens spent the greater part of Sabbath afternoon together. Ida hid nothing in her full confidence, not even the crime that had been in her thoughts, and which might have destroyed the life that now was growing so rich and beautiful. When her pathetic story was completed, Jennie said:

“Mr. Van Berg has told me some things in your favor that you have omitted. I cannot flatter myself now that my love is stronger than yours, but you are stronger, you are braver. What is the secret of your strength? Your religion seems to do you more good than mine does me.”

“Well, Jennie,” said Ida musingly, there seems to me this difference. “You have a God, I have a Saviour; you have a faith, I have a tender and helpful Friend. Jesus Christ has said to those who love and trust him: ‘Let not your hearts be troubled.’ He said these words to men who were to suffer all things, and did so, Mr. Eltinge told me. It’s just the same as if he said, You don’t know, I do; leave everything to me, and it shall all be for the best in the end. See how all my trouble this summer has just prepared for this happiness, and I believe, Jennie, that your eternity of happiness will be made all the richer for every sad day of your unselfish life. The souls of such men as Harrold Fleetwood are God’s richest treasures, and he whose name is Love surely kindled such love as yours and his. The God that the Bible reveals to me will not permit it to be lost,” and with Jennie’s head on her bosom she sang low and sweetly:

No hope, ’tis said, though buried deep, But angels o’er it vigils keep; No love in sepulchre shall stay, For Christ our Friend has rolled away The heavy stone of death.

“Oh, sing me those words again,” sobbed Jennie: “sing them again and again, till they fill my heart with hope.”

Ida did so.

“O Ida! God’s good angel to me as well as to Harold Van Berg,” said Jennie, smiling through her tears. “I bless you for those hopeful words. They will repeat themselves in my heart till all is clear and our souls that God mated are joined again. My Harrold was not one who said ‘Lord, Lord’ very often, but I know that he tried to ‘do the will of his Father which is in heaven.’ I am going to your Friend, Ida, for if ever a poor mortal needed

more than mortal help and cheer, I do. I shall just give up everything into his hands, and wait patiently.”

“The life he will give you again, Jennie, will be infinitely richer than the one you have lost.”

Early in the following week Miss Burton returned to her college duties. Before parting she said to Ida: “I do not think I shall ever give way again to my old, bitter, heart-breaking grief.”

Almost every one in the house wanted to shake hands with her in farewell. Poor Mr. Burleigh tried to disguise his feelings by putting crepe on his hat and tying black shawl of his wife’s around his arm; but he blew his nose so often that he finally said he was “taking cold on the piazza,” and so made a hasty retreat.

Ida and Van Berg accompanied Jennie to the depot, but Stanton was not to be found till they reached the station, when he quietly stepped forward and handed Jennie her checks. She was trying to say something that she meant should show her appreciation, when the train thundered up, and he handed her into a palace car, in which she found he had secured her a seat, and before she had time to say a word her tickets were in her hands and he was gone.

When, after several hours’ riding, she approached a station at which she must change cars and recheck her trunks, a friendly voice said to her:

“Miss Burton, if you will give me your checks I will attend to this little matter for you.”

“Mr. Stanton!” she exclaimed. “What does this mean?”

“It means that since I am on the same train with you, I can do no less than offer so slight a service.”

She looked at him very doubtfully, as she said: “I don’t know what to think of this journey of yours. Let me now pay you for my ticket.”

“Mr. Van Berg handed me the money you gave him for that purpose. It’s all right. Your checks please; there is but little time.”

His manner was so quiet and assured, that she handed them to him hesitatingly, and a moment later stepped out on the platform.

In a few moments she called: “Oh, Mr. Stanton, you have lost your train.”

“Not at all. I am going to Boston. There are your checks once more, and here is your train and seat,” he added, as he accompanied her to it. Then he lifted his hat, and was about to depart, when she said: “Since you are on the

same train, perhaps you will venture to take this seat near me. I never was curious about a gentleman's business before; but it strikes me as a rather odd coincidence that you are going to Boston today."

"A great many people go to Boston," he replied.

"It's for my sake you are taking this long journey, Mr. Stanton," she said, regretfully.

"Yes," he replied, in the same quiet, undemonstrative manner that he had maintained towards her for some weeks past; "this journey is for your sake, and for your sake I shall take a very different journey through life from the one I had marked out for myself. I know your sad story, Miss Burton. I expect nothing from you, I hope for nothing, and I shall never ask anything, except a little confidence on your part, so that I can render you an occasional service. Never for a moment imagine that I am cherishing hopes that I know well you cannot reward."

"Mr. Stanton, this is beyond my comprehension!"

"There seems to me nothing strange or unnatural in it," he said. "You found me a pleasure-loving animal, and through your influence I think I am becoming somewhat different. You have taught me that there is a higher and better world than that of sense. How good a work I can do in life I will let the years prove as they pass. But I do not think my feelings will ever change towards you, save as time deepens and strengthens them. Van thinks all the world of you, as well he may; but his life will be very happy and full of many interest. I shall think of you alone, and the work I do for your sake until I can add another motive. Of course I believe in a heaven—such lives as your make one necessary; and I mean to find a way of getting there. In the meantime, you are my motive; but my regard for you shall be so very unobtrusive that I trust you will not resent it, and the thought of my unseen care and watchfulness may in time come to be a pleasant one."

There was nothing in his tone or manner to indicate that to their fellow-travelers that he was not speaking on the most ordinary topic; and he looked her full in the face with his clear dark eyes, in which she saw only truth and faithfulness.

She was very, very deeply touched, and she could not keep the tears out of her eyes as she leaned towards him and said in tones that no others could hear:

"I am no longer the friendless orphan I was when I came to the Lake House. In Mr. Van Berg I have found a friend whom I can trust; in you, Ik

Stanton, a brother that I can love.”

If the reader’s patience has not failed him up to this long-deferred moment, it shall now be rewarded by a few brief, concluding words.

Mrs. Mayhew felt considerably aggrieved that she had had so little part in Ida’s engagement with the wealthy and aristocratic Mr. Van Berg, and in later years she complained that they were very unfashionable, and spent an unreasonable amount of time in looking after all kinds of charitable institutions. Mr. Mayhew drank ever deeper at the full fountain of his child’s love, and is serenely passing on to an honorable old age. Mr. Eltinge is now beyond age and weakness, but Ida often murmurs with tears in her eyes as she looks at his portrait, “He is just speaking to me as he did when my heart was breaking.” Stanton’s city friends say that he has greatly changed and might stand very high as a lawyer and politician if he were not so quixotic and prone to take cases in which there was no money, but he receives letters from New England which seem to compensate him for lack of large fees. Van Berg has not yet regretted that he entrusted “faulty Ida Mayhew” with his happiness, and he is more anxious than ever to lure her to his studio. For a long time he had to take the truth of her faith on trust but at last he stood by her side at God’s altar and confessed that Name which has been the lowliest and grandest of earth.

Ida is still very human, but with all her faults, her husband often whispers in her ear: “Not Ida, but Ideal.” She is continually giving up her life for Christ’s sake, and as often finds it coming back to her in some richer, sweeter form; and by her simple, joyous faith has led many to the Friend she found in the quaint old garden, and who says of all who come, “I will give unto them eternal life.”

Jennie Burton is still waiting; but at the end of each day of faithful work she sings the song of hope that Ida taught her:

No hope, ’tis said, though buried deep,
But angels o’er it vigils keep;
No love in sepulchre shall stay,
For Christ my Friend will roll away
The heavy stone of death.

THE END

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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