Rosamond or, The Youthful Error

Mary J. Holmes

Table of Contents

Rosamond or, The Youthful Error.....1
Mary J. Holmes.....2
CHAPTER I. THE OWNER OF RIVERSIDE.....3
CHAPTER II. ROSAMOND LEYTON.....5
CHAPTER III. BEN'S VISIT.....8
CHAPTER IV. ROSAMOND'S EDUCATION.....11
CHAPTER V. BROTHER AND SISTER.....13
CHAPTER VI. MARIE PORTER.....16
CHAPTER VII. MAKING LOVE.....20
CHAPTER VIII. NEWS.....24
CHAPTER IX. THE GUEST AT RIVERSIDE.....26
CHAPTER X. THE STORY.....29
CHAPTER XI. THE END.....34
DIAMONDS.....38
BAD SPELLING.....43
MAGGIE LEE.....47
THE ANSWERED PRAYER.....52

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- CHAPTER I. THE OWNER OF RIVERSIDE.
- CHAPTER II. ROSAMOND LEYTON.
- CHAPTER III. BEN'S VISIT.
- CHAPTER IV. ROSAMOND'S EDUCATION.
- CHAPTER V. BROTHER AND SISTER.
- CHAPTER VI. MARIE PORTER.
- CHAPTER VII. MAKING LOVE.
- CHAPTER VIII. NEWS.
- CHAPTER IX. THE GUEST AT RIVERSIDE.
- CHAPTER X. THE STORY.
- CHAPTER XI. THE END
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ROSAMOND
OR
THE YOUTHFUL ERROR
A Tale of Riverside
AND OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER I. THE OWNER OF RIVERSIDE.

All the day long the September rain had fallen, and when the night closed in it showed no sign of weariness, but with the same monotonous patter dropped upon the roof, or beat against the windows of the pleasantly lighted room where a young man sat gazing at the glowing grate, and listening apparently to the noise of the storm without. But neither the winds, nor yet the rain, had a part of that young man's thoughts, for they were with the past, and the chain which linked them to that past was the open letter which lay on the table beside him. For that letter he had waited long and anxiously, wondering what it would contain, and if his overtures for reconciliation with one who had erred far more than himself, would be accepted. It had come at last, and with a gathering coldness at his heart he had read the decision,—"she would not be reconciled," and she bade him "go his way alone and leave her to herself."

"It is well," he said; "I shall never trouble her again,"—and with a feeling of relief, as if a heavy load, a dread of coming evil, had been taken from his mind, he threw the letter upon the table, and leaning back in his cushioned chair, tried to fancy that the last few years of his life were blotted out.

"Could it be so, Ralph Browning would be a different man." he said aloud; then, as he glanced round the richly furnished room, he continued—"People call me happy, and so perhaps I might be, but for this haunting memory. Why was it suffered to be, and must I make a life−long atonement for that early sin?"

In his excitement he arose, and crushing the letter for a moment in his hand, hurled it into the fire; then, going to his private drawer, he took out and opened a neatly folded package, containing a long tress of jet black hair. Shudderingly he wound it around his fingers, laid it over the back of his hand, held it up to the light, and then with a hard, dark look upon his face, threw it, too upon the grate, saying aloud, "Thus perisheth every memento of the past, and I am free again—free as air!"

He walked to the window, and pressing his burning forehead against the cool, damp pane, looked out upon the night. He could not see through the darkness, but had it been day, his eye would have rested on broad acres all his own; for Ralph Browning was a wealthy man, and the house in which he lived was his by right of inheritance from a bachelor uncle for whom he had been named, and who, two years before our story opens, had died, leaving to his nephew the grand old place, called *Riverside*, from its nearness to the river. It was a most beautiful spot; and when its new master first took possession of it, the maids and matrons of Granby, who had mourned for the elder Browning as people mourn for a good man, felt themselves somewhat consoled from the fact that his successor was young and handsome, and would doubtless prove an invaluable acquisition to their fireside circles, and furnish a theme for gossip, without which no village can well exist. But in the first of their expectations they were mistaken, for Mr. Browning shunned rather than sought society, and spent the most of his leisure hours in the seclusion of his library, where, as Mrs. Peters, his housekeeper, said, he did nothing but mope over books and walk the floor. "He was melancholy," she said; "there was something workin' on his mind, and what it was she didn't know more'n the dead— though she knew as well as she wanted to, that he had been crossed in love, for what else would make so many of his hairs gray, and he not yet twenty−five!"

That there was a mystery connected with him, was conceded by most of the villagers, and many a curious gaze they bent upon the grave, dignified young man, who seldom joined in their pastime or intruded himself upon their company. Much sympathy was expressed for him in his loneliness, by the people of Granby, and more than one young girl would gladly have imposed upon herself the task of cheering that loneliness; but he seemed perfectly invulnerable to maiden charms; and when Mrs. Peters, as she often did, urged him "to take a wife and be somebody," he answered quietly, "I am content to follow the example of my uncle. I shall probably never marry."

Still he was lonely in his great house—so lonely that, though it hurt his pride to do it, he wrote the letter, the answer to which excited him so terribly, and awoke within his mind a train of thought so absorbing and intense, that he did not hear the summons to supper until Mrs. Peters put her head into the room, asking "if he were deaf or what."

Mrs. Peters had been in the elder Browning's household for years, and when the new owner came, she still continued at her post, and exercised over her young master a kind of motherly care, which he permitted because he knew her real worth, and that without her his home would be uncomfortable indeed. On the occasion of which

we write, Mrs. Peters was unusually attentive, and to a person at all skilled in female tactics, it was evident that she was about to ask a favor, and had made preparations accordingly. His favorite waffles had been buttered exactly right—the peaches and cream were delicious—the fragrant black tea was neither too strong nor too weak—the fire blazed brightly in the grate—the light from the chandelier fell softly upon the massive silver service and damask cloth;—and with all these creature comforts around him, it is not strange that he forgot the letter and the tress of hair which so lately had blackened on the coals. The moment was propitious, and by the time he had finished his second cup, Mrs. Peters said, "I have something to propose."

Leaning back in his chair, he looked inquiringly at her, and she continued: "You remember Mrs. Leyton, the poor woman who had seen better days, and lived in East Granby?"

"Yes."

"You know she has been sick, and you gave me leave to carry her any thing I chose?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's dead, poor thing, and what is worse, she hain't no connection, nor never had, and her little daughter Rosamond hain't a place to lay her head."

"Let her come and sleep with you, then," said Mr. Browning, rattling his spoon upon the edge of his cup.

"Yes, and what'll she do days?" continued Mrs. Peters. "She can't run the streets, that's so; now, I don't believe no great in children, and you certainly don't b'lieve in 'em at all, nor your poor uncle before you; but Rosamond ain't a child; she's *thirteen*—most a woman—and if you don't mind the expense, I shan't mind the trouble, and she can live here till she finds a place. Her mother, you know, took up millinering to get a living."

"Certainly, let her come," answered Mr. Browning, who was noted for his benevolence.

This matter being thus satisfactorily settled, Mrs. Peters arose from the table, while Mr. Browning went back to the olden memories which had haunted him so much that day, and with which there was not mingled a single thought of the little Rosamond, who was to exert so strong an influence upon his future life.

CHAPTER II. ROSAMOND LEYTON.

Rosamond had been some weeks at Riverside, and during all that time Mr. Browning had scarcely noticed her at all. On the first day of her arrival he had spoken kindly to her, asking her how old she was, and how long her mother had been dead, and this was all the attention he had paid to her. He did not even yet know the color of her eyes, or texture of her hair,—whether it were curly or straight, black or brown; but he knew in various ways that she was there—knew it by the sound of dancing feet upon the stairs, which were wont to echo only to Mrs. Peters' heavy tread—knew it by the tasteful air his room suddenly assumed—by the ringing laugh and musical songs which came often from the kitchen, and by the thousand changes which the presence of a merry−hearted girl of thirteen brings to a hitherto silent house. Of him Rosamond stood considerably in awe, and though she could willingly have worshipped him for giving her so pleasant a home, she felt afraid of him and kept out of his way, watching him with childish curiosity at a distance, admiring his noble figure, and wondering if she would ever dare speak to him as fearlessly as Mrs. Peters did.

From this woman Rosamond received all a mother's care, and though the name of her lost parent was often on her lips, she was beginning to be very happy in her new home, when one day toward the middle of October Mrs. Peters told her that Mr. Browning's only sister, a Mrs. Van Vechten, who lived South, was coming to Riverside, together with her son Ben. The lady Mrs. Peters had never seen, but Ben, who was at school in Albany, had spent a vacation there, and she described him as a "great, good−natured fool," who cared for nothing but dogs, cigars, fast horses and pretty girls.

Rosamond pushed back the stray curls which had fallen over her face, glanced at the cracked mirror which gave her *two* noses instead of one, and thinking to herself, "I wonder if he'll care for me," listened attentively while Mrs. Peters continued,—"This Miss Van Vechten is a mighty fine lady, they say, and has heaps of niggers to wait on her at home,—but she can't bring 'em here, for *I* should set 'em free—that's, so. I don't b'lieve in't. What was I sayin'? Oh, I know, she can't wait on herself, and wrote to have her brother get some one. He asked me if you'd be willin' to put on her clothes, wash her face, and *chaw her victuals* like enough."

"Mr. Browning never said that," interrupted Rosamond, and Mrs. Peters replied—"Well, not that exactly, but he wants you to wait on her generally."

"I'll do anything reasonable," answered Rosamond. "When will she be here?" "I'll do anything reasonable," answered Rosamond, "I must hurry, or I shan't have them north chambers ready for her. Ben ain't coming quite so soon."

The two or three days passed rapidly, and at the close of the third a carriage laden with trunks stopped before the gate at Riverside, and Mrs. Van Vechten had come. She was a thin, sallow−faced, proud−looking woman, wholly unlike her brother, whose senior she was by many years. She had seen much of the world, and that she was conscious of her own fancied superiority was perceptible in every movement. She was Mrs. Richard Van Vechten, of Alabama—one of the oldest families in the state. Her deceased husband had been United States Senator—she had been to Europe—had seen the Queen on horseback—had passed the residence of the Duchess of Sutherland, and when Rosamond Leyton appeared before her in her neatly−fitting dress of black and asked what she could do for her, she elevated her eyebrows, and coolly surveying the little girl, answered haughtily, "Comb out my hair."

"Yes, I will," thought Rosamond, who had taken a dislike to the grand lady, and suiting the action to the thought, she did comb out her hair, pulling it so unmercifully that Mrs. Van Vechten angrily bade her stop.

"Look at me, girl," said she; "did you ever assist at any one's toilet before?"

"I've hooked Mrs. Peters' dress and pinned on Bridget's collar," answered Rosamond, her great brown eyes brimming with mischief.

"Disgusting!" returned Mrs. Van Vechten—"I should suppose Ralph would know better than to get me such an ignoramus. Were you hired on purpose to wait on me?"

"Why, no, ma'am—I live here," answered Rosamond.

"Live here!" repeated Mrs. Van Vechten, "and pray, what do you do?"

"Nothing much, unless I choose," said Rosamond, who, being a great pet with Mrs. Peters and the other

servants, really led a very easy life at Riverside.

Looking curiously into the frank, open face of the young girl, Mrs. Van Vechten concluded she was never intended to take a negro's place, and with a wave of her hand she said, "You may go; I can dress myself alone."

That evening, as the brother and sister sat together in the parlor, the latter suddenly asked, "Who is that Rosamond Leyton, and what is she doing here?"

Mr. Browning told her all he knew of the girl, and she continued, "Do you intend to educate her?"

"Educate her!" said he—"what made you think of that?"

"Because," she answered, with a sarcastic smile, "as you expect to do penance the rest of your lifetime, I did not know but you would deem it your duty to educate every beggar who came along."

The idea of educating Rosamond Leyton was new to Mr. Browning, but he did not tell his sister so—he merely said, "And suppose I do educate her?"

"In that case," answered the lady, "Ben will not pass his college vacations here, as I had intended that he should do."

"And why not?" asked Mr. Browning.

"Why not?" repeated Mrs. Van Vechten. "Just as though you did not know how susceptible he is to female beauty, and if you treat this Rosamond as an equal, it will be like him to fall in love with her at once. She is very pretty, you know."

Mr. Browning did not know any such thing. In fact, he scarcely knew how the young girl looked, but his sister's remark had awakened in him an interest, and after she had retired, which she did early, he rang the bell for Mrs. Peters, who soon appeared in answer to his call.

"Is Rosamond Leyton up," he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Peters, wondering at the question.

"Send her to me," he said, and with redoubled amazement Mrs. Peters carried the message to Rosamond, who was sitting before the fire, trying in vain to undo an obstinate knot in her boot−string.

"Mr. Browning sent for me!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flushing up. "Wants to scold me, I suppose, for pulling his sister's hair. I only did what she told me to," and with a beating heart she started for the parlor.

Rosamond was afraid of Mr. Browning, and feeling sure that he intended to reprove her, she took the chair nearest to the door, and covering her face with her hands, began to cry, saying—"It was ugly in me, I know', to pull Mrs. Van Vechten's hair, and I did it on purpose, too; but I won't do so again, I certainly won't."

Mr. Browning was confounded. This was the first intimation he had received of the *barbaric* performance, and for a moment he remained silent, gazing at the little girl. Her figure was very slight, her feet and hands were very small, and her hair, though disordered now and rough, was of a beautiful brown, and fell in heavy curls around her neck. He saw all this at a glance, but her face, the point to which his attention was chiefly directed, he could not see until those little hands were removed, and as a means of accomplishing this he at last said, kindly—"I do not understand you, Rosamond. My sister has entered no complaint, and I did not send for you to censure you. I wish to talk with you—to get acquainted. Will you come and sit by me upon the sofa?"

Rosamond's hands came down from her face, but she did not leave her seat; neither did Mr. Browning now wish to have her, for the light of the chandelier fell full upon her, giving him a much better view of her features than if she had been nearer to him. If, as Mrs. Peters had said, Ben Van Vechten was fond of pretty girls, he in a measure inherited the feeling from his uncle, who was an ardent admirer of the beautiful, and who now felt a glow of satisfaction in knowing that Rosamond Leyton was pretty. It was a merry, sparkling, little face which he looked upon, and though the nose did turn up a trifle, and the mouth was rather wide, the soft, brown eyes, and exquisitely fair complexion made ample amends for all. She was never intended for a menial—she would make a beautiful woman—and with thoughts similar to these, Mr. Browning, after completing his survey of her person, said— "Have you been to school much?"

"Always, until I came here," was her answer; and he continued—"And since then you have not looked in a book, I suppose?"

The brown eyes opened wide as Rosamond replied,—"Why, yes I have. I've read over so much in your library when you were gone. Mrs. Peters told me I might," she added, hastily, as she saw his look of surprise, and mistook it for displeasure.

"I am perfectly willing," he said; "but what have you read? Tell me."

Rosamond was interested at once, and while her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled, she replied—"Oh, I've read Shakespeare's Historical Plays, every one of them—and Childe Harold, and Watts on the Mind, and Kenilworth, and now I'm right in the middle of the Lady of the Lake. Wasn't Fitz−James the King? *I* believe he was. When I am older I mean to write a book just like that."

Mr. Browning could not forbear a smile at her enthusiasm, but without answering her question, he said,—"What do you intend to do until you are old enough?"

Rosamond's countenance fell, and after tapping her foot upon the carpet awhile, she said, "Mrs. Peters will get me a place by−and−by, and I s'pose I'll have to be a milliner."

"Do you wish to be one?"

"Why, no; nor mother didn't either, but after father died she had to do something. Father was a kind of a lawyer, and left her poor."

"Do you wish to go away from here, Rosamond?"

There were tears on the long−fringed eye−lashes as the young girl replied, "No, sir; I'd like to live here always, but there's nothing for me to do."

"Unless you go to school. How would you like that?"

"I have no one to pay the bills," and the curly head shook mournfully.

"But I have money, Rosamond, and suppose I say that you shall stay here and go to school?"

"Oh, sir, *will* you say so? *May* I live with you always?" and forgetting her fear of him in her great joy, Rosamond Leyton crossed over to where he sat, and laying both her hands upon his shoulder, continued—"Are you in earnest, Mr. Browning? May I stay? Oh, I'll be so good to you when you are old and sick!"

It seemed to her that he was old enough to be her father, then, and it almost seemed so to him. Giving her a very paternal look, he answered, "Yes, child, you shall stay as long as you like and now go, or Mrs. Peters will be wondering what keeps you."

Rosamond started to leave the room, but ere she reached the door she paused, and turning to Mr. Browning, said, "You have made me *so* happy, and I like you so much, I wish you'd let me kiss your hand—may I?"

It was a strange question, and it sent the blood tingling to the very tips of Mr. Browning's fingers.

"Why, ye−es,—I don't know. What made you think of that?" he said, and Rosamond replied,—"I always kissed father when he made me very happy. It was all I could do."

"But I am not your father," stammered Mr. Browning; "I shall not be twenty−five until November. Still you can do as you please."

"Not twenty−five yet," repeated Rosamond;—"why, I thought you were nearer *forty*. I don't believe I'd better, though I like you just as well. Good night."

He heard her go through the hall, up the stairs, through the upper hall, and then all was still again.

"What a strange little creature she is," he thought; "so childlike and frank, but how queer that she should ask to *kiss me!* Wouldn't Susan be shocked if she knew it, and won't she be horrified when I tell her I *am* going to educate the girl. I shouldn't have thought of it but for her. And suppose Ben does fall in love with her. If he knew a little more, it would not be a bad match. Somebody must keep up our family, or it will become extinct. Susan and I are the only ones left, and *I*"—here he paused, and starting to his feet, he paced the floor hurriedly, nervously, as if seeking to escape from some pursuing evil. "It is terrible," he whispered, "but I *can* bear it and will," and going to his room he sought his pillow to dream strange dreams of tresses black, and ringlets brown,—of fierce, dark eyes, and shining orbs, whose owner had asked to kiss his hand, and mistaken him for her sire.

CHAPTER III. BEN'S VISIT.

The next morning, as Mrs. Van Vechten was slowly making her toilet alone, there came a gentle rap at her door, and Rosamond Leyton appeared, her face fresh and blooming as a rose−bud, her curls brushed back from her forehead, and her voice very respectful, as she said—"I have come to ask your pardon for my roughness yesterday. I can do better, and if you will let me wait on you while you stay, I am sure I shall please you."

Mrs. Van Vechten could not resist that appeal, and she graciously accepted the girl's offer, asking her the while what had made the change in her behavior. Always frank and truthful, Rosamond explained to the lady that Mr. Browning's kindness had filled her with gratitude and determined her to do as she had done. To her Mrs. Van Vechten said nothing, but when she met her brother at the breakfast table, there was an ominous frown upon her face, and the moment they were alone, she gave him her opinion without reserve. But Mr. Browning was firm. "He should have something to live for," he said, "and Heaven only knew the lonely hours he passed with no object in which to be interested. Her family, though unfortunate, are highly respectable," he added, "and if I can make her a useful ornament in society, it is my duty to do so."

Mrs. Van Vechten knew how useless it would be to remonstrate with him, and she gave up the contest, mentally resolving that "Ben should not pass his college vacations there."

When the villagers learned that Mr. Browning intended to educate Rosamond and treat her as his equal, they ascribed it wholly to the influence of his sister, who, of course, had suggested to him an act which seemed every way right and proper. They did not know how the lady opposed it, nor how, for many days, she maintained a cold reserve toward the young girl, who strove in various ways to conciliate her, and at last succeeded so far that she not only accepted her services at her toilet, but even asked of her sometimes to read her to sleep in the afternoon, a process neither long nor tedious, for Mrs. Van Vechten was not literary, and by the time the second page was reached she usually nodded her full acquiescence to the author's opinions, and Rosamond was free to do as she pleased.

One afternoon when Mrs. Van Vechten was fast asleep, and Rosamond deep in the "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner," (the former having selected that poem as an opiate because of its musical jingle,) there was the sound of a bounding step upon the stairs, accompanied by the stirring notes of Yankee Doodle, which some one whistled at the top of his voice. Rosamond was about going to see who it was, when the door opened and disclosed to view a long, lank, light−haired, good−natured looking youth, dressed in the extreme of fashion, with a huge gold chain dangling across his vest, and an immense diamond ring upon his little finger. This last he managed to show frequently by caressing his chin, where, by the aid of a microscope, a very little down might possibly have been found! This was Ben! He had just arrived, and learning that his mother was in her room, had entered it unceremoniously. The unexpected apparition of a beautiful young girl startled him, and he introduced himself to her good graces by the very expressive exclamation, "*Thunder!* I beg your pardon, Miss," he continued, as he met her surprised and reproving glance. "You scared me so I didn't know what else to say. It's a favorite expression of mine, but I'll quit it, if you say so. Do you live here?"

"I wait upon your mother," was the quiet answer, which came near wringing from the young man a repetition of the offensive word.

But he remembered himself in time, and then continued, "How do you know she's my mother? You are right, though. I'm Ben Van Vechten—the veriest dolt in school, they say. But, as an offset, I've got a heart as big as an ox; and now, who are you? I know you are not a waiting− maid!"

Rosamond explained who she was, and then, rather pleased with his off− hand manner, began to question him concerning his journey, and so forth. Ben was delighted. It was not every girl who would of her own accord talk to him, and sitting down beside her, he told her twice that she was handsome, was cautiously winding his arm around her waist, when from the rosewood bedstead there came the sharp, quick word, "Benjamin!" and, unmindful of Rosamond's presence, Ben leaped into the middle of the room, ejaculating, "Thunder! mother, what do you want?"

"I want *her* to leave the room," said Mrs. Van Vechten, pointing toward Rosamond, who, wholly ignorant of the nature of her offence, retreated hastily, wondering how she had displeased the capricious lady.

Although Ben Van Vechten would not have dared to do a thing in direct opposition to his mother's commands, he was not ordinarily afraid of her, and he now listened impatiently, while she told him that Rosamond Leyton was not a fit associate for a young man like himself, "She was a sort of nobody, whom her brother had undertaken to educate," she said, "and though she might be rather pretty, she was low−born and vulgar, as any one could see."

Ben confessed to a deficiency of eye−sight on that point, and then, as his mother showed no signs of changing the conversation, he left her abruptly, and sauntered off into the garden, where he came suddenly upon Rosamond, who was finishing the Ancient Mariner in the summer− house, her favorite resort.

"So we've met again," said he, "and a pretty lecture I've had on your account."

"Why on my account?" asked Rosamond; and Ben, who never kept a thing to himself, told her in substance all his mother had said.

"She always wakes in the wrong time," said he, "and she saw me just as I was about to give you a little bit of a hug—so"—and he proceeded to demonstrate.

Rosamond's temper was up, and equally indignant at mother and son, she started to her feet, exclaiming, "I'd thank you, sir, to let me alone."

"Whew−ew," whistled Ben. "Spunky, ain't you. Now I rather like that. But pray don't burst a blood vessel. I've no notion of making love to you, if mother does think so. You are too small a girl."

"Too small a girl," repeated Rosamond, scornfully. "I'm *fourteen* to− morrow—quite too old to be insulted," and she darted away, followed by the merry laugh of the good−humored Ben.

Two hours before, Rosamond would not have been so excited, for though nearly fourteen, she was in thought and feeling a very child, as was proved by her asking to kiss her benefactor's hand; but Mrs. Van Vechten's remarks, repeated to her by Ben, had wrought in her a change, and, in some respects, transformed her into a woman at once. She did not care so much for the liberties Ben had attempted to take, but his mother's words rankled in her bosom, awakening within her a feeling of bitter resentment; and when, next day, the lady's bell rang out its summons for her to come, she sat still upon the doorsteps and gave no heed.

"Rosamond," said Mrs. Peters, "Mrs. Van Vechten is ringing for you."

"Let her ring, I'm not going to wait on her any more," and Rosamond returned to the book she was reading.

Meantime, flurried and impatient, the lady above stairs pulled at the bell−rope, growing more nervous and angry with every pull, until at last, as she heard her brother's step in the hall, she went out to him and said, "I wish you'd send that girl to me. I've rung at least fifty times; and dare say she's enticing Ben again. I knew it would be so."

Going hurriedly down the stairs, Mr. Browning sought out Rosamond and said to her, "My sister is ringing for you."

"I know it, sir;" and the brown eyes, which heretofore had seemed so soft and gentle, flashed upon him an expression which puzzled him.

"Then why do you not go?" he asked; and the young girl replied, "I shall not wait upon, her any more."

"*Rosamond!*" said Mr. Browning. There was severity in the tone of his voice, and Rosamond roused at once.

"She says I am *vulgar*, and *low−born*, and have designs upon Ben," said she, "and it's a falsehood. My mother was as much a lady as she. I am *not* vulgar, and I hate Ben, and I won't stay here if I must wait on *her*. Shall I go away?"

If Rosamond left, the life of the house went with her. This Mr. Browning knew; but man−like, he did not wish to be conquered by a woman, and after questioning her as to the nature of Mrs. Van Vechten's offence, he answered, "My sister says some foolish things, I know, but it is my request that you attend to her while she stays, and I expect to be obeyed."

That last word was unfortunate, for Rosamond had a strong will of her own, and tapping her little foot upon the ground, she said saucily, "And suppose you are not obeyed?"

He did not tell her she must leave Riverside, but he said, "You must answer for your disobedience to me, who have certainly some right to control you;" then, fearing that his own high temper might be tried more than he chose to have it, he walked away just in time to avoid hearing her say, "she cared less for him than for his sister!"

Rosamond was too impulsive not to repent bitterly of her conduct; and though she persisted in leaving Mrs. Van Vechten to herself, and refused to speak to Ben, whose face, in consequence, wore a most melancholy expression, she almost cried herself sick, and at last, startled Mrs. Peters, just as that lady was stepping into bed,

by declaring that she must see Mr. Browning before she slept.

Mr. Browning sat in his library, alone. He did not usually retire early, but this night he had cause for wakefulness. The burst of passion he had witnessed in his protegee, had carried him back to a time when another than little Rosamond Leyton had laughed his wishes to scorn.

"And is it ever thus with them?" he said. "Are all women furies in disguise?—and Rosamond seemed so gentle, so good."

He did not hear the low knock on his door, for his thoughts were far away in the south−land, where he had learned his first lesson of womankind. Neither did he hear the light footfall upon the floor, but when a sweet, tearful voice said to him, "Mr. Browning, are you feeling so badly for me?" he started, and on a hassock at his feet saw Rosamond Leyton. The sight of her was unexpected, and it startled him for a moment, but soon recovering his composure, he said gently: "Why are you here? I supposed you were in bed."

Rosamond began to cry, and with her usual impetuosity replied, "I came to tell you how sorry I am for behaving so rudely to you. I do try to govern my temper so hard, but it sometimes gets the mastery. Won't you forgive me, sir? It wasn't Rosamond that acted so—it was a vile, wicked somebody else. Will you forgive me?" and in her dread that the coveted forgiveness might be withheld, she forgot that he was only *twenty−four*, and laid her head upon his knee, sobbing like a little child.

"Had *she* done like this, how different would my life have been," thought Mr. Browning, and involuntarily caressing the curly head, he was about to speak, when Rosamond interrupted him, saying,

"I won't deceive you, Mr. Browning, and make you think I'm better than I am. I am sorry I acted so to you, but I don't believe I'm sorry about Mrs. Van Vechten. I don't like her, for she always treats me as though I were not near as good as she, and I can't wait on her any more. Must I? Oh, don't make me," and she looked beseechingly into his face.

He could not help respecting her for that inborn feeling, which would not permit herself to be trampled down, and though he felt intuitively that she was having her own way after all, he assured her of his forgiveness, and then added: "Mrs. Van Vechten will not require your services, for she received a letter to−night, saying her presence was needed at home, and she leaves us to−morrow."

"*And Ben?*" she asked—"does he go, too?"

"He accompanies his mother to New York," Mr. Browning said, "and I believe she intends leaving him there with a friend, until his school commences again."

In spite of herself, Rosamond rather liked Ben, and feeling that she was the cause of his banishment from Riverside, her sympathy was enlisted for him, and she said, "If I were not here, Ben would stay. Hadn't you rather send me away?"

"No, Rosamond, no;—I need you here," was Mr. Browning's reply, and then as the clock struck eleven, he bade her leave him, saying it was time children like her were in bed.

As he had said, Mis. Van Vechten was going away, and she came down to breakfast next morning in her traveling dress, appearing very unamiable, and looking very cross at Rosamond, with whom she finally parted without a word of reconciliation. Ben, on the contrary, was all affability, and managed slyly to kiss her, telling her he should come there again in spite of his mother.

After their departure the household settled back into its usual monotonous way of living, with the exception that Rosamond, being promoted to the position of an equal, became, in many respects, the real mistress of Riverside, though Mrs. Peters nominally held the reins, and aside from superintending her work, built many castles of the future when her protegee would be a full grown woman and her master still young and handsome!

CHAPTER IV. ROSAMOND'S EDUCATION.

One year has passed away since Mrs. Van Vechten departed for the South, and up the locust lined avenue which leads to Riverside, the owner of the place is slowly riding. It is not pleasant going home tonight, and so he lingers by the way, wondering why it is that the absence of a *child* should make so much difference in one's feelings! During the year Rosamond had recited her lessons to him, but with many others he fancied no girl's education could be finished unless she were *sent away*—and two weeks before the night of which we write he had taken her himself to Atwater Seminary, a distance of more than two hundred miles, and then, with a sense of desolation for which he could not account, he had returned to his home, which was never so lonely before. There was no merry voice within the walls,—no tripping feet upon the stairs,—no soft, white hand to bathe his forehead when suffering from real or fancied headaches,—no slippers waiting by his chair,—no flowers on the mantel,—no bright face at the window,—no Rosamond at the door.

Of all this was he thinking that November afternoon, and when at last he reached his house, he went straight to his library, hoping to find a letter there, telling him of her welfare. But letter there was none, and with a feeling of disappointment he started to the parlor. The door was ajar and he caught glimpses of a cheerfully blazing fire within the grate. The shutters, too, were open and the curtains were put back just as they used to be when *she was there*. It seemed like the olden time, and with spirits somewhat enlivened he advanced into the room. His favorite chair stood before the fire, and so near to it that her head was leaning on its arm, sat a young girl. Her back was turned toward him, but he knew that form full well, and joyfully he cried: "Rosamond, how came you here?"

Amid her smiles and tears, Rosamond tempted to tell him the story of her grievances. She was homesick, and she could not learn half so much at the Atwater Seminary as at home—then, too, she hated the strait− jacket rules, and hated the lady−boarder, who pretended to be sick, and wouldn't let the school−girls breathe, especially Rosamond Leyton, for whom she seemed to have conceived a particular aversion.

Pleased as Mr. Browning was to have Rosamond with him again, he did not quite like her reasons for coming back, and he questioned her closely as to the cause of her sudden return.

"I shouldn't have come, perhaps," said Rosamond, "if that sick woman hadn't been so nervous and disagreeable. She paid enormous sums for her board, and so Mrs. Lindsey would hardly let us breathe for fear of disturbing her. My room was over hers, and I had to take off my shoes and walk on tiptoe, and even then she complained of me, saying I was rude and noisy, when I tried so hard to be still. I made some hateful remark about her in the hall, which she overheard, and when Mrs. Lindsey scolded me for it, saying she was a very wealthy lady from Florida, and accustomed to every attention at home, I said back some pert things, I suppose, for she threatened to write and tell you, and so I thought I'd come and tell you myself."

There was a dizzy whirl in Mr. Browning's brain—a pallor about his lips—for a terrible suspicion had flashed upon him, and leaning forward, he said in a voice almost a whisper, "What was the Florida lady's name?"

"Potter, or Porter—yes, *Miss Porter*, that was it. But what is the matter? Are you sick?" Rosamond asked, as she saw how white he was.

"Only a sudden faintness. It will soon pass off," he said. "Tell me more of her. Did she see you? Were you near her?"

"No," answered Rosamond. "She was sick all the time I was there, and did not leave her room. The girls said, though, that she was rather pretty, but had big, black, evil−looking eyes. I don't know why it was, but I felt afraid of her—felt just as though she was my evil genius. I couldn't help it—but you *are* sick, Mr. Browning—you are pale as a ghost. Lie down upon the sofa, and let me bring the pillows, as I used to do."

She darted off in the direction of his sleeping−room, unconscious of the voice which called after her, asking if it were not dark in the hall, and bidding her take a light.

"But what does it matter?" he said, as he tottered to the sofa. " *She* is not here. Atwater Seminary is two hundred miles away. She can't harm Rosamond now."

By this time Rosamond came with the pillows, which she arranged upon the sofa, making him lie down while she sat by, and laid her hand soothingly upon his burning forehead.

"We will have tea in here to−night," she said, "I told Mrs. Peters so, and I will make it myself. Do you feel

any better?" and she brought her rosy face so near to his that he felt her warm breath upon his cheek.

"Yes, I am better," he replied, "but keep your hand upon my forehead. It assures me of your presence, when my eyes are shut."

So Rosamond sat beside him, and when Mrs. Peters came in to lay the cloth, she found them thus together. Smiling knowingly, she whispered to herself, "'Nater is the same everywhere," and the good lady bustled in and out, bringing her choicest bits and richest cake in honor of her pet's return. That night, freed from boarding−school restraint, Rosamond slept soundly in her own pleasant chamber, but to Ralph Browning, pacing up and down his room, there came not a moment of unconsciousness. He could not forget how near he had been to one who had embittered his whole life—nor yet how near to her young Rosamond had been, and he shuddered as if the latter had escaped an unseen danger. Occasionally, too, the dread thought stole over him, "suppose she should come here, and with her eagle eye discover what, if it exist at all, is hidden in the inmost recesses of my heart."

But of this he had little fear, and when the morning came he was himself again, and, save that it was haggard and pale, his face gave no token of the terrible night he had passed. But what should he do with Rosamond? This was the question which now perplexed him. He had no desire to send her from him again, neither would she have gone if he had—and he at last came to the very sensible conclusion that the school in his own village was quite as good as any, and she accordingly became an attendant at the Granby Female Seminary. Here she remained for two years and a half, over which time we will pass silently and introduce her again to our readers, when she is nearly eighteen—a graduate—−a belle—and the sunshine of Riverside.

CHAPTER V. BROTHER AND SISTER.

During the time which had elapsed since Ben Van Vechten first made the acquaintance of Rosamond, he had not once been to Riverside, for, failing to enter college, and overwhelmed with mortification at his failure, he had returned to Alabama, from which place he wrote to her occasionally, always addressing her as a little girl, and speaking of himself as a very ancient personage in comparison with herself. But that Rosamond was now no longer a little girl was proved by her finely rounded figure, her intelligent face, her polished manners and self−reliant air. And Rosamond was beautiful, too—so beautiful that strangers invariably asked *who* she was, turning always for a second look, when told she was the adopted sister or daughter—the villagers hardly knew which—of the wealthy Mr. Browning. But whether she were the daughter or the sister of the man with whom she lived, she was in reality the mistress of his household, and those who at first slighted her as the child of a milliner, now gladly paid her homage as one who was to be the heir of Mr. Browning's wealth. He would never marry her, the wise ones thought—would never marry anybody—and so, with this understanding, he was free to talk, walk, and ride with her as often as he chose. He liked her, the people said, but did not love her, while Rosamond herself believed he almost hated her, so strangely cold and harsh was his manner toward her at times.

This coldness had increased of late, and when the Lawries, who, next to Mr. Browning, were the most aristocratic people in the place, suggested that she should accompany them for a few weeks to the Springs, she was delighted with the plan, and nothing doubting that Mr. Browning would be glad to have her out of the way, she went to him for his consent. She found him in his library, apparently so absorbed in reading that he did not observe her approach until she stood between him and the light. Then he looked up quickly, and, as she fancied, an expression of displeasure passed over his face.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," she said, rather petulantly; "I have to break in upon your privacy if I would see you at all."

He gave her a searching glance, and then, laying aside his book and folding his arms, said pleasantly, "I am at your service now, Miss Leyton. What is it you wish?"

Very briefly she stated her request, and then sitting down in the window, awaited his answer. It was not given immediately, and when he did speak, he said—"Rosamond, do you wish to go?"

"Of course I do," she replied, "I want to go where it is not as lonesome as I find it here."

"Lonesome, Rosamond, lonesome," he repeated. "Riverside has never been lonesome since—" he paused a moment and then added, "since you came here."

The shadow disappeared from Rosamond's face, as she replied—"I did not suppose you cared to have me here. I thought you did not like me."

"Not like you, Rosamond?" and over his fine features there came a look of pain, which increased as Rosamond continued:—"You are so cold at times, and shun me as it were; inventing excuses to drive me from you when you know I would rather stay."

"Oh, Rosamond," he groaned, "how mistaken you are. The world would be to me a blank were it not for you; and if my manner is sometimes cold and cruel, it is because stern duty demands it should be so. I cannot lay bare my secret heart to you of all others, but could you know me as I am, you would censure much, but pity more." He paused a moment, then, scarcely knowing what he said, he continued—"Rosamond, we will understand each other. *I shall never marry*—never *can* marry. In your intercourse with me, will you always remember that?"

"Why, yes," answered Rosamond, puzzled to comprehend him. "I'll remember that you say so, but it is not likely you'll keep your word."

"I am not trifling with you," he said." Marriage is not for *me* . There is a dreadful reason why I cannot marry, and if at times I am cold toward you, it is because—because—"

Rosamond's eyes were riveted upon his face—darker and darker they grew, becoming at last almost black in their intensity. She was beginning to understand him, and coloring crimson, she answered, bitterly: "I know what you would say, but you need have no fears, for I never aspired to that honor. Rosamond Leyton has yet to see the man she could love."

"Rosamond," and Mr. Browning's voice was so low, so mournful in its tone that it quelled the angry feelings

in the young girl's bosom, and she offered no resistance when he came to her side and took her hand in his, saying as he did so—"Listen to me. You came here a little girl, and at first I did not heed you, but you made your presence felt in various ways, until at last I thought I could not live without you. You are a young lady now—the world calls you beautiful. To me you are beautiful. Oh, *so* beautiful," and he laid one hand upon her shining hair, softly, tenderly nay, proudly, as if she had been his child. "I am not old yet, and it would be natural that we should love each other, but we must not—we cannot."

"And lest I should love you too well, you have tried to make me hate you," interrupted Rosamond, trying in vain to release herself from his powerful grasp, and adding, "but you can spare yourself the trouble. I like you too well to hate you; but as I live, I would not marry you if I could. I mean what I say!"

He released her hand, and returning to his chair, laid his head upon the table, while she continued—"I know just about how well you like me—how necessary I am to your comfort, and since fate has decreed that we should be thrown together, let us contribute to each other's happiness as far as in us lies. I will think of you as a brother, if you like, and you shall treat me as a sister, until somebody takes me off your hands. Now, I can't say *I* shall never marry, for I verily believe I shall. Meantime, you must think of me just as you would if you had a wife. Is it a bargain, Mr. Browning?"

She spoke playfully, but he knew she was in earnest, and from his inmost soul he blessed her for having thus brought the conversation to a close. He would not tell her why he had said to her what he had—it was not what he intended to say, and he knew she was in a measure deceived, but he could not explain to her now; he could not tell her that he trembled for himself far more than for her, and it was not for her then to know how much he loved her, nor how that love was wearing his life away because of its great sin. He was growing old now very fast. The shadows of years were on his brow, and Rosamond almost fancied she saw his brown locks turning white. She was a warm−hearted, impulsive girl, and going toward him, she parted from his forehead the hair streaked with gray, saying softly to him: "Shall it not be so? May I be your sister?"

"Yes, Rosamond, yes," was his answer; and then, wishing to bring him back to the point from which they started, Rosamond said abruptly— "And what of the Springs? Can I go?"

The descent was a rapid one, but it was what he needed, and lifting up his head, he replied, just as he had done before, "Do you want to go?" "Not as much as I did when I thought you were angry, and if you would rather, I had quite as lief stay with you."

"Then stay," he said, "and we will have no more misunderstandings."

The next evening, as he sat alone in the parlor, a servant brought to him a letter, the superscription of which made him reel, as if he would have fallen to the floor. It was nearly four years since he had seen that handwriting—he had hoped never to look upon it again—but it was there before his eyes, and she who wrote that letter was coming to Riverside—"would be there in a few days, Providence permitting. Do not commit suicide on my account," she wrote, "for I care as little as yourself to have our secret divulged, and unless I find that you are after other *prey*, I shall keep my own counsel."

The letter dropped from his nerveless fingers—the objects in the room swam before his eyes, and like one on whom a crushing weight has fallen, he sat bewildered, until the voice of Rosamond aroused him, and fleeing to his chamber he locked the door, and then sat down to think. She was coming to Riverside, and wherefore? He did not wish for a reconciliation now—he would rather live there just as he was, with Rosamond.

"Nothing will escape her," he said; "those basilisk eyes will see everything—will ferret out my love for that fair young girl. Oh, Heaven, *is* there no escape!"

He heard the voice of Anna Lawrie in the yard. She was coming for Rosamond's decision, and quick as thought he rang the bell, bidding the servant who appeared to send Miss Leyton to him.

"Rosamond," he said, when she came to the door, "I have changed my mind. You must go to the Springs."

"But I'd rather stay at home—I do not wish to go," she said.

"I say you *must*. So tell Miss Lawrie you will," he answered, and his eyes flashed almost savagely upon her.

Rosamond waited for no more. She had discovered the impediment to his marrying. It was *hereditary insanity*, and she had seen the first signs of it in him herself! Magnanimously resolving never to tell a human being, nor let him be chained if she could help it, however furious he might become, she went down to Miss Lawrie, telling her she would go.

One week from that day was fixed upon for their departure, and during that time Rosamond was too much

absorbed in dresses and finery to pay much heed to Mr. Browning. Of one thing she was sure, though—he was *crazy*; for what else made him stalk up and down the gravel−walk, his head bent forward, and his hands behind him, as if intently thinking. Once, when she saw him thus, she longed to go out to him, to tell him she knew his secret, and that she would never leave him, however unmanageable he should become! But his manner toward her now was so strange that she dared not, and she was almost as glad as himself when at last the morning came for her to go.

"Promise me one thing," he said, as they stood together a moment alone. "Don't write until you hear from me, and don't come home until I send for you."

"And suppose the Lawries come, what then?" she asked, and he replied, "No matter; stay until I write. Here are five hundred dollars in case of an emergency," and he thrust a check into her hand.

"Stop," he continued, as the carriage came round—"did you put your clothes away where no one can see them, or are you taking them all with you?"

"Why, no, why should I?" she answered. "Ain't I coming back?"

"Yes, yes—Heaven only knows," he said. "Oh, Rosamond, it may be I am parting with you forever, and at such a moment, is it a sin for you to kiss me? You asked to do so once. Will you do it now?"

"I will," she replied, and she kissed, unhesitatingly, his quivering lips.

The Lawries were at the door—Mrs. Peters also—and forcing down his emotion, he bade her a calm good−by. The carriage rolled away, but ere its occupants were six miles from Riverside, every article of dress which had belonged to Rosamond had disappeared from her room, which presented the appearance of any ordinary bed−chamber, and when Mrs. Peters, in great alarm, came to Mr. Browning, asking what he supposed had become of them, he answered quietly—"I have put them in my private closet and locked them up!"

CHAPTER VI. MARIE PORTER.

The models were crowded with visitors. Every apartment at ——Hall, from basement to attic, was full, save two small rooms, eight by ten, so dingy and uncomfortable, that only in cases of emergency were they offered to guests. These, from necessity, were taken by the Lawries, but for Rosamond there was scarcely found a standing point, unless she were willing to share the apartment of a sick lady, who had graciously consented to receive any genteel, well−bred person, who looked as though they would be quiet and not rummage her things more than once a day!

"She was a very high−bred woman," the obsequious attendant said, "and her room the best in the house; she would not remain much longer, and when she was gone the young lady could have it alone, or share it with her companions. It contained two beds, of course, besides a few *nails* for dresses."

"Oh, do take it," whispered the younger Miss Lawrie, who was not yet thoroughly versed in the *pleasures* of a watering place, and who cast rueful glances at her cheerless *pen*, so different from her airy chamber at home.

So Rosamond's trunks were taken to No. 20, whither she herself followed them. The first occupant, it would seem, was quite an invalid, for though it was four in the afternoon, she was still in bed. Great pains, however had evidently been taken with her toilet, and nothing could have been more perfect than the arrangement of her pillows—her hair—her wrapper, and the crimson shawl she wore about her shoulders. Rosamond bowed to her politely, and then, without noticing her particularly, went over to the side of the room she supposed was to be hers. She had just laid aside her hat, when the lady said: "That open blind lets in too much light. Will you please shut it Miss ——I don't know what to call you."

"Miss Leyton," answered Rosamond, "and you are—"

"Miss Porter," returned the speaker.

"Rosamond started quickly, for she remembered the name, and looking for the first time directly at the lady, she met a pair of large black eyes fixed inquiringly upon her.

"Leyton—Leyton," repeated the lady, "where have I heard of you before?"

"At Atwater Seminary, perhaps," suggested Rosamond, a little doubtful is to the manner in which her intelligence would be received.

A shadow flitted over the lady's face, but it was soon succeeded by a smile, and she said graciously, "Oh, yes, I know. You annoyed me and I annoyed you. It was an even thing, and since we are thrown together again, we will not quarrel about the past. Ain't you going to close that blind? The light shines full in my face, and, as I did not sleep one wink last night, I am looking horridly to−day."

"Excuse me, madam," said Rosamond, "I was so taken by surprise that I forgot your request," and she proceeded to shut the blind.

This being done, she divested herself of her soiled garments, washed her face, brushed her curls, and was about going in quest of her companions, when the lady asked if she had friends there. Rosamond replied that she had, at the same time explaining how uncomfortable they were.

"The hotel is full," said the lady, "and they all envy me my room; but if I pay for the best, I am surely entitled to the best. I shall not remain here long, however. Indeed, I did not expect to be here now, but sickness overtook me. I dare say I am the subject of many anxious thoughts to the person I am going to visit."

There was a half−exultant expression upon the lady's face as she uttered these last words, but in the darkened room, Rosamond did not observe it. She was sorry for one thus detained against her will, and leaning against the foot−board, she said: "You suffer a great deal from ill−health, do you not? Have you always been an invalid?"

"Not always. I was very healthy once, but a great trouble came upon me, shocking my nervous system terribly, and since then I have never seen a well day. I was young when it occurred—about your age, I think. How old are you, Miss Leyton?"

"I am eighteen next October," was Rosamond's reply, and the lady continued, "I was older than that. Most nineteen. I am twenty−eight now."

Rosamond did not know *why* she said it, but she rejoined quickly: "Twenty−eight. So is *Mr.* Browning!"

"*Who?*" exclaimed the lady, the tone of her voice so sharp—so loud and earnest, that Rosamond was startled,

and did not answer for an instant.

When she did, she said, "I beg your pardon; it is Mr. Browning who is twenty−eight."

"Ah, yes, I did not quite understand you. I'm a little hard of hearing. Who is Mr. Browning?"

The voice had assumed its usually soft, smooth tone, and Rosamond could not see the rapid beatings of the heart, nor the eager curiosity lurking in the glittering black eyes. The lady *seemed* indifferent, and smoothed carelessly the rich Valenciennes lace, which edged the sleeve of her cambric wrapper.

"Did you tell me who Mr. Browning was, dear?" and the black eyes wandered over the counterpane looking everywhere but at Rosamond, so fearful was their owner lest they should betray the interest she felt in the answer.

"Mr. Browning," said Rosamond, "is—is—I hardly know what he is to me. I went to his house to live when I was a little, friendless orphan, and he very kindly educated me, and made me what I am. I live with him still at Riverside." "Ye−es—Riverside—beau−ti−ful name—his country—seat—I—sup−pose," the words dropped syllable by syllable from the white lips, but there was no quiver in the voice—no ruffle upon her face.

Raising herself upon her elbow, the lady continued, "Pray, don't think me fidgety, but won't you please open that shutter. I did not think it would be so dark. There, that's a good girl. Now, come and sit by me on the bed, and tell me of Riverside. Put your feet in the chair, or take this pillow. There, turn a little more to the light. I like to see people when they talk to me."

Rosamond complied with each request, and then, never dreaming of the close examination to which her face was subjected, she began to speak of her beautiful home—describing it minutely, and dwelling somewhat at length upon the virtues of its owner.

"You like him very much," the lady said, nodding a little affirmative nod to her own question.

"Yes—very—very much," was Rosamond's answer; and the lady continued, "And *Mrs*. Browning? Do you like her, too?"

"There is no Mrs. Browning," returned Rosamond, adding, quickly, as she saw in her auditor's face an expression she did not understand, "but it is perfectly proper I should live there, for Mrs. Peters, the housekeeper, has charge of me."

"Perhaps, then, he will marry you," and the jeweled hands worked nervously under the crimson shawl.

"Oh, no, he won't," said Rosamond, decidedly, "he's too old for me. Why, his hair is turning gray!"

"That's nothing," answered the lady, a little sharply. "Everybody's hair turns early now−a−days. Sarah found three or four silver threads in mine, this morning. Miss Leyton, don't you love Mr. Browning?"

"Why, yes," Rosamond began, and the face upon the pillow assumed a dark and almost fiendish expression. "Why, yes, I love him as a brother, but nothing else. I respect him for his goodness, but it would be impossible to love him with a marrying love."

The fierce expression passed away, and Miss Porter was about to speak when Anna Lawrie sent for Rosamond, who excused herself and left the room, thinking that, after all, she should like her old enemy of Atwater Seminary very much.

Meantime "the enemy" had buried her face in her pillows, and clenching her blue veined fists, struck at the empty air, just as she would have struck at the owner of Riverside had he been standing there.

"Fine time he has of it," she muttered, "living there with her, and she so young and beautiful. I could have strangled her—the jade!— when she sat there talking so enthusiastically to *me, of him!* And she loves him, too. I know she does, though she don't know it herself. But I must be wary. I must seem to like this girl—must win her confidence—so I can probe her heart to its core, and if I find they love each other!"—she paused a moment, then grinding her teeth together, added slowly, as if the sound of her voice were musical and sweet, "Marie Porter will be avenged!"

That strange woman could be a demon or an angel, and as the latter character suited her just now, Rosamond, on her return to her room, found her all gentleness and love.

That night, when all around the house was still, the full moon shone down upon a scene which would have chilled the blood of Ralph Browning and made his heart stand still. Upon a single bedstead near the window Rosamond Leyton lay calmly sleeping—her brown curls floating o'er the pillow—her cheeks flushed with health and beauty—her lips slightly apart and her slender hands folded gracefully upon her bosom. Over her a fierce woman bent—her long, black hair streaming down her back—her eyes blazing with passion—her face the impersonation of malignity and hate; and there she stood, a vulture watching a harmless dove. Rosamond was

dreaming of her home, and the ogress, standing near, heard her murmur, "dear Mr. Browning."

For a moment Marie Porter stood immovable—then gliding back to her own couch, she whispered, "It is as I believed, and now *if* he loves *her*, the time I've waited for so long has come."

All that night she lay awake, burning with excitement and thirsting for revenge, and when the morning came, the illness was not feigned which kept her in her bed and wrung from her cries of pain. She was really suffering now, and during the next few days, Rosamond stayed almost constantly at her side, administering to her wants, and caring for her so tenderly that hatred died out of the woman's heart, and she pitied the fair young girl, for in those few days she had learned what Rosamond did not know herself, though she was gradually waking up to it now. It was a long time since she had been separated from Mr. Browning, and she missed him so much, following him in fancy through the day, and at night wondering if he were thinking of her, and wishing he could hear the sound of her voice singing to him as she was wont to do when the twilight was over the earth. Anon there crept into her heart a feeling she could not define—a feverish longing to be where he was—a sense of desolation and terrible pain when she thought of his insanity, and the long, dreary years which might ensue when he would lose all knowledge of her. She did not care to talk so much of him now, but Miss Porter cared to have her, and caressingly winning the girl's confidence, learned almost everything—learned that there was an impediment to his marrying, and that Rosamond believed that impediment to be *hereditary insanity*—learned that he was often fitful and gloomy, treating his ward sometimes with coldness, and again with the utmost tenderness. Of the interview in the library Rosamond did not tell, but she told of everything else—of his refusing to let her come to the Springs and then compelling her, against her will, to go; and Marie Porter, holding the little hands in hers, and listening to the story, read it all, and read it aright, gloating over the anguish she knew it cost Ralph Browning to see that beautiful girl each day and know he must not win her.

"But I pity *her*" she said, "for there is coming to her a terrible awakening."

Then, for no other reason than a thirst for excitement, she longed to see that awakening, and one day when they sat together alone, she took Rosamond's hand in hers, and examining its scarcely legible lines, said, half playfully, half seriously, "Rosamond, people have called me a fortune−teller. I inherited the gift from my grandmother, and though I do not pretend to much skill, I can surely read your destiny. You *love* Mr. Browning. I have known that all along. You think of him by day—you dream of him by night, and no thought is half so sweet as the thought of going home to him. But, Rosamond, you will not marry him. There is an impediment, as you say, but not insanity. I cannot tell you what it is, but I can see," and she bent nearer to the hand which trembled in her own. "I can see that for you to marry him, or—mark me, Rosamond—for you even to love him, is a most wicked thing—a dreadful sin in the sight of Heaven, and you must forget him—will you?"

Rosamond had laid her face upon the bed and was sobbing hysterically, for Miss Porter's manner frightened her even more than her words. In reply to the question, "Will you?" she at last answered passionately, *"No, I won't!* It is *not* wicked to love him as I do. I am his *sister*, nothing more."

Miss Porter's lip curled scornfully a moment, and then she said, "Let me tell you the story of *my* life, shall I?"

No answer from Rosamond, and the lady continued: "When I was about your age I fancied I loved a man who, I think, must have been much like Mr. Browning—"

"No, no," interrupted Rosamond. "Nobody was ever like Mr. Browning. I don't want to hear the Miss Porter, but if I mistake not she will go home story. I don't want anything but to go home."

I will not tell her until it's more necessary, thought much sooner than she anticipates. And she was right, for on that very night Mr. Browning sat reading a letter which ran as follows:

"I find myself so happy with *your little* Rosamond, who chances to be my room−mate, that I have postponed my visit to Riverside, until some future time, which, if you continue neutral, may never come—but the moment you trespass on forbidden ground, or breathe a word of love into *her* ear—beware! She loves *you* . I have found that out, and I tell it because I know it will not make your life more happy, or your punishment easier to bear!"

He did not shriek—he did not faint—he did not move—but from between his teeth two words came like a burning hiss, "Curse her!" Then, seizing his pen, he dashed off a few lines, bidding Rosamond "not to delay a single moment, but to come home at once."

"She knows it all," he said, "and now, if *she* comes here, it will not be much worse. I can but die, let what will happen."

This letter took Rosamond and the Lawries by surprise, but not so Miss Porter. She expected it, and when she

saw how eager Rosamond was to go, she smiled a hard, bitter smile, and said, "I've half a mind to go with you."

"*What! where?* To *Riverside?*" asked Rosamond, suspending her preparations for a moment, and hardly knowing whether she were pleased or not.

"Yes, to Riverside," returned Miss Porter, "though on the whole, I think I'd better not. Mr. Browning may not care to see me. If he does, you can write and let me know. Give him my love, and say that if you had not described him as so incorrigible an old bach, I might be coming there to try my powers upon him. I am *irresistible in my diamonds*. Be sure and tell him that; and stay, Rosamond, I must give you some little token of my affection. What shall it be?" and she feigned to be thinking.

Most cruel must her thoughts have been, and even she hesitated a moment ere she could bring herself to such an act. Then with a contemptuous—"Pshaw!" she arose and opening her jewel box took from a private drawer a plain gold ring, bearing date nine years back, and having inscribed upon it simply her name "Marie." This she brought to Rosamond, saying, "I can't wear it now;—my hands are too thin and bony, but it just fits you,—see—" and she placed it upon the third finger of Rosamond's left hand!

Rosamond thanked her,—admired the chaste beauty of the ring and then went on with her packing, while the wicked woman seated herself by the window and leaning her head upon her hands tried to quiet the voice of conscience which cried out against the deed she had done.

"It does not matter," she thought. "That tie was severed years ago,— by his own act, too. The ring shall go. But will he see it! Men do not always observe such things," and then lest he should not quaff the cup of bitterness prepared for him, she wrote on a tiny sheet of gilt− edged paper, "Look on Rosamond's third finger!"

This she carefully sealed and gave to Rosamond, bidding her hand it to Mr. Browning, and saying in answer to her look of inquiry, "It is about a little matter concerning yourself. He can show it to you, if he thinks proper!"

"The omnibus, Miss, for the cars," cried a servant at the door, and with a hurried good−bye to her friends, Rosamond departed and was soon on her way to Riverside.

CHAPTER VII. MAKING LOVE.

An accident had occurred to the downward train, and Rosamond was detained upon the road for a long time, so that it was already dark when she reached the Granby depot. Wishing to surprise Mr. Browning, she started for home on foot, leaving her trunks in charge of the baggage master. All around the house was still, and stepping into the hall she was about passing up the stairs, when the parlor door suddenly opened, throwing a glare of light upon her face. The same instant some one caught her round the neck, and kissing her twice, only released her when she exclaimed, "*Mr. Browning*, I am surprised at you!"

"Mr. Browning! *Thunder!* Just as though I was my uncle!" cried a familiar voice, and looking at the speaker, Rosamond recognized *Ben Van Vechten!* He had come to Riverside the day previous, he said, and hearing she was expected, had waited at the depot four mortal hours, and then returned in disgust.

"But how did you know me?" she asked, and he replied, "By your daguerreotype, of course. There is but one such beautiful face in the whole world."

He was disposed to be complimentary, and Rosamond was not sorry when his mother appeared, for in her presence he was tolerably reserved. Mrs. Van Vechten greeted Rosamond politely, but the old hauteur was there, and her manner seemed to say, "If you are educated and refined, I can't forget that you were once my waiting−maid."

"Where is Mr. Browning?" asked Rosamond, and *Ben* replied, "Oh, up in his den having the shakes. He mopes there all the time. Can't you break him of the blues?"

"I'll go and try," answered Rosamond, and she started up the stairs, followed by Ben, whose mother called him back, bidding him, in a low voice, "stay where he was, and not make a fool of himself."

She could trust her *brother*, but not her *son*, and she thus did the former the greatest favor she could have done—she let him meet young Rosamond Leyton alone. The evening was quite chilly for July, and, as, since the receipt of Miss Porter's note, Mr. Browning had seemed rather agueish, there was a fire burning in the grate, and it cast its shadows upon him as he sat in his accustomed chair. His back was toward the door, and he knew nothing of Rosamond's return until two, soft, white hands were placed before his eyes, and a voice which tried to be unnatural, said "Guess who I am."

"Rosamond—darling—have you come back to me again?" he exclaimed, and starting up, he wound his arm about her, and looked into her face, expecting, momentarily, to hear her say, "Yes, I know it all."

But Rosamond did not say so. She merely told him how glad she was to be at home once more, in her delight forgetting that Marie Porter had said she loved the man who held her closely to his side and smoothed her wavy hair even while his heart throbbed painfully with memories of the past and trembled for the future. He longed to speak of her room− mate, but he dared not betray his knowledge of her existence, and he sat there waiting, yet dreading to hear the hated name.

"Did you room alone?" he asked at last, and now remembering the words, "You do love him," Rosamond moved quickly from his side. "She does know," he thought, and a silent moan of anguish died upon his lips. But Rosamond did not know—the movement was actuated by mere maidenly reserve, and sitting down directly opposite him, she told him of Miss Porter, whom she said she liked so well.

"How much of an invalid is she?" asked Mr. Browning, when he could trust his voice to speak.

"Her health is miserable," returned Rosamond. "She has the heart disease, and her waiting−maid told me she was liable to die at any time if unusually excited."

It might have been because Rosamond was there that Mr. Browning thought the room was brighter than it had been before, and quite calmly he listened while she told him more of her new friend.

"She seemed so interested in you, and in Riverside," said Rosamond, "and even proposed coming home with me—"

Mr. Browning started suddenly, and as suddenly a coal snapped out upon the carpet. This was an excuse for his movement, and Rosamond continued, "She thought, though, you might not care to see her, being a stranger, but she sent you *her love*, and—. You are cold, ain't you, Mr. Browning? You shiver like a leaf. Ben said you'd had the ague."

Rosamond closed the door and commenced again. "Where was I? Oh, I know. She said if you were not a confirmed bachelor she would try her powers on you. 'She was irresistible in her diamonds,' *she bade me tell you. But have you an ague chill, really? or what makes your teeth chatter so? Shall I ring for more coal?"*

"No, Rosamond, no. Fire does not warm me; I shall be better soon."

Rosamond pitied him, he looked so white and seemed to be suffering so much, and she remained silent for a time. Then remembering the note, she handed it to him, and turning toward the fire, stooped down to fix a bit of coal which was in danger of dropping from the grate. While in this attitude a cry between a howl of rage and a moan of anguish fell upon her ear—her shoulders were grasped by powerful hands, and looking up she saw Mr. Browning, his face distorted with passion and his flashing eyes riveted upon the *ring* glittering in the firelight. Seizing her hand, he wrenched it from her finger, and glanced at the name—then, swift as thought, placed it upon the marble hearth, and crushed it with his heel.

"It's mine—you've broken it," cried Rosamond, but he did not heed her, and gathering up the pieces, he hurled them into the grate—then, pale as ashes, sank panting into the nearest chair.

Rosamond was thunder−struck. She did not suppose he had had time to read the note, and never dreaming there was any connection between that and his strange conduct, she believed him to be raving mad, and her first impulse was to fly. Her second thought, however, was, "I will not leave him. He has these fits often, now, I know, and that is why he sent for me. He knew I could quiet him, and I will."

So Rosamond stayed, succeeding so far in soothing him that his eyes lost their savage gleam, and were suffused with a look of unnatural tenderness when they rested on her face. He did not ask her how she came by the ring, for he knew it had been sent as an insult to him, and he felt a glow of satisfaction in knowing that it was blackening on the grate. Ben's voice was now heard in the hall, asking if they intended staying there all night, and in a whisper Mr. Browning bade Rosamond go down and apologize for him. She accordingly descended to the parlor, telling Mrs. Van Vechten that her brother was too much indisposed to come down, and wished to be excused. Mrs. Van Vechten bowed coolly, and taking a book of prints, busied herself for awhile in examining them; then the book dropped from her hand—her head fell back—her mouth fell open, and Ben, who was anxiously watching her, knew by unmistakable sounds that she was fast asleep. It was now his time, and faithfully did he improve it, devoting himself so assiduously to Rosamond, that she was glad when a *snore*, louder and more prolonged than any which had preceded it started the lady herself, and produced symptoms of returning consciousness.

The next day, and the next, it was the same, and at the expiration of a week, Ben had determined either to marry Rosamond Leyton, or go to the *Crimean War*, this last being the bugbear, with which he intended frightening his mother into a consent. He hardly dared disobey her openly for fear of disinheritance, and he would rather she should express her willingness to receive Miss Leyton as her daughter. He accordingly startled her one day by asking her to sanction his intended proposal to the young girl. Nothing could exceed Mrs. Van Vechten's amazement and contempt. She would never consent, and if Ben persisted in making so disgraceful an alliance, she would disinherit him at once. Ben knew she was in earnest, and so fell back upon the Crimean war as a last resort. "He would go immediately—would start that very day for New York—he had money enough to carry him there," and he painted so vividly "death on a distant battle−field, with a ferocious *Russian* rifling his trousers' pocket," that his mother began to cry, though she still refused to relent.

"Choose, mother, choose," said he. "It's almost car time—Rosamond or the war," and he drew on his heavy boots.

"Oh Benjamin, you, will kill me dead."

"I know it. I mean to. Rosamond or the war!" and he buttoned up his coat preparatory to a start.

"Do, Ben, listen to reason."

"I won't—I won't;—Rosamond or the war! I shall rush into the thickest of the fight, and be killed the first fire, of course, and black is *so* unbecoming to you."

"Stop, I entreat. You know you are afraid of cannons;" this was said beseechingly.

"Thunder, mother! No, I ain't! Rosamond or the war—choose quick. I hear the whistle at East Granby."

He left the room—went down the stairs, out at the door, through the yard, and out into the avenue, while his distracted mother looked after him through blinding tears. She knew how determined he was when once his mind was made up, and she feared his present excitement would last until he was fairly shipped, and it was too late to

return. He would never fight, she was sure, and at the first battle−sound he would fly, and be hung as a deserter, no doubt! This touched her pride. She would rather people should say of her boy that he married a milliner's daughter than that he was hung, and hurrying to the window just as Ben looked back, hoping for a signal, she waved her hand for him to return, calling out at the top of her voice, "I relent—I relent." "I knew the *Crimea* would fetch her," said Ben; "lucky I thought of that," and without going to his mother at all, he sought out Rosamond. Half an hour later he astonished the former by rushing into her presence, and exclaiming, "She's refused me, mother; and she meant it, too. Oh, *I shall die*—I know I shall. *Oh, oh, oh!"* and Ben rolled on the floor in his frantic grief. As nearly as she could, Mrs. Van Vechten learned the particulars of his interview with Rosamond, and, though at first secretly pleased that he had been refused, she felt a very little piqued that her son should thus be dishonored, and when she saw how wretched it had made him, her feelings were enlisted in his behalf, and she tried to soothe him by saying that her brother had a great deal of influence with Rosamond, and they would refer the matter to him.

"Go now, mother. Don't wait a minute," pleaded Ben, and Mrs. Van Vechten started for her brother's library.

She found him alone, and disclosed the object of her visit at once. Rosamond had refused her son, who, in consequence, was nearly distracted, and threatened going to the Crimean war—a threat she knew he would execute unless her brother persuaded Rosamond to revoke her decision and think again.

Mr. Browning turned as white as marble, but his sister was too much absorbed in her own matters to heed his emotions, and she continued—

"Of course it will be mortifying to us all to have her in the family, and maybe Ben will get over it; but they must be engaged somehow, or he'll go away. I'll send her up to you immediately," and she hurriedly left the room in quest of Rosamond. For a moment Mr. Browning sat like one stupefied; then, covering his face with his hands, he moaned, "Must *this* come upon me, too? Must I, who love her so madly, bid her marry another? And yet what does it matter? She can never be mine—and if she marries Ben I can keep them with me always, and that vile woman will have no cause for annoying me. She said Rosamond loved me, but I pray Heaven that may not be so."

A light tread echoed in the hall, and with each fall of those little feet, Ralph Browning's heart throbbed painfully. Another moment and Rosamond was there with him—her cheeks flushed—her eyelashes wet with tears, and her whole manner betrayed an unusual degree of excitement.

"I understand from your sister," said she, "that you wish me to marry *Ben,* or leave your house. I will do the latter, but the former— never! Shall I consider our interview at an end?"

She turned to leave the room, but Mr. Browning caught her dress, exclaiming: "Stay, Rosamond, and hear me. I never uttered such words to Mrs. Van Vechten. I do not wish you to marry Ben unless you love him. Do you love him, Rosamond? Do you love anybody?"

This was not what he intended to say—but he had said it, and now he waited for her answer. To the first question it came in a decided "No, I do not love him," and to the last it came in burning blushes, stealing over her cheek—her forehead—her neck, and speaking in her downcast eye. She had never believed that she did love her guardian, until told that he wished her to marry another, when it burst upon her in all its force, and she could no more conceal it now than she could stop the rapid beatings of her heart. He saw it all in her tell−tale face, and forgetting everything, he wound his arms around her, and drawing her to his side, whispered in her ear, "Darling, Rosamond, say that you love me. Let me hear that assurance once, and I shall be almost willing to die."

"Ladies do not often confess an attachment until sure it is returned," was Rosamond's answer, and doubly forgetful now of all the dreary past, Ralph Browning poured into her ear hot, burning words of love— hugging her closer and closer to him until through the open window came the sound of Mrs. Peters' voice calling to the stranger girl who had that morning entered service at Riverside as a waiting−maid in general. *Maria* was the name, and as the ominous word fell upon Mr. Browning's ear, he started, and pushing Rosamond from him, turned his face away so she could not see the expression of mute despair settling down upon it. Sinking upon the lounge he buried his face in its cushions while Rosamond looked curiously upon him, feeling sure that she knew what it was that so affected him. He had told her of his love—had said that she was dearer to him than his life, and in confessing this he had forgotten the dark shadow upon his life, and it was the dread of telling it to her—the pain of saying "I love you, but you cannot be my wife," which affected him so strangely. But she knew it all, and she longed to assure him of her sympathy. At last when he seemed to be more calm, she stole up to him, and kneeling at his side bent over him so that her bright hair mingled with his own.

"Mr. Browning," she whispered softly, "I *know your secret*, and I do not love you less."

"*You, Rosamond, you know it!*" he exclaimed, gazing fixedly at her. "It cannot be. You would never do as you have done."

"But I do know it," she continued, taking both his hands in hers, and looking him steadily in the eye, by way of controlling him, should he be seized with a sudden attack, "I know exactly what it is, and though it will prevent me from being your wife, it will not prevent me from loving you just the same, or from living with you either. I shall stay here always—and—and—pardon me, Mr. Browning, but when you get furious, as you sometimes do, I can quiet you better than any one else, and it may be, the world will never need to know you're a *madman!"*

Mr. Browning looked searchingly into her innocent eyes, and then, in spite of himself, he laughed aloud. He understood why she should think him a madman, and though he repented of it afterward, he hastened to undeceive her now. "As I hope to see another day, it is not that," he said. "It is far worse than insanity; and, Rosamond, though it breaks my heart to say it, it is wicked for me to talk of love to you, and you must not remember what I said. You must crush every tender thought of me. You must forget me—nay, more—you must *hate* me. Will you, Rosamond?"

"No—no—no! she cried, and laying her face in his lap, she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Leave me," he whispered, "or I *shall* go mad, for I know I am the cause of this distress."

There was decision in the tones of his voice, and it stilled the tumult in Rosamond's bosom. Rising to her feet, she said calmly: "I will go, but I cannot forget that you deceived me. You have wrung from me a confession of my love, only to throw it back upon me as a priceless thing."

Not thus would he part with her, and grasping her arm, he began: "Heaven knows how much more than my very life I love you—"

He did not finish the sentence, for through the air a small, dark object came, and, missing its aim, dropped upon the hearth, where it was broken in a hundred pieces. It was a vase which stood upon the table in the hall, and Ben Van Vechten's was the hand that threw it! Impatient at the delay, he had come up in time to hear his uncle's last words, which aroused his Southern blood at once, and seizing the vase, he hurled it at the offender's head—then, rushing down the stairs, he burst upon his mother with "Great thunder! mother; Uncle Ralph is making love to Rosamond himself, and she likes it too. I saw it with my own eyes! I'll hang myself in the barn, or go to the Crimean war!" and Ben bounded up and down like an India−rubber ball. Suddenly remembering that another train was due ere long, he darted out of the house, followed by his distracted mother, who, divining his intention, ran swiftly after him, imploring him to return. Pausing for a moment as he struck into the highway, he called out, "Good−by, mother. I've only one choice left—WAR! Give my love to Rosamond, and tell her I shall die like a hero. You needn't wear black, if you don't want to. Good−by."

He turned the corner—he had started for the *war*—and mentally resolving to follow him in the next train, Mrs. Van Vechten returned to the house, and sought her brother.

"Ralph," she began, sternly, "have you talked of love to Rosamond?"

Mr. Browning had borne so much that nothing startled him now, and returning her glance unflinchingly, he replied, "I have."

"How, then—is Marie dead?" the lady asked.

"Not to my knowledge—but hist," was the reply, as Mr. Browning nodded toward the hall, where a rustling movement was heard.

It was the *new girl*, coming with a dust−pan and brush to remove the fragments of the vase, though how she knew they were there, was a question she alone could answer. For a single instant her dull, gray eye shot a gleam of intelligence at the occupants of the room, and then assuming her usual appearance, she did what she came to do, and departed. When they were again alone, Mrs. Van Vechten demanded an explanation of her brother, who gave it unhesitatingly. Cold−hearted as she always seemed, Mrs. Van Vechten had some kind feelings left, and, touched by her brother's tale of suffering, she gave him no word of reproach, and even unbent herself to say that a brighter day might come to him yet. Then she spoke of Ben, announcing her determination of following him that night. To this plan Mr. Browning offered no remonstrance, and when the night express left the Granby station, it carried with it Mrs. Van Vechten, in pursuit of the runaway Ben.

CHAPTER VIII. NEWS.

Nearly two weeks had passed away since the exciting scene in Mr. Browning's library, and during that time Rosamond had kept herself aloof from her guardian, meeting him only at the table, where she maintained toward him a perfectly respectful but rather freezing manner. She was deeply mortified to think he had won from her a confession of her love, and then told her how useless—nay, worse—how wicked it was for her to think of him. She knew that he suffered intensely, but she resolutely left him to suffer alone, and he would rather it should be so.

Life was growing more and more a wearisome burden, and when, just one week after the library interview, he received a note in the well− remembered handwriting, he asked that he might die and forget his grief. The letter was dated at the Springs, where Miss Porter was still staying, though she said she intended starting the next day for Cuyler, a little out−of−the−way place on the lake, where there was but little company, and she could be quiet and recruit her nervous system. The latter had been terribly shocked, she said, by hearing of his recent attempt at making love to Rosamond Leyton! "Indeed," she wrote, "it is to this very love−making that you owe this letter from me, as I deem it my duty to keep continually before your mind the fact that *I* am still alive."

With a blanched cheek Mr. Browning read this letter through—then tore it into fragments, wondering much who gave her the information. There were no *spies* about his premises. Rosamond would not do it, and it must have been his sister, though why she should thus wish to annoy him he did not know, when she, more than any one else, had been instrumental in placing him where he was. Once he thought of telling Rosamond all, but he shrank from this, for she would leave his house, he knew, and, though she might never again speak kindly to him, he would rather feel that she was there.

And so another dreary week went by, and then one morning there came to him tidings which stopped for an instant the pulsations of his heart, and sent through his frame a thrill so benumbing and intense that at first pity and horror were the only emotions of which he seemed capable. It came to him in a newspaper paragraph, which in substance was as follows:

"A sad catastrophe occurred on Thursday afternoon at Cuyler, a little place upon the lake, which of late has been somewhat frequented during the summer months. Three ladies and one gentleman went out in a small pleasure−boat which is kept for the accommodation of the guests. They had not been gone very long when a sudden thunder−gust came on, accompanied by a violent wind, and the owner of the skiff, feeling some alarm for the safety of the party, went down to the landing just in time to see the boat make a few mad plunges with the waves, and then capsize at the distance of nearly half a mile from the shore.

"Every possible effort was made to save the unfortunate pleasure− seekers, but in vain; they disappeared from view long before a boat could reach them. One of the bodies has not yet been recovered. It is that of a Miss Porter, from Florida. She had reached Cuyler only the day previous, and was unaccompanied by a single friend, save a waiting−maid, who seems overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her mistress."

This, then, was the announcement which so affected Ralph Browning, blotting out for a moment the wretched past, and taking him back to the long ago when he first knew Marie Porter and fancied that he loved her. She was *dead* now—*dead.* Many a time he whispered that word to himself, and with each repetition the wish grew strong within him—not that she were living, but that while living he had not hated her so bitterly, and with the softened feeling which death will always bring, he blamed himself far more than he did her. There had been wrong on both sides, but he would rather now, that she had been reconciled to him ere she found that watery grave. Hand in hand with these reflections came another thought; a bewildering, intoxicating thought. He was *free* at last—free to *love*—to *worship* —to *marry* Rosamond.

"And I will go to her at once," he said, after the first hour had been given to the dead; "I will tell her all the truth."

He rose to leave the room, but something stayed him there, and whispered in his ear, "There may be some mistake. Cuyler is not far away. Go there first and investigate."

For him to will was to do, and telling Mrs. Peters he should be absent from home for a time, he started immediately for Cuyler, which he reached near the close of the day. Calm and beautiful looked the waters of the

lake on that summer afternoon, and if within their caverns the ill−fated Marie slept, they kept over her an unruffled watch and told no tales of her last dying wail to the careworn, haggard man who stood upon the sandy beach, where they said that she embarked, and listened attentively while they told him how gay she seemed that day, and how jestingly she spoke of the dark thunderhead which even then was mounting the western horizon. They had tried in vain to find her, and it was probable she had sunk into one of the unfathomable holes with which the lake was said by some to abound. Sarah, the waiting−maid, wept passionately, showing that the deceased must have had some good qualities, or she could not thus have attached a servant to her.

Looking upon Mr. Browning as a friend of her late mistress, she relied on him for counsel, and when he advised her immediate return to Florida, she readily consented, and started on the same day that he turned his face toward Riverside. They had said to him: "If we find her, shall we send her to your place?" and with an involuntary shudder he had answered, "No—oh, no. You must apprise me of it by letter, as also her Florida friends—but bury her quietly here."

They promised compliance with his wishes, and feeling that a load was off his mind, he started at once for home. Certainty now was doubly sure. Marie was dead, and as this conviction became more and more fixed upon his mind, he began to experience a dread of telling Rosamond all. Why need she know of it, when the telling it would throw much censure on himself. She was not a great newspaper reader—she had not seen the paragraph, and would not see it. He could tell her that the obstacle to his happiness had been removed—that 'twas no longer a sin for him to think of her or seek to make her his wife. All this he would say to her, but nothing more.

And all this he did say to her in the summer−house at the foot of the garden, where he found her just as the sun was setting. And Rosamond listened eagerly—never questioning him of the past, or caring to hear of it. She was satisfied to know that she might love him now, and with his arm around her, she sat there alone with him until the August moon was high up in the heavens. He called her his "sunshine"—his "light" —his "life," and pushing the silken curls from off her childish brow, kissed her again and again, telling her she should be his wife when the twentieth day of November came. That was his twenty−ninth birthday, and looking into her girlish face, he asked her if he were not too old. He knew she would tell him *no* , and she did, lovingly caressing his grayish hair.

"He had grown young since he sat there," she said, and so, indeed, he had, and the rejuvenating process continued day after day, until the villagers laughingly said that his approaching marriage had put him back ten years. It was known to all the town's folks now, and unlike most other matches, was pronounced a suitable one. Even Mrs. Van Vechten, who had found Ben at Lovejoy's Hotel, and still remained with him in New York, wrote to her brother a kind of congratulatory letter, mingled with sickly sentimental regrets for the "heart−broken, deserted and now departed Marie." It was doubtful whether she came up to the wedding or not, she said, as Ben had positively refused to come, or to leave the city either, and kept her constantly on the watch lest he should elope with a second−rate actress at Laura Keene's theatre.

Rosamond laughed heartily when Mr. Browning told her of this sudden change in Ben, and then with a sigh as she thought how many times his soft, good−natured heart would probably be wrung, she went back to the preparations for her bridal, which were on a magnificent scale. They were going to Europe—they would spend the winter in Paris, and as Mr. Browning had several influential acquaintances there, they would of course see some society, and he resolved that his bride should be inferior to none in point of dress, as she was to none in point of beauty. Everything which love could devise or money procure was purchased for her, and the elegance of her outfit was for a long time the only theme of village gossip.

Among the members of the household none seemed more interested in the preparations than the girl Maria, who has before been incidentally mentioned. Her dull eyes lighted up with each new article of dress, and she suddenly displayed so much taste in everything pertaining to a lady's toilet, that Rosamond was delighted and kept her constantly with her, devising this new thing and that, all of which were invariably tried on and submitted to the inspection of Mr. Browning, who was sure to approve whatever his Rosamond wore. And thus gayly sped the halcyon hours, bringing at last the fading leaf and the wailing October winds; but to Rosamond, basking in the sunlight of love, there came no warning note to tell her of the dark November days which were hurrying swiftly on.

CHAPTER IX. THE GUEST AT RIVERSIDE.

The November days had come. The satin dress was made—the bridal veil sent home—the wreath of orange, too; and then, one morning when the summer, it would seem, had come to revisit the scenes of its brief reign, Mr. Browning kissed his bride−elect, and wiped away the two big tears which dropped from her eyelashes when he told her that he was going away for that day and the next.

"But when to−morrow's sun is setting, I shall be with you again," he said, and he bade her quiet the fluttering of her little heart, which throbbed so painfully at parting with him.

"I don't know why it is," she said, "I'm not one bit superstitious, but Bruno howled so dismally under my window all night, and when he ceased, a horrid owl set up a screech. I told Maria, and she said, in her country the cry of an owl was a sign that the grave was about to give up its dead, and she looked so mysterious that she frightened me all the more—"

"That Maria is too superstitious, and I don't like her to be with you so much," said Mr. Browning, his own cheek turning slightly pale, as he thought of the grave giving up *his* dead. Thrice he turned back to kiss the little maiden, who followed him down the avenue, and then climbed into a box−like seat, which had been built on the top of the gate−post, and was sheltered by a sycamore. "Here," said she, "shall I wait for you to−morrow night, when the sun is away over there. Oh, I wish it would hurry."

He wished so, too, and with another fond good−by they parted. The day seemed long to Rosamond, and, though she varied the time by trying on each and every one of her new dresses, she was glad when it was night, so she could go to bed and sleep the time away. The next morning the depression of spirits was gone; he was coming—she should wait for him beneath the sycamore—possibly she would hide to make him believe she was not there, and the bright blushes stole over her dimpled cheeks as she thought what he would do when he found that she *was* there.

"Ten o'clock," she said to herself, as she heard the whistle of the upward train. "Seven hours more and he will come."

Going to her room, she took a book, in which she tried to be interested, succeeding so well that, though her windows commanded a view of the avenue, she did not see the lady who came slowly up the walk, casting about her eager, curious glances, and pausing more than once to note the exceeding beauty of the place. Once she stopped for a long time, and, leaning against a tree, seemed to be debating whether to turn back or go on. Deciding upon the latter, she arose, and quickening her movements, soon stood upon the threshold. Her ring was answered by Maria, who betrayed no surprise, for from the upper hall Mrs. Peters herself was closely inspecting the visitor.

"Is Mr. Browning at home?" the lady asked.

"Gone to Buffalo," was the laconic reply, and a gleam of satisfaction flitted over the face of the questioner, who continued—"And the young lady, Miss Leyton? Has she gone too?"

"She is here," said Maria, still keeping her eye upon the shadow bending over the balustrade. "What name shall I give her?"

"No name. I wish to surprise her," and passing on into the parlor, thestranger laid aside her hat and shawl with the air of one perfectly at home; then seating herself upon a sofa, she examined the room as curiously as she had examined the grounds of Riverside.

"It seems a pity to mar all this," she said, "and were it not that I hate him so much, I would go away forever, though that would be a greater injury to her than my coming to life will be. Of course he's told her all, and spite of her professed liking for me, she is glad that I am dead. I long, yet dread, to see her amazement; but hist—she comes."

There was the sound of little, high−heeled slippers on the stairs, the flutter of a pink morning gown, and then Rosamond Leyton stood face to face with—Marie Porter! The grave had given up its dead, and without any visible marks of the world prepared for such as she, save, indeed, the increased *fire* which burned in her black eyes, the risen woman sat there much as living people sit—her head bent forward—her lips apart—and a look of expectation upon her face. But she was doomed to disappointment. Rosamond knew nothing of the past, and with

a cry of pleasurable surprise she started forward, exclaiming, "Oh, Miss Porter, I felt so cross when told a visitor was here, but now I know who 'tis, I am so glad, for I am very lonely to−day."

The hard woman swept her hand a moment before her eyes, and with that movement swept away the kindly spirit, which whispered, "Don't undeceive her. Don't quench the light of that bright face, nor break that girlish heart."

But it was necessary; Marie Porter knew that, and though she repented of what she had done, it was now too late to retreat, and all she could do was to break the heart of the unsuspecting girl as tenderly as possible.

"Why are you so lonely?" she said, "This is a most beautiful spot. I believe I'd like to live here myself."

"Oh, yes, 'tis a lovely place," answered Rosamond, "but—but—Mr. Browning is not here," and she averted her crimson face.

"Is Mr. Browning so necessary to your happiness" Miss Porter asked, and bringing an ottoman, Rosamond sat down at her visitor's feet and thus replied: "We talked so much of him at the Springs that it surely is not foolish in me to tell you what everybody knows. Now, you won't laugh at me, will you? Mr. Browning and I are going to—oh, I can't tell it; but, any way, your fortune−telling is not true."

"Mr. Browning and you are going to be married. Is that it?" the woman asked; and with a quick, upward glance of her soft, brown eyes, Rosamond replied, Yes, that's it—that's it; and oh, you can't begin to guess how happy I am. He is not *crazy* either. It was something else, though I don't know what, for he never told me, and I do not care to know. The obstacle has been removed, whatever it was, and it has wrought such a change in him. He's so much younger— handsomer, now, and so kind to me. I'm glad you've come, Miss Porter, and you'll stay till after the wedding. It's the twentieth, and he has bought me so many new things. We are going to Europe. Just think of a winter in Paris, with Mr. Browning! But, what! Are you *crying*?" and Rosamond started as a burning tear fell upon her forehead.

"Rosamond Leyton," said Miss Porter, in a voice husky with emotion, "I have not wept in eight long years, but the sight of you, so innocent, so happy, wrings the tears from my stony heart, as agony will sometimes force out the drops of perspiration when the body is shivering with cold. I was young like you once, and my bridal was fixed—" She paused, and stealing an arm around her waist, Rosamond said pleadingly, "Tell me about it, Miss Porter, I always knew you had a history. Did the man die?"

"No—no. Better for me if he had—aye, and better, too, for you."

This last was a whisper, and Rosamond did not hear it. Her thoughts were bent upon the story, and she continued, "Will it pain you too much to tell it now?"

"Yes, yes, wait," Miss Porter said, "Wait until after dinner, and meantime, as I cannot possibly stay until the 20th, perhaps you will let me see your dresses."

Nothing could please Rosamond more, and gay as a little child, she led the way to a large upper room, which contained her wedding outfit. Proudly she displayed her treasures, flitting like a bird from one pile of finery to another, and reserving the most important until the very last.

"There's the dinner−bell," she suddenly exclaimed, "I did not think it could be *one*. Only four hours more—but come, let us go down and after dinner, if you'll never tell Mrs. Peters, nor anybody, I'll try on my bridal dress and let you see if it is becoming. I want so much to know how it looks, since Maria put the rose−buds in the berthe. And then your story. I must hear that."

As they were going down the stairs Miss Porter took Rosamond's hand and said, "How is this?—Where is my ring?"

Rosamond could not tell her of an act which now that it no longer had insanity for an excuse, puzzled her not a little. So she made some trivial excuse, which, however, did not deceive her auditor. But the latter deemed it wise to say no more just then, and silently followed her young friend into the dining−room. Dinner being over they went up to Rosamond's chamber, the closet of which contained the bridal robes.

"*Two o'clock*," said Rosamond, consulting her watch, then bringing out the rich white satin and exquisite overskirt of lace, she continued, "I shall have just time to try this on, hear your story and get dressed before Mr. Browning comes. How short the day seems with you here! I told him I'd be sitting in that little box which you possibly noticed, built on the gate−post against the tree.—And he'll be so disappointed not to find me there, that maybe you won't mind my leaving you awhile when the sun is right over the woods."

"Certainly not," answered Miss Porter, and the dressing−up process began, Rosamond chatting gayly all the

while and asking if it were very foolish for her to try on the dress. "I should not do it," she said, "if you would stay. Can't you?"

The answer was a decided negative, and adjusting her little slipper, Rosamond stood up while her companion put over her head the satin dress. It fitted admirably, and nothing could have been fairer than the round, chubby arms and plump, well−shaped shoulders which the *shortcomings* of the dress showed to good advantage. Now the lace over−skirt—now the berthe—and then the veil, with the orange−wreath twined among the flowing curls, and Rosamond was dressed at last.

"How do I look?" she asked, but Marie Porter made no immediate reply, and as she gazed upon the young girl, so beautiful, so innocent, and unsuspecting, who can tell of the keen anguish at her heart, or how she shrank from the bitter task which she must do, and quickly, too, for the clock pointed to *three*, and her plan was now to strike the *dove* and then flee ere the *eagle* came. She would thus wound him more deeply, for the very uncertainty would add fresh poison to his cup of agony.

"How do I look?" Rosamond asked again, and after duly complimenting the dress, Miss Porter added, "I promised you my story, and if I tell it at all to−day, I must begin it now, for it is long, and I would finish it ere Mr. Browning comes."

"Very well, I'm all attention," said Rosamond, and like a lamb before its slaughterer she knelt before the woman, bending low her graceful head to have the wreath removed.

This done, Miss Porter said, "Have you any camphor handy, or hartshorn? I am sometimes faint and may want them."

"Yes, both, here, in the bathing−room," said Rosamond, and she brought them to the lady, who placed them upon the table—not for herself, but for one who would need them more—for poor, poor Rosamond. The disrobing proceeded slowly, for the little girl was well pleased with the figure reflected by the mirror. But Miss Porter could not wait, and when the wreath, the veil, and berthe were removed, she seated herself by the window in a position which commanded a full view of her victim's face; and forcing down the throbbings of her heart, which it seemed to her were audible in that silent room, she commenced the story.

CHAPTER X. THE STORY.

"My home," began Miss Porter, "is, as you know, in Florida. I am an only child, as were both my parents, so that I have now living no nearer relative than a great−uncle—a superannuated clergyman, who superintends my affairs, and who, in case I die before he does, which is very probable, will be heir to my possessions.

"It is now nearly ten years since my father started for Europe, and I went to an adjoining state to visit a widow lady, whom I had met in New Orleans the winter previous. It is not necessary that I should use real names, consequently I will call her Mrs. Le Vert. She was spending the summer on her plantation, at what she called her country− seat. It was a large, old−fashioned, wooden building, many miles from any neighbors, and here she lived alone—for her only son, a lad of twelve years of age, was at some northern school. At first I was very lonely, for the secluded life we led at Holly Grove was hardly in accordance with the taste of a young girl. Still, I did not mind it as much as some, for I cared but little for gentlemen's society, and had frequently declared that I should never marry.

"Toward the last of July, Mrs. Le Vert's brother came to visit her. He was a handsome, boyish−looking youth, six months older than myself— just out of college—full of life and very fond of pretty girls, particularly if they chanced to be wealthy."

"That's a little like Ben," said Rosamond, and Miss Porter continued:

"From the first, Mrs. Le Vert seemed determined to make a match between us, for her brother was poor, and she fancied it would be a fine idea to have the Porter estate come into the Dunlap family. So she threw us constantly together—talked of me to him and of him to me, until I really began to believe I liked him. He, on the contrary, cared for nothing but my money. Still he deemed it advisable to assume a show of affection, and one night talked to me of love quite eloquently. I had been to a dinner party that day, and had worn all my diamonds. He had never seen them before, and they must have inflamed his avarice, for I afterward heard him tell his sister that he never should have proposed if I had not looked so beautiful that night. ' *I was irresistible in my diamonds*,' he said."

Miss Porter paused a moment to witness the effect of her last words, but Rosamond was looking over her shoulder at a *wrinkle* she had just discovered in the waist, and did not heed them. Still she was listening, and she said, "Yes—go on. You were looking beautifully that night. Did you consent to marry him?"

"Unhappily, I did," returned Miss Porter, "for I had made myself believe that I loved him. I wished that he was older, to be sure, but he said he would wait until he was of age. This plan, however, did not suit his ambitious sister. She knew I intended asking my father's approval, and from what she heard of him she feared he would never consent to my marrying a poor student, and she urged an immediate union. But I persisted in writing to my father, who answered immediately, forbidding me to think of young Dunlap, ordering me to go home, and saying he always intended me for John Castlewell, a neighbor of ours—a millionaire—a *booby*—a *fool*—whom I hated as I did poison.

"Not long after the receipt of this letter I was surprised by the sudden appearance of Uncle Bertram, who had come at my father's request to take me home. This roused me at once. My father was a tyrant, I said, and I would let him know I could do as I pleased. In my excitement, I fancied I could not exist a moment without Richard Dunlap, while he declared that life would be a blank for him if passed away from me. At this opportune moment Mrs. Le Vert suggested that we be married immediately—that very night. Uncle Bertram fortunately was a clergyman, and could officiate as well as any other. In justice to Richard, I will say that he hesitated longer than I did—but he was persuaded at last, as was Uncle Bertram, and with no other witness than Mrs. Le Vert and a white woman who lived with her as half waiting−maid and half companion, we were married."

Rosamond was interested now, and forgetting to remove her dress, she threw a crimson shawl around her shoulders, and sitting down upon the bed, exclaimed, "Married! You married! Why, then, are you called Porter?"

"Listen and you shall know," returned the lady, a dark look settling down upon her face.

"Scarcely was the ceremony over, when I began to regret it—not because I disliked Richard, but because I dreaded my father's displeasure, for he had a most savage, revengeful temper, and his daughter possesses the same." This was bitterly spoken, and she continued—"Hardly an hour after we were married, a negro brought a

letter to Richard from an eccentric old man for whom he had been named. In it the old man said he had made his namesake his heir, provided he did not marry until he was *twenty−five*.

"'I know just how *frillickin' you are,' he wrote, 'and I know, too, how unsuitable and how unhappy most early marriages are—so my boy, if you want Sunnyside, wait till you are twenty−five before you take an extra rib. I hate to be bothered with letters, and if you don't answer this, I shall conclude that you accept my terms.'"*

"Mrs. Le Vert at once suggested that, as the old gentleman had already had two fits of apoplexy, and would undoubtedly soon have the third, our marriage should for a time be kept a secret.

"But he didn't consent," cried Rosamond.

"Yes, he did," answered Miss Porter, "and though I, too, said it would be best, I began to distrust him from that moment—to think that he preferred money to myself. Uncle Bertram promised secrecy and went back alone, and then commenced a life of wretchedness, which makes me shudder even to recall it. With the exception of my own servant, who dared not tell if I bade her be silent, the blacks knew nothing of our marriage, and though we lived together as man and wife, so skillfully did Mrs. Le Vert and Esther, her white domestic, manage the matter, that for a time our secret was safely kept. A few of the negroes discovered it ere I left, but as they always lived in that out−of−the− way place, it never followed me, and to this day no human being in Florida, save Uncle Bertram knows of the marriage.

"I am very impulsive, and the excitement being over, my affection began to cool. Richard could have kept it alive had he tried, but he did not. On the contrary he was much alone, and when with me was always tormenting me with conscientious scruples about deceiving 'the old man.'"

"Oh, I like him for that," cried Rosamond, "I like him for that. Why didn't you let him tell?"

"Because," returned Miss Porter, "I had fears that father would disinherit *me*, and if Richard lost Sunnyside we should be poor indeed."

A shadow passed over Rosamond's face, and she said involuntarily, "I could be happy with Mr. Browning if we *were* poor."

Marie started and answered quickly, "What has *Mr. Browning* to do with my story?"

"Nothing, nothing," returned Rosamond, "only I was thinking that if you loved Richard as well as I do Mr. Browning, you would not have cared for money."

"But I didn't," returned Marie. "I was mistaken. 'Twas a mere childish fancy. I never loved him. *I hate him now*."

She spoke vehemently, and when Rosamond said mournfully. "Hate your husband!" she replied, "Yes, more than *hate*, or I had never come to tell you this; but listen—from indifference we came to coldness—from coldness to recrimination—from that to harsh words—from harsh words to quarrels—and from quarrels to *blows* !"

She uttered the last word slowly, while Rosamond exclaimed, "Not *blows*, Miss Porter! No man would strike a woman. *I* almost hate him, now."

The proud lip curled scornfully—a gleam of satisfaction shot from the keen black eyes, and Marie went on. "He would say—nay does say *I* was the most to blame—that I aggravated him beyond human endurance— but he provoked me to it. Think of his swearing at me, Rosamond— calling me a *she−devil* and all that. Think, too, of his telling me to my face that he was driven into the marriage wholly by his sister— that he regretted it more than I, and to crown all, think of his *boxing my ears!*—he, a poor, insignificant Northern *puppy*, boxing *me*—a Porter, and a Southern heiress!"

She was terribly excited, and Rosamond, gazing at her face, distorted with malignant passion, began to fancy that the greater wrong might perhaps have lain with her.

After a moment's pause, Marie began again. "When we had been three months man and wife, he wrote to the old man, confessing his marriage, and saying sundry things not wholly complimentary to his bride; but I intercepted it, read it, tore it up, and taunted him with it. I believe I called him a low−lived Yankee, or something like that, and then it was he struck me. The blow sunk deep into my soul. It was an insult, an unpardonable insult, and could not be forgiven. My Southern blood was all on fire, and had I been a man, he should have paid for that blow. I feel it yet; the smart has never for a moment left me, but burns upon my face just as hatred for him burns upon my heart!"

"Oh, Miss Porter," cried Rosamond, as the former ground her teeth together, "don't look so terribly. You frighten me. He struck you, but he asked your pardon, sure?"

"Yes, he pretended to, but I spat at him and bade him leave me forever. His sister tried to interfere, but she made the matter worse, and as my father was on the eve of embarking for America, I determined to go home, and when he came, tell him the whole and ask him to seek satisfaction from one who had dared to strike his daughter. Richard made a show of trying to keep me—said we had better live together, and all that, while his sister called us two silly children who needed whipping. But I did not heed it. I went home to Uncle Bertram and waited for my father, who never came. He died upon the sea, and I was heir of all his vast possessions. Then Richard made overtures for reconciliation, but I spurned them all. You've heard of *woman− haters,* Rosamond—I am a *man−hater*. I loathe the whole sex, Uncle Bertram excepted. My marriage was of course a secret in Florida. My servant, who knew of it, died soon after my father, and as Uncle Bertram kept his own counsel, more than one sought my hand, but I turned my back upon them all.

"Four or five years ago he wrote me a letter. He was then master of Sunnyside, for the old man left it to him after all. He was lonely there, he said, and he asked a reconciliation. Had he never struck me, I might have gone, for his letter was kindly enough, but the blow was a barrier between us, so I refused to listen, and exulted over the thought of his living there alone all his days, with the secret on his mind.

"The sweetest morsel of all in the cup of revenge was, however, for a time withheld, but it came at last, Rosamond. It came at last. He loved a beautiful young girl, loved her all the more that he could not marry her."

She drew nearer to Rosamond, who, though still unsuspecting, trembled from head to foot with an undefinable emotion of coming evil.

"I saw her, Rosamond; saw this young girl with his name upon her lips when waking—saw her, too, with his name upon her lips when sleeping, and all this while she did not dream that I, the so−called Marie Porter, was his wife, the barrier which kept him from saying the words her little heart longed so to hear."

There were livid spots on Rosamond's neck—livid spots upon her face, and still she did not move from her seat, though her clammy hand clutched nervously her bridal dress. A *horrid* suspicion had flashed upon her, but with a mighty effort she threw it off as injustice to Mr. Browning, and mentally crying, "It cannot be," she faintly whispered, "Go on."

"The summer I met her," said Miss Porter, I was at Cartersville, a little out−of−the−way place on a lake—"

"You're telling me true?" interrupted Rosamond, joy thrilling in her tones.

"Yes, true," returned Miss Porter.

"Then bless you—bless you for those last words," rejoined Rosamond, burying her face in her companion's lap. "A terrible fear for a moment came over me, that it might be *I*. But it isn't. *I* met you at the Springs. Oh, if it had been me, I should most surely die."

"But *she* did not—the young girl," resumed Miss Porter. "She had a brave, strong heart, and she bore up wondrously. She felt that he had cruelly deceived her, and that helped her to bear the blow. Besides, she was glad she knew of it in time, for, had he married her, she would not have been his wife, you know."

Rosamond shuddered and replied, "I know, but my heart would have broken all the same. It aches so now for her. But go on, how did she find it out? Who could have strength to tell her?"

There was a pause, and each could hear the beating of the other's heart. The November wind had risen within the last half hour, and now howled dismally past the window, seeming to Rosamond like the wail that young girl must have uttered when she first learned how her trust had been betrayed. *The clock struck four!* Rosamond counted each stroke, and thought, "One hour more, and *he* will be here." Marie counted each stroke, and thought, "One hour more, and I must be gone."

"Rosamond," she began again, "what I now have to confess is an act of which I have repented bitterly, and never more than since I sat within this room. But it was not premeditated, and believe me, Rosamond, it was not done for any malice I bore to that young girl, for I pitied her so much—oh, so much," and her hand wandered caressingly over the bright hair lying on her lap.

"We went out one afternoon—two ladies, a gentleman, and myself—in a small sail−boat upon the lake. *I* planned the excursion and thought I should enjoy it, but we had not been out long when my old affection of the heart began to trouble me. I grew faint, and begged of them to put me on the land. They complied with my request, and set me down upon a point higher up than that from which we had embarked, and near to a dilapidated cabin where lived a weird old hag, who earned a scanty livelihood by fortune−telling. I told her I was sick, and sat down by her door where I could watch the movements of the party. Suddenly a terrific thunderstorm arose, the

wind blew a hurricane, and though the boat rode the billows bravely for a time, it capsized at length, and its precious freight disappeared beneath the foaming waves. For a moment horror chilled my blood; then, swift as the lightning which leaped from the cloud overhanging the graves of my late companions, a maddening thought flashed upon my mind."

"But the girl—hasten to that part," said Rosamond, lifting up her head, while Miss Porter went back to her chair.

"I shall come to her soon enough," returned Miss Porter, continuing her story. "No living being, save the old woman at my side, knew of my escape, and I could bribe her easily. Fortunately I carried the most of my money about my person, and I said to her, 'There are reasons why, for a time at least, I wish to be considered dead. Here are twenty dollars now, and the same shall be paid you every month that you are silent. No human creature must know that I am living.' I saw by the kindling of her eye at the sight of the gold that I was safe, and when the night shadows were falling I stole from her cabin, and taking a circuitous route to avoid observation, I reached the midway station in time for the evening train.

"Three days later in a distant city I read of the sad catastrophe— read that all had been found but one, a Miss Porter, from Florida, and as I read I thought '*he* will see that, too.' He did see it. Before going to Carterville I sent to Sunnyside a girl who was under peculiar obligations to me, and one whom I could trust. She secured the place. She was employed at last about the person of that young girl, *who had lived at Sunnyside since she was a child, a friendless orphan*."

There was a quick, gasping moan as if the soul were parting from the body, and Rosamond fell upon her face, which the pillows concealed from view, while Miss Porter hurriedly proceeded:

"There is but little more to tell. I wrote to the girl who took her own letters from the office. I told her all, and from her heard that the bridal day was fixed. The obstacle was removed—not *insanity* , but a *living wife*. Need I say more?"

She paused, but from the bed where the crushed, motionless figure lay, there came no sound, and she said again, "Speak, Rosamond. Curse me, if you will, for saving you from an unlawful marriage."

Still there was no sound, save the low sighing of the wind, which seemed to have taken a fresh note of sadness as if bewailing the unutterable desolation of the young girl, who lay so still and lifeless that Marie Porter's heart quickened with fear, and drawing near, she touched the little hand resting on the pillow. It was cold— rigid—as was also the face which she turned to the light.

"*It is death!*" she cried, and a wild shriek rang through the house, bringing at once the servants, headed by Mrs. Peters.

"*What is it?*" cried the latter, as she saw the helpless figure and beautiful upturned face.

"*It's death, madam—death*, and it's coming on me, too," answered Miss Porter, clasping her hands over her heart, which throbbed as it never had done before, and which at last prostrated her upon the lounge.

But no one heeded her, save the girl Maria. The rest gave their attention to Rosamond, who lay so long in the death−like stupor that others than Miss Porter believed her dead.

The clock struck five! and echoing from the Granby hills the engine− whistle came. Then a slight tremor ran through her frame, and Mrs. Peters whispered joyfully, "There's life—there's hope."

Along the highway the returning traveler came with rapid tread, but 'neath the sycamore no Rosamond was waiting.

"She is hiding from me," he said, but his search for her was vain, and he rapidly hastened on.

All about the house was still. There was no Rosamond at the door—nor in the hall—nor in the parlor—nor on the stairs; but from her chamber came the buzz of voices, and he entered unannounced, recoiling backward when he saw the face upon the pillow, and knew that it was Rosamond's. Every particle of color had left it; there were dark circles beneath the eyes, and a look about the mouth as if the concentrated agony of years had fallen suddenly upon her.

"What is it?" he asked, and at the sound of his voice, the brown eyes he had been wont to call so beautiful unclosed, but their sunny brightness was all gone, and he shuddered at their dim, meaningless expression.

She seemed to know him, and stretching her arm toward him as a child does toward its mother when danger threatens, she laid her head upon his bosom with a piteous wail—the only really audible sound she had yet uttered.

"Rosamond, darling—what has come upon you?" he said, "and why are you in your bridal dress?"

At that word she started, and moving away from him, moaned sadly, "It was cruel—oh, so cruel to deceive me, when I loved and trusted him so much."

"Won't somebody tell me what this means?" he demanded, and Mrs. Peters replied, "We do not know. There's been a strange woman here, and she was with Rosamond when it happened."

"Woman? What woman? And where is she now?" he asked, and Mrs. Peters replied, "She was faint—dying, she said, and Maria took her into another chamber."

Mechanically he started for that chamber—hearing nothing—seeing nothing—thinking nothing for the nameless terror which had fallen upon him. He did not suspect the real truth. He merely had a vague presentiment that some one who knew nothing of the drowning had come there to save his Rosamond from what they supposed to be an unlawful marriage, and when at last he stood face to face with his living wife, when he knew the grave had given up its dead, he dropped to the floor as drops the giant oak when felled by the lightning's power!

Marie Porter, even had she been cruelly wronged, was avenged—fully, amply avenged, and covering her face with her hands, she moaned, "I have killed them both, and there's nothing left for me now but to die!"

CHAPTER XI. THE END

Over the horrid awakening which came to the wretched man, we need not linger; neither is it necessary to dwell upon the first few days of mystery and dread, when death seemed brooding over Riverside, and rumor was busy with surmises and suspicions concerning the stranger, and the relation, if any, which she bore to Rosamond Leyton. We will rather hasten on to the morning when to Mr. Browning the joyful tidings came that Rosamond was better—so much better, indeed, that he could see and talk with her if he chose.

Only once since the fearful night when he found her moaning in her bridal dress, had he stood by her bedside—for, though he longed to be there, he could not endure to see her turn away from him, whispering as she did so, "It was cruel—oh, so cruel to deceive me so." Neither had he been near Marie Porter, consequently he knew nothing of the means by which she had imposed upon him the story of her death. But Rosamond knew—Rosamond could tell him, and from no other lips would he hear it. So, when he learned that she was better, he asked to see her alone, and Mrs. Peters, to whom he had necessarily confided the story of his marriage, carried his message to Rosamond.

For a moment Rosamond did not seem to hear, but when the message was repeated, the great tears forced themselves from beneath her long eyelashes, and rolling down her cheeks, dropped upon the pillow.

"He might have spared me this," she said," but if it is his wish, I can see him."

With a mighty effort she stilled the violent throbbings of her heart, forced an unnatural calm upon her face and whispered—"Let him come now; I am ready."

He was standing without the door, so near that he heard the words, and in a moment he was at her side. Falling upon his knees before her, he clasped her hands in his, imploring her forgiveness for the great wrong he had done her in not telling her the truth at first. "But I am innocent of the last," he said; "believe me, Rosamond, I thought her dead, or I had never asked you to be my wife. I know not how she deceived me so terribly, but you know, and I have sought this interview to hear the story from your own lips. Will you tell it to me, darling—Miss Leyton, I mean," he added hastily, as he saw a shadow of pain flit over her face.

"I will if I can," she faintly answered, and summoning all her strength, she repeated to him what Miss Porter had told her, except, indeed, the parts with which she knew he was familiar.

"The plot was worthy of her who planned it," he said bitterly; then, as Rosamond made no reply, he continued—"she told you, I suppose, of our married life, and painted me the blackest villain that ever trod the earth. This may in part be true, but, Rosamond, though I may never know the bliss of calling you my wife, I cannot be thus degraded in your sight and offer no apology. I was a boy—a self−willed, high− tempered boy, nineteen years of age, and she aggravated me beyond all human endurance, seeking ways and means by which she could provoke me. I loved her at first—nay, do not turn away incredulously. Heaven is my witness that I loved her, or thought I did, but 'twas a boyish love, and not such as I feel for you,"

"You swore at her," said Rosamond, unable to reconcile love with an oath.

"Once—only once," he replied. "I blush to own it, for it was not a manly act."

"You struck her," and for the first time since he had been in that room the brown eyes rested full upon his face.

"Yes, Rosamond," he answered; "I own that, too, but she goaded me to madness, and even raised her voice against my sainted mother, who had borne so dastardly a son as *I*!"

"And Riverside?" said Rosamond. "Did your uncle die deceived?"

"Never—never," Mr. Browning exclaimed, starting to his feet. "I told the whole truth, or I would not have lived here a day. Rosamond, I have greatly sinned, but she has not been blameless. She insulted me in every possible way, even to giving *you* her *wedding ring* , and then, lest I should not see it, wrote to me 'to look upon your finger.' No wonder you thought me mad!"

"Her *wedding ring*! Could she do that?" said Rosamond.

"Yes, her wedding ring. It first belonged to Susan, who gave it to me for the occasion, and two weeks after I had it marked with Marie's name and the date of our marriage. It is broken now, and I would to Heaven I could thus easily break the tie which binds me to her, and keeps me from you! Oh, Rosamond, Rosamond, must it be?

Must I live my life without you, when I need you so much—when my heart longs so to claim you for its own?"

He covered his face with his hands, and Rosamond could see the tears dropping slowly through his fingers. Terribly was he expiating the sin of his boyhood, and what wonder is it, if, in his agony, he cried, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Rosamond alone was calm. She seemed to have wept her tears away, and the blow which had fallen so crushingly upon her, had benumbed her heart, so that she now did not feel as acutely as the weeping man before her. Very soothingly she spoke to him, but she offered no word of cheer—no hope that all would yet be well. "They would bear it with brave hearts," she said, "and he must be reconciled to his wife."

"Never—never," he exclaimed. "The same roof cannot shelter us both, and if she chooses to stay when she is better, she is welcome to Riverside, but I cannot share it with her."

Neither said to the other, "It may be she will die," for such a thought had never intruded itself upon their minds, and yet Marie Porter's life was numbered now by days. The heart disease, from which she had long been suffering, was greatly aggravated by the strong nervous excitement through which she had recently been passing. Stimulants of a most powerful kind had created a kind of artificial strength, which had enabled her to come to Riverside, but this was fast subsiding; and when she bent over the motionless form of Rosamond, and feared that she was dead, she felt, indeed, that death would ere long claim her as his own. The sight of her husband, too, had well nigh been more than she could bear. For nearly nine long years she had not looked upon his face, but she remembered it well—a handsome, boyish face. His hair, she remembered, too—his soft, dark, wavy hair, through which her fingers had sometimes strayed, in the far back days at Holly Wood, before she was his bride. He would not be greatly changed, she thought; and when, on that fatal night, she heard his coming footsteps, she pictured him in her mind much as he was that winter−day, when, standing in his sister's door, he bade her a long good−by. Nearer and nearer he had come—faster and louder had beaten her heart, while a cold, faint sickness crept over her.

"Open the window—I cannot breathe," she gasped; but ere her request was obeyed, Ralph Browning had fainted on the threshold, and she had asked that she might die.

She had seen him only for an instant, but that sufficed to tell her he was changed from the dark−haired, handsome boy, into the gray−haired suffering man. His eyes had met hers, but the fierce hatred she expected, was not there; and the look of utter hopeless despair which she saw in its place, touched her as reproach and resentment could not have done.

"Oh, I hope I shall die," she said, as she hid her face in the pillow. "I hope I shall die."

This wish she uttered every hour; and when, at last, the physician said to her, "Madam, you *will* die," she answered, "It is well!"

She did not ask for Mr. Browning, for she knew he would not come, but she inquired anxiously each day for Rosamond; and when, at last, she heard they were together, she laid her hand upon her heart, and watching its rise and fall, smiled to think how fast her life was going out.

"Listen, Maria," she said, "Listen to what they say, and hear if they talk of me."

Noiselessly Maria glided to the door of Rosamond's chamber—stood there for a moment and then as noiselessly came back repeating to her mistress the substance of what she had heard, together with sundry little embellishments of her own.

"He will give you Riverside and go away himself," she said, and Miss Porter quickly rejoined, "Go where? Go with whom?"

"With Miss Leyton of course," returned Maria. "He said he would not live without her."

"The wretch!" ejaculated the angry woman, all her softer emotions giving way to this fancied insult. "He might at least wait now until I'm dead. I'll go to him myself, and see if in my presence he dare talk thus to her."

She was greatly excited, and in spite of the painful throbbings of her heart and the dizzy sensation she felt stealing over her, she stepped upon the floor, and hurriedly crossed the room. The effort was too much for her feeble strength, and she sank fainting upon a chair. The girl Maria had seen her faint before, but never before had she seen so fearful a look upon her face, and she ran in terror to Mr. Browning, beseeching him to come "for her mistress was dying sure, and would trouble nobody much more."

For a moment he hesitated, but when Rosamond said, "Go," he went. Taking the fainting woman in his arms he laid her upon the bed as gently, though not as tenderly as he would have laid his Rosamond there.

"Call Mrs. Peters," he said, and when that matron came, he bade her give to the invalid every possible care.

Slowly Miss Porter came back to life, but it was only to faint again, and with each fainting fit it became more and more apparent that life was ebbing fast. They did not say to Rosamond that she would die, but they told it to Mr. Browning, who heard as one who hears not. Every other sensation seemed to have given place to a feeling of horror, and when at the close of the second day word came to him that she *was dying*, and had asked to see him, he arose mechanically and walked to her sick room as calmly as he had visited it the previous night, when he knew she was asleep. One glance, however, at her white face and wild bright eyes roused him to the reality, and bending over her pillow, he forced himself to take her hand in his, saying kindly, "Marie, do you know me?"

"Know you? Yes," she answered. "You are my husband—my husband." She lingered upon that name as if its sound recalled to life some olden feeling—some memory of Holly Wood, where they first had met.

"Marie, you are dying," he continued. "Shall we part in anger, or in peace?"

"In peace, if you will," she answered. "I have had my revenge—but it is *not* sweet as some say it is. I would rather, Ralph, that I had never known you, for then I should not have been the wicked wretch I am."

Mr. Browning did not reply to this, and for a few moments there was silence, during which she seemed to sleep. Rousing up ere long, she gasped for breath, and grasping nervously her husband's hand, she whispered, "I am going now—there's no sham this time—five minutes more, and you are free to marry Rosamond. Be kind to her, Ralph. Deal with her not as you dealt with me, and—and—come closer to me, Ralph. Let me whisper this last so as no one can hear."

He bent him down to listen, and summoning all her strength, she said, not in a whisper, but in tones which echoed through the silent room— "NEVER, NEVER STRIKE ROSAMOND, WILL YOU?"

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Rapidly the story circulated that the strange woman who lay dead at Riverside had been Ralph Browning's wife, and hundreds flocked to the funeral, hoping to gain a view of the deceased. But in this they were disappointed, for there was nothing visible, save the handsome coffin, on whose silver plate was inscribed the word "MARIE."

Some said that "Browning" might have been added to the name, and while others marvelled that the husband wore no badge of mourning, a few said wisely that the *mourning* was visible in other than the usual signs—in the hair gray before its time, and in the deep−cut lines which a *living* sorrow alone had made. And so, amid surmises of the past and foretellings of the future, the ill−fated Marie was laid in the village vault, until word could be received from her old uncle, who might wish to have her rest among the balmy groves and fragrant flowers of her beautiful Florida home.

And now our story winds to its close. Ralph Browning was free indeed, but death had been at Riverside, and the shadow it had left must disappear ere he took to himself a second bride. Rosamond, too, must recover from the blow which had fallen so crushingly on her—must learn to confide again in the man she loved—to think of the great wrong he had done her as the result of an early, boyish error, which he regretted even more bitterly than herself.

And so the warm spring rains had fallen and the April blossoms were bursting from the dark, moist earth ere the wedding morning came. At the bridal there was no satin dress—no orange wreath—no flowing veil—but there was perfect love shining in the beautiful brown eyes of the girlish bride, while the fine face of the bridegroom wore a look of perfect happiness, as if the past were all forgotten, and the world was bright and new. Europe was still their destination, and among those who accompanied them to New York, going with them even to the vessel's deck, none bade them a more affectionate adieu than Mrs. Van Vechten herself. She had spent a part of the winter at Riverside, and had learned to appreciate the gentle girl who she knew was to be her brother's wife.

Ben, too, was of the party. He had listened in amazement to the story of his uncle's first marriage, wondering how it could have been kept from him, and remembering several little incidents, the meaning of which he now understood. He had given up the Crimean war, as well as the dancing girl, and now he had given up Rosamond, too, but he bore it quite heroically, and ever after took especial pains to speak of her as "My Aunt Rosamond." For more than a year the bridal pair remained abroad, and then returned again to Riverside, where now the patter of tiny feet, and the voice of childhood is heard, for children have gathered around the hearthstone, and in all the world there is not a prouder, happier wife and mother than the little Rosamond who once on a dreary November day listened, with a breaking heart, to the story of Ralph Browning's Youthful Error.

DIAMONDS.

"The boys mustn't look at the girls, and the girls must look on their books," was said at least a dozen times by the village school−master, on that stormy morning when Cora Blanchard and I—she in her brother's boots, and I in my father's socks—waded through drift after drift of snow to the old brown school−house at the foot of the long, steep hill.

We were the only girls who had dared to brave that wintry storm, and we felt amply repaid for our trouble, when we saw how much attention we received from the ten tall boys who had come—some for fun—some because they saw Cora Blanchard go by—and one, Walter Beaumont, because he did not wish to lose the lesson of the day. Our teacher, Mr. Grannis, was fitting him for college, and every moment was precious to the white−browed, intellectual student, who was quite a lion among us girls, partly because he was older, and partly because he never noticed us as much as did the other boys. On this occasion, however, he was quite attentive to Cora, at least, pulling off her boots, removing her hood, and brushing the large snow−flakes from her soft wavy hair, while her dark brown eyes smiled gratefully upon him, as he gave her his warm seat by the stove.

That morning Cora wrote to me slyly on her slate: "I don't care if mother *does* say Walter Beaumont is *poor* as *poverty* —I like him best of anybody in the world—don't you?"

I thought of the big red apple in my pocket, and of the boy who had so carefully shaken the snow from off my father's socks, and answered, "No"—thinking, the while, that I should say *yes*, if Walter had ever treated me as he did my playmate and friend Cora Blanchard. She was a beautiful young girl, a favorite with all, and possessing, as it seemed, but one glaring fault—a proneness to estimate people for their wealth rather than their worth. This in a measure was the result of her home−training, for her family, though far from being rich, were very aristocratic, and strove to keep their children as much as possible from associating with the "vulgar herd," as they styled the laboring class of the community. In her secret heart Cora had long cherished a preference for Walter, though never, until the morning of which I write, had it been so openly avowed. And Walter, too, while knowing how far above him she was in point of position, had dared to dream of a time when a bright−haired woman, with a face much like that of the girlish Cora, would gladden his home, wherever it might be.

That noon, as we sat around the glowing stove, we played as children will, and it came my turn to "answer truly whom I intended to marry." Without a thought of the big apple, the snowy socks, or of any one in particular, I replied unhesitatingly—"The one I love best," and the question passed on to Cora, who was sitting by the side of Walter Beaumont. He had not joined in our sport, but now his eye left his book and rested upon Cora with an expression half fearful, half expectant. She, too, glanced at him, and as if the spirit of prophecy were upon her, she said—"I shall not marry the one I love the best, but the one who has the most money, and can give me the handsomest *diamonds*. Sister Fanny has a magnificent set, and she looks so beautifully when she wears them."

Instantly there fell a shadow on Walter Beaumont's face, and his eye returned again to the Latin lettered page. But his thoughts were not of what was written there; he was thinking of the humble cottage on the borders of the wood, of the rag−carpet on the oaken floor, of the plain old−fashioned furniture, and of the gentle, loving woman who called him "her boy," and that spot her home. There were no *diamonds* there—no money—and Cora, if for these she married, would never be his wife. Early and late he toiled and studied, wearing his threadbare coat and coarse brown pants—for an education, such as he must have, admitted of no useless expenditure, and the costly gems which Cora craved were not his to give. In the pure, unselfish love springing up for her within his heart, there were diamonds of imperishable value, and these, together with the name he would make for himself, he would offer her, but nothing more, and for many weeks there was a shadow on his brow, though he was kind and considerate to her as of old.

As the spring and summer glided by, however, there came a change, and when, in the autumn, he left our village for New Haven, there was a happy, joyous look upon his face, while a tress of Cora's silken hair was lying next his heart. Every week he wrote to her, and Cora answered, always showing to me what she had written, but never a word of his. "There was too much love," she said, "too much good advice in his letters for me to see," and thus the time passed on, until Walter, who had entered the junior class, was graduated with honor, and was about to commence a theological course at Andover, for he had made the ministry his choice. He was twenty−one now,

and Cora was sixteen. Wondrously beautiful was she to look upon, with her fair young face, her soft brown eyes, and wavy hair. And Walter Beaumont loved her devotedly, believing too, that she in turn loved him, for one summer afternoon, in the green old woods which skirted the little village, she had sat by his side, and with the sunbeams glancing down upon her through the overhanging boughs, she had, told him so, and promised some day to be his wife. Still, she would not hear of a positive engagement—both should be free to change their mind if they wished, she said, and with this Walter was satisfied.

"I have no *diamonds* to give you, darling," he said, drawing her close to him; and Cora, knowing to what he referred, answered that "*his* love was dearer to her than all the world besides." Alas, that woman should be so fickle!

The same train which carried Walter away, brought Mrs. Blanehard a letter from her daughter, a dashing, fashionable woman, who lived in the city, and who wished to bring her sister Cora "out" the coming winter. "She is old enough, now," she wrote, "to be looking for a husband, and of course she'll never do anything in that by−place."

This proposition, which accorded exactly with Mrs. Blanchard's wishes, was joyfully acceded to by Cora, who, while anticipating the pleasure which awaited her, had yet no thought of proving false to Walter, and in the letter which she wrote informing him of her plan, she ensured him of her unchanging fidelity, little dreaming that the promise thus made would so soon be broken! Petted, caressed, flattered and admired, as she was in the circle of her sister's friends, how could she help growing worldly and vain, or avoid contrasting the plain, unassuming Walter, with the polished and gayly−dressed butterflies who thronged Mrs. Burton's drawing−room. When the summer came again, she did not return to us as we had expected, but we heard of her at Saratoga, and Newport, the admired of all admirers; while one, it was said, a man of high position and untold wealth, bid fair to win the beauteous belle. Meantime, her letters to Walter grew short and far between, ceasing at length altogether; and one day, during the second winter of her residence in the city, I received from her a package containing his miniature, the books he had given her, and the letters he had written. These she wished me to give him when next I saw him, bidding me tell him to think no more of one who was not worthy of him.

"To be plain, Lottie," she wrote, "I'm engaged, and though Mr. Douglass is not a bit like Walter, he has a great deal of money, drives splendid horses, and I reckon we shall get on well enough. I wish, though, he was not quite so old. You'll be shocked to hear that he is almost *fifty*, though he looks about *forty!* I know I don't like him as well as I did Walter, but after seeing as much of the world as I have, I could not settle down into the wife of a poor minister. I am not good enough, and you must tell him so. I hope he won't feel badly—poor Walter. I've kept the lock of his hair. I couldn't part with that, but, of course, Mr. Douglass will never see it. *His* hair is gray! Good−by."

This was what she wrote, and when I heard from her again, she was Cora Douglass, and her feet were treading the shores of the old world, whither she had gone on a bridal tour.

In the solitude of his chamber, the young student learned the sad news from a paragraph in a city paper, and bowing his head upon the table, he strove to articulate, "It is well," but the flesh was weak, warring with the spirit, and the heart which Cora Blanchard had cruelly trampled down, clung to her still with a death−like fondness, and followed her even across the waste of waters, cried out—"How can I give her up!" But when he remembered, as he ere long did, that 'twas a sin to love her now, he buried his face in his hands, and, calling on God to help him in this his hour of need, wept such tears as never again would fall for Cora Blanchard.

The roses in our garden were faded, and the leaves of autumn were piled upon the ground, ere he came to his home again, and I had an opportunity of presenting him with the package which many months before had been committed to my care. His face was very pale, and his voice trembled as he asked me—"Where is she now?"

"In Italy," I answered, adding that "her husband was said to be very wealthy."

Bowing mechanically, he walked away, and a year and a half went by ere I saw him again. Then he came among us as our minister. The old, white−haired pastor, who for so long had told us of the Good Shepherd and the better land, was sleeping at last in the quiet graveyard, and the people had chosen young Walter Beaumont to fill his place. He was a splendid−looking man—tall, erect, and finely formed, with a most winning manner, and a face which betokened intellect of the highest order. We were proud of him, all of us—proud of our clergyman, who, on the third Sabbath in June, was to be ordained in the old brick church, before whose altar he had years ago been baptized, a smiling infant.

On the Thursday afternoon preceding the ordination, a large traveling carriage, covered with dust and laden with trunks, passed slowly through our village, attracting much attention. Seated within it was a portly, gray−haired man, resting his chin upon a gold−headed cane, and looking curiously out at the people in the street, who stared as curiously at him. Directly opposite him, and languidly reclining upon the soft cushions, was a white, proud−faced lady, who evidently felt no interest in what was passing around her, for her eyes were cast down, and her thought seemed busy elsewhere. I was sitting at my chamber window, gazing out upon them, and just as they drew near the gate, the lady raised her eyes—the soft, brown eyes, which once had won the love of Walter Beaumont, and in which there was now an unmistakable look of anguish, as if the long eyelashes, drooping so wearily upon the colorless cheek, were constantly forcing back the hidden tears. And this was Cora Douglass, come back to us again from her travels in a foreign land. She knew me in a moment, and in her face there was much of her olden look as, bending forward, she smiled a greeting, and waved toward me her white, jeweled hand, on which the *diamonds* flashed brightly in the sunlight.

The next morning we met, but not in the presence of the old man, her husband. Down in the leafy woods, about a quarter of a mile from Mrs. Beaumont's cottage, was a running brook and a mossy bank, overshadowed by the sycamore and elm. This, in the days gone by, had been our favorite resort. Here had we built our play−house, washing our bits of broken china in the rippling stream—here had we watched the little fishes as they darted in and out of the deeper eddies—here had we conned our daily tasks—here had she listened to a tale of love, the memory of which seemed but a mocking dream, and here, as I faintly hoped, I found her. With a half−joyful, half−moaning cry, she threw her arms around my neck, and I could feel her tears dropping upon my face as she whispered, "Oh, Lottie, Lottie, we have met again by the dear old brook."

For a few moments she sobbed as if her heart would break, then suddenly drying her tears, she assumed a calm, cold, dignified manner, such as I had never seen in Cora Blanchard. Very composedly she questioned me of what I had done during her absence, telling me, too, of her travels, of the people she had seen and the places she had visited, but never a word said she of him she called her husband. From the bank where we sat, the village grave−yard was discernible, with its marble gleaming through the trees, and at last, as her eye wandered in that direction, she said, "Have any of our villagers died? Mother's letters were never very definite."

"Yes," I answered, "Our minister, Mr. Sumner, died two months ago."

"Who takes his place?" she asked; and, as if a suspicion of the truth were flashing upon her, her eyes turned toward me with an eager, startled glance.

"Walter Beaumont. He is to be ordained next Sabbath, and you are just in time," I replied, regretting my words the next instant, for never saw I so fearful a look of anguish as that which swept over her face, and was succeeded by a cold, hard, defiant expression, scarcely less painful to witness.

She would have questioned me of him, I think, had not an approaching footstep caught our ear, sending a crimson flush to Cora's hitherto marble cheek, and producing on me a most unpleasant sensation, for I knew that the gray−haired man now within a few paces of us, was he who called that young creature *his wife. Golden* was the chain by which he had bound her, and every link was set with diamonds and costly stones, but it had rusted and eaten to her very heart's core, for the most precious gem of all was missing from that chain—love for her husband, who, fortunately for his own peace of mind, was too conceited to dream how little she cared for him. He was not handsome, and still many would have called him a fine−looking, middle−aged man, though there was something disagreeable in his thin, compressed lips and intensely black eyes—the one betokening a violent temper, and the other an indomitable will. To me he was exceedingly polite—rather too much so for my perfect ease, while toward Cora he tried to be very affectionate.

Seating himself at her side, and throwing his arm around her, he called her a "little truant," and "why she had run away from him."

Half pettishly she answered, "Because i like sometimes to be alone," then, rising up and turning toward me she asked if "the water still ran over the, old mill dam in the west woods just as it used to do," Saying if it did, she wished to see it. "You can't go," she continued, addressing her husband, "for it is more than a mile, over fences and plowed fields."

This was sufficient, for Mr. Douglass was very fastidious in all matters pertaining to his dress, and had no fancy for soiling his white pants, or patent leathers. So Cora and I set off together, while he walked slowly back to the village. Scarcely was he out of sight, however, when, seating herself beneath a tree, and throwing herself flat

upon the ground, Cora announced her intention of not going any further.

"I only wished to be alone. I *breathe* so much better," she said, and when I looked inquiringly at her, she continued, "Never marry a man for his wealth, Lottie, unless you wish to become as hard, as wicked and unhappy as I am. John Douglass is worth more than half a million, and yet I would give it all if I were the same little girl who, six years ago, waded with you through the snow−drifts to school on that stormy day. Do you remember what we played that noon and my foolish remark that I would marry for *money* and *diamonds!* Woe is me, I've won them both!" and her tears fell fast on the sparkling gems which covered her slender fingers.

Just then I saw in the distance a young man whom I knew to be Walter Beaumont. He seemed to be approaching us, and when Cora became aware of that, she started up and grasping my arm, hurried away, saying, as she cast backward a fearful glance, "I would rather die than meet him now. I am not prepared."

For the remainder of the way we walked on in silence, until we reached her mother's gate, where we found her husband waiting for her. Bidding me good morning she followed him slowly up the graveled walk and I saw her no more until the following Sabbath. It was a gloriously beautiful morning, and at an early hour the old brick church was filled to overflowing, for Walter had many friends, and they came together gladly to see him made a minister of God. During the first part of the service he was very pale, and his eye wandered often toward the large, square pew where sat a portly man and a beautiful young woman, richly attired in satin and jewels. It had cost her a struggle to be there, but she felt that she must look again on one whom she had loved so much and so deeply wronged. So she came, and the sight of him standing there in his early manhood, his soft brown hair clustering about his brow, and his calm, pale face wearing an expression almost angelic, was more than she could bear, and leaning forward she kept her countenance concealed from view until the ceremony was ended, and Walter's clear, musical voice announced the closing hymn. Then she raised her head, and her face, seen through the folds of her costly veil, looked haggard and ghastly, as if a fierce storm of passion had swept over her. By the door she paused, and when the newly−ordained clergyman passed out, she offered him her hand, the hand which, when he held it last, was pledged to him, There were *diamonds* on it now— diamonds of value rare, but their brightness was hateful to that wretched woman, for she knew at what a fearful price they had been bought.

They did not meet again, and only once more did Walter see her; then, from our door, he looked out upon her as with her husband she dashed by on horseback, her long cloth skirt almost sweeping the ground, and the plumes of her velvet cap waving in the air.

"Mrs. Douglass is a fine rider," was all Walter said, and the tone of his voice indicated that she was becoming to him an object of indifference. Desperately had he fought with his affection for her, winning the victory at last, and now the love he once had felt for her was slowly and surely dying out, The next week, tiring of our dull village life, Cora left us, going to Nahant, where she spent most of the summer, and when in the winter we heard from her again, she was a widow—the sole heir of her husband who had died suddenly, and generously left her that for which she married him—his money,

"Will Walter Beaumont marry Cora now?" I had asked myself many a time, without, however, arriving at any definite conclusion, when a little more than a year succeeding Mr. Douglass's death, she wrote, begging me to come to her, as she was very lonely, and the presence of an old friend would do her good. I complied with her request, and within a few days was an inmate of her luxurious home, where everything indicated the wealth of its possessor. And Cora, though robed in deepest black, was more like herself, more like the Cora of other days, than I had seen her before since her marriage. Of her husband she spoke freely and always with respect, saying he had been kinder far to her than she had deserved. Of Walter, too, she talked, appearing much gratified when I told her how he was loved and appreciated by his people.

One morning when we sat together in her little sewing room, she said, "I have done what you perhaps, will consider a very unwomanly act. I have written to Walter Beaumont. Look," and she placed in my hand a letter, which she bade me read. It was a wild, strange thing, telling him of the anguish she had endured, of the tears she had shed, of the love which through all she had cherished for him, and begging him to forgive her if possible, and be to her again what he had been years ago. She was not worthy of him, she said, but he could make her better, and in language the most touching, she besought of him not to cast her off, or despise her because she had stepped so far aside from womanly delicacy as to write to him this letter. "I will not insult you," she wrote in conclusion, "by telling you of the *money* for which I sold myself, but it is mine now, lawfully mine, and most gladly would I share it with you."

"You will not send him this?" I said. "You cannot be in earnest?"

But she was determined, and lest her resolution should give way, she rang the bell, ordering the servant who appeared to take it at once to the office. He obeyed, and during the day she was unusually gay, singing snatches of old songs, and playing several lively airs upon her piano, which for months had stood unopened and untouched. That evening, as the sun went down, and the full moon rose over the city, she asked me to walk with her, and we, ere long, found ourselves several streets distant from that in which she lived. Groups of people were entering a church near by, and from a remark which we overheard, we learned that there was to be a wedding.

"Let us go in," she said, "it may be some one I know," and entering together, we took our seats just in front of the altar.

Scarcely were we seated when a rustling of satin announced the approach of the bridal party, and in a moment they appeared moving slowly up the aisle. My first attention was directed toward the bride, a beautiful young creature, with a fair sweet face, and curls of golden hair falling over her white, uncovered neck.

"Isn't she lovely?" I whispered; but Cora did not hear me.

With her hands locked tightly together, her lips firmly compressed, and her cheeks of an ashen hue, she was gazing fixedly at the bridegroom, on whom I, too, now looked, starting quickly, for it was our minister, Walter Beaumont! The words were few which made them one, Walter and the young girl at his side, and when the ceremony was over, Cora arose, and leaning heavily upon my arm, went out into the open air, and on through street after street, until her home was reached. Then, without a word, we parted—I going to my room, while she, through the live−long night, paced up and down the long parlors where no eye could witness the working of the mighty sorrow which had come upon her.

The next morning she was calm, but very, very pale, saying not a word of last night's adventure. Neither did she speak of it for several days, and then she said, rather abruptly, "I would give all I possess if I had never sent that letter. The mortification is harder to bear even than Walter's loss. But he will not tell of it, I'm sure. He is too good—too noble," and tears, the first she had shed since that night, rained through her thin, white fingers. It came at last—a letter bearing Walter's superscription, and with trembling hands she opened it, finding, as she had expected, his wedding card, while on a tiny sheet was written, "God pity you, Cora, even as I do.—WALTER."

"Walter! Walter!" she whispered, and her quivering lips touched once the loved name which she was never heard to breathe again.

Prom that day Cora Douglass faded, and when the autumnal days were come, and the distant hills were bathed in the hazy October light, she died. But not in the noisy city, for she had asked to be taken home, and in the pleasant room where we had often sat together, she bade me her last good−by. They buried her on the Sabbath, and Walter's voice was sad and low as with Cora's coffin at his feet he preached from the words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." His young wife, too, wept over the early dead, who had well nigh been her rival, and whose beautiful lace wore a calm, peaceful smile, as if she were at rest.

There was a will, they said; and in it Walter was generously remembered, while to his wife was given an ivory box, containing Cora's *diamonds*—necklace, bracelets, pin and ear−rings—all were there; and Walter, as he looked upon them, drew nearer to him his fair girl−wife, who but for these, might not, perchance, have been to him what she was—his dearest earthly treasure.

BAD SPELLING

The last notes of the bell which duly summoned to their task the pupils of Madame Duvant's fashionable seminary had ceased, and in the school−room, recently so silent, was heard the low hum of voices, interspersed occasionally with a suppressed titter from some girl more mischievous than her companions. Very complacently Madame Duvant looked over the group of young faces, mentally estimating the probable gain she should receive from each, for this was the first day of the term, then with a few low−spoken words to the row of careworn, pale−faced teachers, she smoothed down the folds of her heavy gray satin and left the room, just as a handsome traveling−carriage stopped before the door.

The new arrival proved to be a fashionably−dressed woman, who, with an air of extreme hauteur, swept into the parlor, followed by two young girls, one apparently sixteen and the other fourteen years of age. The younger and, as some would call her, the plainer looking of the two, was unmistakably a "poor relation," for her face bore the meek, patient look of a dependent, while the proud black eyes and scornfully curved lip of the other, marked her as the daughter of the lady, who, after glancing about the room and satisfying herself that the chairs, tables, and so forth, were *refined*, gave her name as "Mrs. Greenleaf, wife of the Hon. Mr. Greenleaf, of Herkimer county, N.Y."

"I have come," said she, apparently speaking to Madame Duvant, but looking straight at the window, "I've come to place my daughter Arabella under your charge, and if she is pleased with your discipline, she will finish her education here—graduate—though I care but little for that, except that it sounds well. She is our only child, and, of course, a thorough education in the lower English branches is not at all necessary. I wish her to be highly accomplished in French, Italian, music, drawing, painting, dancing, and, perhaps, learn something of the old poets, so as to be able to talk about them a little, if necessary, but as for the other branches, such as geography, history, arithmetic, grammar, and the like, she can learn them by herself, and it is not my wish that she should waste her time over any thing so common. These will do for Mildred," and she glanced toward the *poor relation*, whose eyes were bent upon the carpet.

"She is the child of my husband's sister, and we have concluded to educate her for a teacher, so I wish, you to be very thorough with her in all those stupid things which Arabella is not to study."

Madame Duvant bowed, and Mrs. Greenleaf continued, "Last term they were at Bloomington Seminary, and, if you'll believe it, the principal insisted upon putting Arabella into the spelling−class, just because she didn't chance to spell every word of her first composition correctly! I dare say it was more Mildred's fault than hers, for she acknowledged to me that 'twas one of Mildred's old pieces that she found and copied."

An angry flash of Arabella's large black eyes, and a bright red spot on Mildred's cheek, were the only emotions manifested by the young girls, and Mrs. Greenfield proceeded: "Of course, I wouldn't submit to it—my daughter spelling *baker*, and all that nonsense, so I took her away at once. It was my wish that Mildred should remain, but husband, who is peculiar, wouldn't hear of it, and said she should go where Arabella did, so I've brought them both."

After little further conversation, it was arranged that Miss Arabella should go through a course of merely fashionable accomplishments, Madame Duvant assuring her mother that neither spelling−book nor dictionary should in any way annoy her. Mildred, on the contrary, was to be thoroughly drilled in every thing necessary for a teacher to know, Mrs. Greenleaf hinting that the sooner her education was completed the better she would be pleased, for it cost a great deal to clothe, feed and school her. Madame Duvant promised to execute the wishes of her patron, who gathered up her flowing robes, and with a dozen or more kisses for her daughter, and a nod of her head for Mildred, stepped into her carriage and was driven rapidly away.

Just across the spacious grounds of the Duvant Seminary, and divided from them by a wall which it seemed almost impossible to scale, stood a huge stone building, whose hacked walls, bare floors and dingy windows—from which were frequently suspended a cap, a pair of trousers, or a boy's leg—stamped it at once as "The College," the veriest pest in the world, as Madame Duvant called it, when, with all the vigilance both of herself and Argus−eyed teachers, she failed to keep her young ladies from making the acquaintance of the students, who winked at them in church, bowed to them in the streets, tied notes to stones and threw them over the

ponderous wall, while the girls waved their handkerchiefs from their windows, and in various other ways eluded the watchfulness of their teachers. A great acquisition to the fun−loving members of the seminary was Arabella Greenleaf, and she had scarcely been there six weeks ere she was perfectly well acquainted with every student whom she considered at all worth knowing. But upon only one were her brightest glances and her most winsome smiles lavished, and that was George Clayton, a young man from South Carolina, who was said to be very wealthy. He was too honorable to join in the intrigues of his companions, and when at last he became attracted by the witching eyes and dashing manners of Arabella Greenleaf, he went boldly to Madame Duvant and asked permission to see the young lady in the parlor.

His request was granted, and during the two years he remained at college, he continued occasionally to call upon Arabella, who, each time that he saw her, seemed more pleasing, for she was beautiful, and when she chose to be so was very courteous and agreeable. One evening when George called as usual and asked to see her, he waited a long time, and was about making up his mind to leave, when a fair, delicate looking girl, with deep blue eyes and auburn hair, entered the room, introducing herself as *Miss Graham*, the cousin of Arabella, who, she said, was indisposed and unable to come down.

"She bade me say that she was very sorry not to see you," added Mildred, for she it was, blushing deeply as she met the eager, admiring eye of George Clayton.

Gladly would he have detained her, but with a polite good evening, she left him in a perfect state of bewilderment. "Strange that I never observed her before, for I must have seen her often," he thought, as he slowly wended his way back to his rooms, "and stranger still that Arabella never told me she had a cousin here."

The next time he met Arabella his first inquiry was for her cousin, and why she had never mentioned her. With a heightened color Arabella answered, "Oh, she's a little body, who never cares to be known—a perfect bookworm and man−hater."

The words bookworm and man−hater produced upon George Clayton a far different effect from what Arabella had intended, and he often found himself thinking of the soft blue eyes of Mildred Graham. Unlike some men, there was nothing terrible to him in a bookish woman, and he might, perhaps, have sought another interview with Mildred, but for a circumstance which threw her entirely in the shade.

The annual examination of Madame Duvant's seminary was drawing near. Arabella was to graduate, while both she and Mildred were competitors for a prize offered for the best composition. There was a look of wonder on Mildred's face, when she saw her cousin's name among the list, for composition was something in which Arabella did not excel. Greatly then did Mildred marvel when day after day she found her, pencil in hand, and apparently lost in thought, as she filled one sheet after another, until at last it was done.

"Now, Milly," said Arabella, "You correct the spelling and copy it for me—that's a good girl."

Mildred had acted in this capacity too often to refuse, and with a martyr's patience, she corrected and copied the manuscript, wondering the while from whence came the sudden inspiration which had so brightened Arabella's ideas. But if she had any suspicions of the truth, she kept them to herself, handing her own composition in with that of her cousin, and calmly waiting the result.

The examination was over. Arabella, who knew exactly what questions would be put to her, had acquitted herself with great credit, and her proud lady mother, who was one of the numerous visitors, fanned herself complacently as she heard on all sides the praises of her daughter.

And now nothing remained but the evening exhibition, at which music and the prize compositions formed the chief entertainment. At an early hour the large school−rooms were densely crowded. Among the first who came was George Clayton—securing a seat as near as possible to the stage, so that he should not lose a single word. He himself had graduated but two weeks previously, and was now about to make the tour of Europe together with his father, who was present. They were to sail the next night, and at nine o'clock this evening they were to leave for New York. During the examination Arabella had risen greatly in George's estimation, and if she had seemed beautiful to him then, she was tenfold more so now, when, with flowing curls and simple white muslin dress, she tripped gracefully across the stage, and seating herself at the piano, played and sang with exquisite skill the well−known song entitled, "No More, Never More."

Then followed the reading of the compositions, Mildred being called upon first, in a clear and peculiarly sweet voice she read, chaining to perfect silence her audience, which, when she was done, greeted her with noisy cheers, whispering one to another that she was sure to win. Arabella, at her own request, was the last. With proud,

flashing eyes and queenly air, she coolly surveyed the mass of heads before her, caught an admiring glance from George Clayton, and then, with a steady hand unrolled her manuscript and read. Her subject was "The Outward and the Inward Life," and no gray−haired sage ever handled it more skilfully than she. When she finished one universal burst of applause shook the building to its centre, while her name was on every lip as she triumphantly left the room. Just then a distant bell struck the hour of nine, and George Clayton arose to go. He was sure of Arabella's success, and in the hall below, whither she had gone to bid him adieu, he shook her hand warmly, telling her how happy it made him to see her thus victorious, and winning from her a promise to write to him when he should be over the sea.

Half an hour later and the night express was bearing him far away. Half an hour later, and with flushed brow Arabella stood up and received the prize, which consisted of two elegantly bound volumes of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Forty minutes later, and from the seat by the door, a little bent, weird−looking woman arose, and making her way through the crowd, advanced until she stood upon the stage, then stretching her long, bony finger toward Arabella, who had returned, she said, "I am a lover of justice, and should I hold my peace, the very stones would cry out against me. Yonder young lady has no right to the prize, for the piece which she has palmed off as her own appeared in the *Woodland Gazette*, a paper published in an obscure New Hampshire village. How she came by it, she can, perhaps, explain, but I cannot."

At the commencement of this strange speech, Arabella arose as if to defy the woman, who was thus blasting her good name, but at the mention of the *Woodland Gazette* she fainted and was carried from the room. Madame Duvant now came forward and addressed a few low−spoken words to the woman, who answered aloud, "I have the best of reasons for what I have said. My son, who lives in New Hampshire, occasionally sends me the *Gazette*, and in one number, which came nearly a year ago, appeared this very article, taken originally from an old English paper."

"Prove it! Produce the paper!" fiercely ejaculated Mrs. Greenleaf, as she left the room in quest of her daughter.

"I can do so," answered the woman; "I never tore up a newspaper in my life, and if the audience will wait for the space of ten minutes, I can show them the very article"—saying which she glided noiselessly from the room.

She was a strange, half−crazy old creature, of wonderful memory, who occupied a small cottage in the suburbs of the village, and many doubts were expressed as to the veracity of her statement. But these were soon put to flight by her reappearance. Infolding the dingy yellow paper, she read aloud to her astonished hearers the article which proved to have been taken from the "London Examiner". There was now no longer a shadow of doubt and the prize was withdrawn from the treacherous Arabella, and as Mildred's composition was pronounced the next in order, it was bestowed upon her.

Mollified, indignant and almost frantic at this public disgrace, Arabella finally confessed to having stolen the piece from a paper sent her some months before by a former schoolmate. The next morning she left the village, heaping her pent−up wrath upon the head of her innocent cousin, who was destined in more ways than one to rival her.

Three months had passed away since the night of the exhibition, and in a private parlor at a London hotel sat George Clayton, rather impatiently awaiting the return of his servant from the post−office. As yet he had received no letter from Arabella, for though she had written it had failed to reach him, and while he in the Old World was marvelling at her long delay, she in the New was wondering why he did not answer. The mortification which she had endured affected her deeply, bringing on at last a slow fever, which confined her to her bed, where for weeks she lay, carefully attended by Mildred, who once, when she complained of George's neglect, suggested the possibility of his not having received the letter. This was a new idea to Arabella, and as she was herself unable to write, she persuaded Mildred to do it for her, and strange to say, the two letters reached their destination at the same time.

With eager haste George took them from his servant, who soon went out leaving him alone. The handwriting of both was not alike, and in some trepidation the young man broke the seal of the one bearing the more recent date. It was beautifully written, and mentally complimenting the fair writer, George opened the other, uttering an exclamation of surprise ere he had read a dozen lines. It was a sickly, sentimental affair, taken partly from an old letterwriter, and containing many highflown sentences concerning the "*pearling rill*, " the "*silverey starlite*" and

the "*rozy morn*" which, being spelled as they were, presented a most formidable aspect to the fastidious young man.

Although Arabella had taken much pains with her letter, at least one− fourth of the words were misspelt, and by the time George had finished reading, he entertained no other feeling toward the writer than one of disguest, to think that, with all her showy accomplishments, she had neglected what to him was the most important of all, for in nothing is the ignorance of a young lady more apparent than in a badly−spelled letter. It was a long time ere he answered it, and then the few lines which he wrote were so cold, so different from his first, that in a fit of anger Arabella tossed it into the fire, repenting the act the moment after, and, as if to make amends, writing in return a long letter, to which there came no response, and thus the correspondence ended.

Eighteen months later, and again Madame Duvant's rooms were crowded to overflowing, but this time Arabella Greenleaf was not there, though George Clayton was, eagerly watching each word and movement of Mildred Graham, whose uncle had insisted upon her remaining at school until she, too, should graduate, and who now, justly, received the highest honors of her class. Very beautifully looked the young girl, and as she modestly received the compliments of her friends, George Clayton's was not the only admiring eye which rested upon her, for many now paid her homage.

That night George asked to see her alone. His request was granted, and when next she parted from him it was as his betrothed. Immediately after George's return from Europe, he had heard the story of Arabella's perfidy, and if no other circumstances had interposed to wean him from her entirely, this alone would have done it, for he could not respect a woman who would thus meanly stoop to deception. He had lingered in G—for the purpose of renewing his former acquaintance, with Mildred, the result of which we have seen.

Mortified beyond measure, Arabella heard of her cousin's engagement, and when George came at last to claim his bride, she refused to see him, wilfully absenting herself from home that she should not witness the bridal, which took place one bright October morning, when the forest trees, as if in honor of the occasion, were dressed in their most gorgeous robes, and the birds were singing their farewell songs.

New misfortunes, however, awaited poor Arabella, for scarcely was Mildred gone to her southern home when the red flag of the auctioneer waved from the windows of Mr. Greenleaf's luxurious house, which, with its costly furniture, was sold to the highest bidder, and the family were left dependent upon their own exertions for support. When the first shock was over, Mr. Greenleaf proposed that his daughter should teach, and thus bring into use her boasted accomplishments. For a time Arabella refused, but hearing at last of a situation which she thought might please her, she applied for it by letter. But alas, the mistake she made when she abandoned the spelling−book for the piano, again stood in the way, for no one would employ a teacher so lamentably ignorant of orthography. Nor is it at all probable she will ever rise higher than her present position—that of a *plain* sewer—until she goes back to *first* principles, and commences again the despised column beginning with "*baker!*"

MAGGIE LEE

The usually quiet little village of Ellerton was, one June morning, thrown into a state of great excitement by the news that the large stone building on the hill, which, for several years had been shut up, was at last to have an occupant, and that said occupant was no less a personage than its owner, Graham Thornton, who, at the early age of twenty−eight, had been chosen to fill the responsible office of judge of the county. Weary of city life, and knowing that a home in the country would not materially interfere with the discharge of his new duties, particularly as Ellerton was within half an hour's ride of the city, young Thornton had conceived the idea of fitting up the old stone house, bequeathed to him by his grandfather, in a style suited to his abundant means and luxurious taste. Accordingly, for several weeks, the people of Ellerton were kept in a constant state of anxiety, watching, wondering and guessing, especially Miss Olivia Macey, who kept a small store in the outskirts of the village, and whose fertile imagination supplied whatever her neighbors lacked in actual knowledge of the proceedings at "Greystone Hall," as Judge Thornton called his place of residence.

At last, every thing was completed and the day appointed for the arrival of the Judge, who, disliking confusion, had never once been near his house, but, after a few general directions, had left the entire arrangement of the building and grounds to the management of one whom he knew to be a connoisseur in such matters. As was very natural, a great deal of curiosity was felt concerning the arrival of the distinguished stranger, and as his mother, a proud, stately woman, was to accompany him, Miss Olivia Macey, who boasted of having once been a schoolmate of the haughty lady, resolved upon meeting them at the depot, thinking she should thereby show them proper respect.

"So, Maggie," said she to her niece, a dark−haired, white−browed girl of fifteen, who, at noon, came bounding in from school, "so Maggie, you must watch the store, for there's no knowing how long I shall be gone. Miss Thornton may ask me home with her, and it would not be polite to refuse."

For an instant Maggie's dark brown eyes danced with mischief as she thought how improbable it was that the lofty Mrs. Thornton would seek to renew her acquaintance with one in Miss Macey's humble position, but the next moment they filled with tears, and she said, "Oh, aunt, *must* I stay from school again? It is the third time within a week. I never shall know anything!"

"Never mind, Mag," shouted little Ben, tossing his cap across the room and helping himself to the largest piece of pie upon the dinner−table. "Never mind. I'll stay with you, for I don't like to go to school any way. And we'll get our lessons at home."

Maggie knew how useless it would be to argue the point, so with a dejected air she seated herself at the open window and silently watched her aunt until she disappeared in the distance—then taking up her book, she tired to study, but could not, for the heavy pain at her heart which kept whispering of injustice done to her, unconsciously, perhaps, by the only mother she had ever known. Very dear to Miss Macey were the orphan children of her only sister, and faithfully did she strive to fulfill her trust, but she could not conceal her partiality for fun−loving, curly−haired Ben, nor the fact that the sensitive and ambitious Maggie, who thirsted for knowledge, was wholly unappreciated and misunderstood. Learning—learning was what Maggie craved, and she sat there alone that bright June afternoon, holding upon her lap the head of her sleeping brother, and watching the summer shadows as they chased each other over the velvety grass in the meadow beyond, she wondered if it would ever be thus with her—would there never come a time when she could pursue her studies undisturbed, and then, as the thought that this day made her *fifteen* years of age, her mind went forward to the future, and she said aloud—"Yes—three years from to−day and I shall be free—free as the air I breathe!"

But why that start, sweet Maggie Lee? Why that involuntary shudder as you think of the long three years from now? She cannot tell, but the shadows deepen on her fair, girlish face, and leaning her brow upon her hand, she thinks long and earnestly of what the three years may bring. A footstep on the floor—the first which has fallen there that afternoon—and Maggie looks up to see before her a tall, fine−looking man, who, the moment his eye fell upon her, checked the *whistle*, intended for his dog, which was trembling on his lip, and lifting his hat deferentially, he asked if "this were Miss Macey's store?"

"Yes, sir," answered Maggie, and laying Bennie gently down, she went round behind the counter, while the

young man, gazing curiously at her, continued, "You surely are not Miss Macey?"

There was a most comical expression in the brown eyes which met the black ones of the stranger, as Maggie answered, "No sir, I am nobody but Maggie Lee."

There must have been something attractive either in the name or the little maiden who bore it, for long after the gentleman had received the articles for which he came, he lingered, asking the young girl numberless questions and playing with little Ben, who now wide awake, met his advances more than half way, and was on perfectly familiar terms both with the stranger and the dog Ponto, who had stretched his shaggy length before the door.

"Mag cries, she does, when Aunt Livy makes her stay home from school," said Ben, at last, beginning to feel neglected and wishing to attract attention.

Showing his white, handsome teeth, the gentleman playfully smoothed the silken curls of little Ben, and turning to the blushing Maggie, asked "if she were fond of books?"

"Oh, I love them so much," was the frank, impulsive answer, and ere ten minutes had passed away, Judge Thornton, for he it was, understood Maggie's character as well as if he had known her a lifetime.

Books, poetry, music, paintings, flowers, she worshiped them all, and without the slightest means either of gratifying her taste.

"I have in my library many choice books, to which you are welcome at any time when you will call at Greystone Hall," the stranger said at last.

"Greystone Hall!" gasped Maggie, the little red spots coming out all over her neck and face—"Greystone Hall!—then you must be—−"

"Judge Thornton, and your friend hereafter," answered the gentleman, offering his hand and bidding her good−by.

There are moments which leave their impress upon one's lifetime, changing instantaneously, as it were, our thoughts and feelings, and such an one had come to Maggie Lee, who was roused from a deep reverie by the shrill voice of her aunt, exclaiming, "Well, I've been on a Tom−fool's errand once in my life. Here I've waited in that hot depot over two trains, and heard at the last minute that Mrs. Thornton and her son came up last night, and I hain't seen them after all. It's too bad."

Very quietly Maggie told of the judge's call, repeating all the particulars of the interview; then stealing away to her chamber, she thought again, wondering *where* and *what* she would be three years from that day.

A year has passed away, and Graham Thornton, grown weary of his duties, has resigned the office of judge, and turned school−teacher, so the gossiping villagers say, and with some degree of truth, for regularly each day Maggie Lee and Ben go up to Greystone Hall, where they recite their lessons to its owner, though always in the presence of its lady mistress, who has taken a strange fancy to Maggie Lee, and whose white hand has more than once rested caressingly on the dark, glossy hair of the young girl. To a casual observer, the Maggie of *sixteen* is little changed from the Maggie of *fifteen* years; but to him, her teacher, she is not the same, for while in some respects she is more a woman and less a child, in everything pertaining to himself she is far more a child than when first he met her one short year ago. Then there was about her a certain self−reliance, which is now all gone, and he who has looked so often into the thoughts and feelings of that childish heart knows he can sway her at his will.

"But 'tis only a girlish friendship she feels for him," he says; "only a brotherly interest he entertains for her;" and so day after day she comes to his library, and on a low stool, her accustomed seat at his side, she drinks in new inspirations with which to feed that girlish friendship, while he, gazing down into her soft, brown, dreamy eyes, feels more and more how necessary to his happiness is her daily presence there. And if sometimes the man of the world asks himself "where all this will end?" his conscience is quieted by the answer that Maggie Lee merely feels toward him as she would toward any person who had done her a like favor. So all through the bright summer days and through the hazy autumn time, Maggie dreams on, perfectly happy, though she knows not why, for never yet has a thought of *love* for him entered her soul. She only knows that he to her is the dearest, best of friends, and Greystone Hall the loveliest spot on earth, but the wish that *she* might ever be its mistress has never been conceived.

With the coming of the holidays the lessons were suspended for a time, for there was to be company at the hall, and its master would need all his leisure.

"I shall miss you so much," he said to Maggie, as he walked with her across the fields which led to her humble home. "I shall miss you, but the claims of society must be met, and these ladies have long talked of visiting us."

"Are they young and handsome?" Maggie asked involuntarily.

"Only one—Miss Helen Deane is accounted a beauty, She is an heiress, too, and the best match in all the city of L—," answered Mr. Thornton, more to himself than Maggie, who at the mention of Helen Deane felt a cold shadow folding itself around her heart.

Alas, poor Maggie Lee. The world has long since selected the proud Helen as the future bride of Graham Thornton, who, as he walks slowly back across the snow−clad field, tramples upon the delicate footprints you have made, and wishes it were thus easy to blot out from his heart all memory of you! Poor, poor Maggie Lee, Helen Deane *is* beautiful, far more beautiful than you, and when in her robes of purple velvet, with her locks of golden hair shading her soft eyes of blue, she flits like a sunbeam through the spacious rooms of Greystone Hall, waking their echoes with her voice of richest melody, what marvel if Graham Thornton does pay her homage, and reserves all thoughts of you for the midnight hour, when the hall is still and Helen's voice is no longer heard? He is but a man—a man, too, of the world, and so, though you, Maggie Lee, are very dear to him, he does not think it possible that he can raise you to his rank—make you the honored mistress of his home, and still lower himself not one iota from the station he has ever filled. And though his mother loves you, too, 'tis not with a mother's love, and should children ever climb her knee calling her son their sire, she would deem you a *governess* befitting such as they, and nothing more. But all this Maggie does not know, and when the visiting is over and Helen Deane is gone, she goes back to her old place and sits again at the feet of Graham Thornton, never wondering why he seems so often lost in thought, or why he looks so oft into her eyes of brown, trying to read there that he has not wronged her.

Another year has passed, and with the light of the full moon shining down upon him, Graham Thornton walks again with Maggie Lee across the fields where now the summer grass is growing. The foot−prints in last winter's snow have passed away just as the light will go out from Maggie's heart when Graham Thornton shall have told the tale he has come with her to tell. With quivering lips and bloodless cheek she listened while he told her indifferently, as if it were a piece of news she had probably heard before, that when the next full moon should shine on Greystone Hall, Helen Deane would be there—his bride!

"This, of course, will effectually break up our pleasant meetings," he continued, looking everywhere save in Maggie's face. "And this I regret—but my books are still at your disposal. You will like Helen, I think, and will call on her of course."

They had reached the little gate, and taking Maggie's hand, he would have detained her for a few more parting words, but she broke away, and in reply to his last question, hurriedly answered, "Yes, yes."

The next moment he was alone—alone in the bright moonlight. The door was shut. There was a barrier between himself and Maggie Lee, a barrier his own hands had built, and never again, so long as he lived, would Graham Thornton's conscience be at rest. Amid all the pomp of his bridal day—at the hour when, resplendent with beauty, Helen stood by his side at the holy altar, and breathed the vows which made her his forever—amid the gay festivities which followed, and the noisy mirth which for days pervaded his home, there was ever a still, small voice which whispered to him of the great wrong he had done to Maggie Lee, who never again was seen at Greystone Hall.

Much the elder Mrs. Thornton marveled at her absence, and once when her carriage was rolling past the door of the little store, she bade her coachman stop, while she herself went in to ask if her favorite were ill. Miss Olivia's early call at Greystone Hall had never been returned, and now she bowed coldly and treated her visitor with marked reserve, until she learned why she had come; then, indeed, her manner changed, but she could not tell her how, on the night when Graham Thornton had cruelly torn the veil from Maggie's heart, leaving it crushed and broken, she had found her long after midnight out in the tall, damp grass, where, in the wild abandonment of grief she had thrown herself; nor how, in a calmer moment she had told her sad story, exonerating him from wrong, and blaming only herself for not having learned sooner how much she loved one so far above her, so she simply answered, "Yes, she took a violent cold and has been sick for weeks. Her mother died of consumption; I am afraid Maggie will follow."

"Poor girl, to die so young," sighed Mrs. Thornton, as she returned to her carriage and was driven back to Greystone Hall, where, in a recess of the window Graham sat, his arm around his wife, and his fingers playing

with the curls of her golden hair.

But the hand dropped nervously at his side when his mother startled him with the news that "Maggie Lee was dying." Very wonderingly the large blue eyes of Helen followed him, as, feigning sudden faintness, he fled out into the open air, which, laden though it was with the perfume of the summer flowers, had yet no power to quiet the voice within which told him that if Maggie died, he alone was guilty of her death. "But whatever I can do to atone for my error shall be done," he thought at last, and until the chill November wind had blasted the last bud, the choicest fruit and flowers which grew at Greystone Hall daily found entrance to the chamber of the sick girl, who would sometimes push them away, as if there still lingered among them the atmosphere they had breathed.

"They remind me so much of the past that I cannot endure them in my presence," she said one day when her aunt brought her a beautiful bouquet, composed of her favorite flowers, and the hot tears rained over the white, wasted face, as she ordered them from the room.

Much she questioned both her aunt and Bennie of her rival, whose beauty was the theme of the whole village, and once, when told that she was passing, she hastened to the window, but her cheek grew whiter still, and her hands clasped each other involuntarily as she saw by the side of the fair Helen the form of Graham Thornton. They both were looking toward her window, and as Helen met the burning gaze, she exclaimed, "Oh, Graham, it is terrible. It makes me faint," and shudderingly she drew nearer to her husband, who, to his dying hour, never forgot the wild, dark eyes which looked down so reproachfully upon him that memorable wintry day.

Three years have passed away since the time when first we met with Maggie Lee—three years which seemed so long to her then, and which have brought her so much pain. She has watched the snow and ice as they melted from off the hill−side. She has seen the grass spring up by the open door—has heard the robin singing in the old oak tree—has felt the summer air upon her cheek. She, has reached her *eighteenth* birthday, and ere another sun shall rise will indeed be free.

"Oh, I cannot see her die," cried poor little Ben, when he saw the pallor stealing over her face, and running out into the yard he threw himself upon the grass, sobbing bitterly, "My sister, oh, my sister."

"Is she worse?" said the voice of Graham Thornton. He was passing in the street and had heard the wailing cry. Ben knew that in some way Judge Thornton was connected with his grief, but he answered respectfully. "She is dying. Oh, Maggie, Maggie. What shall I do without her?"

"You shall live with *me*," answered Mr. Thornton.

'Twas a sudden impulse, and thinking the assurance that her brother should be thus provided for would be a comfort to the dying girl, he glided noiselessly into the sick room. But she did not know him, and falling on his knees by her side, he wept like a little child. "She was sleeping," they said, at last, and lifting up his head he looked upon her as she slept, while a fear, undefined and terrible, crept over him, as she lay so still and motionless. At length rising to his feet, he bent him down so low that his lips touched hers, and then, without a word, he went out from her presence, for *he* knew that Maggie Lee *was dead!*

The next day, at sunset, they buried her in the valley where the mound could always be seen from the window of Graham Thornton's room, and, as with folded arms and aching heart he stood by, while they lowered the coffin to its resting−place, he felt glad that it was so. "It will make me a better man," he thought," for when evil passions rise, and I am tempted to do wrong, I have only to look across the fields toward the little grave which but for me would not have been made so soon, and I shall be strengthened to do what is right."

Slowly and sadly he walked away, going back to his home, where, in a luxuriously furnished chamber, on a couch whose silken hangings swept the floor, lay his wife, and near her his infant daughter, that day four weeks of age. As yet she had no name, and when the night had closed upon them, and it was dark within the room, Graham Thornton drew his chair to the side of his wife, and in low, subdued tones, told her of the fair young girl that day buried from his sight. Helen was his wife, a gentle, faithful wife, and he could not tell her how much he had loved Maggie Lee, and that but for his foolish pride she would perhaps at that moment have been where Helen was, instead of sleeping in her early grave.—No, he could not tell her this, but he told her that Maggie had been very dear to him, and he feared it was for the love of him that she had died. "I wronged her. Nellie, darling," he said smoothing the golden tresses which lay on the pillow. "*I* broke her heart, and now that she is gone I would honor her memory by calling our first−born daughter 'MAGGIE LEE.' 'Tis a beautiful name," he continued, "and you will not refuse my request."

There was much of pride in Helen Thornton's nature, and she did refuse, for days and even weeks; but when

she saw the shadows deepened on the brow of her husband, who would stand for hours looking out through the open window toward the valley where slept the village dead, and when the mother in pity for her son, joined also in the request, she yielded; and, as if the sacrifice were accepted and the atonement good, the first smile which ever dimpled the infant's cheek, played on its mouth, as with its large, strange, bright eyes fixed upon its father's face, it was baptized "Maggie Lee."

Four years of sunshine and storm have fallen upon Maggie's grave, where now a costly marble stands, while the handsome iron fence and the well−kept ground within show that some hand of love is often busy there. In a distant city Ben is striving to overcome his old dislike for books, and seeking to make himself what he knows his sister would wish him to be. At home, the little store has been neatly fitted up, and Miss Olivia sits all day long in her pleasant parlor, feeling sure that the faithful clerk behind the counter will discharge his duties well. Greystone Hall is beautiful as ever, with its handsome rooms, its extensive grounds, its winding walks, its bubbling fountains and its wealth of flowers, but there is a shadow over all—a plague−spot which has eaten into the heart of Graham Thornton, and woven many a thread of silver among his raven locks. It has bent the stately form of his lady mother, and his once gay−hearted wife wanders with a strange unrest from room to room, watching over the uncertain footsteps of their only child, whose large, dark eyes, so much like those which, four long years ago flashed down on Helen their scrutinizing gaze, are darkened forever, *for little Maggie Lee is blind!*

They are getting somewhat accustomed to it now—accustomed to calling her their "poor, blind bird," but the blow was crushing when first it came, and on the grave in the valley, Graham Thornton more than once laid his forehead in the dust, and cried, "My punishment is greater than I can bear,"

But He "who doeth all things well," has in a measure healed the wound, throwing so much of sunshine and of joy around her, who never saw the glorious light of day, that with every morning's dawn and every evening's shade, the fond parents bless their little blind girl, the angel of their home.

THE ANSWERED PRAYER

All day long the canary bird' had sung unheeded in his gilded cage by the door, and the robin had caroled unheard by his nest in the tall maple tree, while the soft summer air and the golden rays of the warm June sun entered unnoticed the open windows of the richly furnished room, where a pale young mother kept her tireless watch by the bedside of her only child, a beautiful boy, three summers old. For many days he had hovered between life and death, while she, his mother, had hung over him with speechless agony, terrible to behold in one so young, so fair as she. He was her all, the only happiness she knew, for poor Lina Hastings was an unloving wife, who never yet had felt a thrill of joy at the sound of her husband's voice, and when occasionally his broad hand rested fondly upon her flowing curls, while he whispered in her ear how dear she was to him, his words awoke no answering chord of love.

How came she then his wife—and the mistress of his princely home? Alas! *wealth* was then the god which Lina Moore worshipped, and when Ralph Hastings, with his uncouth form and hundreds of thousands, asked her to be his wife, she stifled the better feelings of her nature which prompted her to tell him No, and with a gleam of pride in her dark blue eyes, and a deeper glow upon her cheek, she one day passed from the bright sunshine of heaven into the sombre gloom of the gray old church, whence she came forth Lina Hastings, shuddering even as she heard that name, and shrinking involuntarily from the caresses which the newly made husband bestowed upon her. And so the love she withheld from him was given the child who now lay motionless and white as the to the costly linen on which his golden curls were streaming.

All day she had watched him, for they told her that if he lived until the sun setting, there was hope, and as the hours wore on and the long shadows stretching to the eastward, betokened the approach of night, oh, how intense became the anxiety in her bosom. Fainter and softer grew the sunlight on the floor, and whiter grew the face of the sleeping boy. 'Twas the shadow of death, they said, and with a bitter wail of woe, Lina fell upon her knees, and as if she would compel the God of heaven to hear her, she shrieked, "Spare my child. Let him live, and I will bear whatsoever else of evil thou shalt send upon me. Afflict me in any other way and I can bear it, but spare to me my child."

In mercy or in wrath, Lina Hastings' prayer was answered. The pulse grew stronger beneath her touch—the breath came faster through the parted lips—a faint moisture was perceptible beneath the yellow curls, and when the sun was set the soft eyes of Eddie Hastings unclosed, and turned with a look of recognition upon his mother, who, clasping him in her arms, wept for joy, but returned no word or thought of gratitude toward Him who had been thus merciful to her.

In a small brown cottage in a distant part of the same village, another mother was watching beside her first−born, only son. They had been friends in their girlhood, she and Lina Hastings. Together they had conned the same hard tasks—together they had built their playhouse beneath the same old chestnut tree—together, hand in hand they wandered over the rocky hills and through the shady woods of New England, and at the same altar had they plighted their marriage vows, the one to the man she loved, the other to the man she tolerated for the sake of his surroundings. From this point their paths diverged, Lina moving in the sphere to which her husband's wealth had raised her, while Mabel Parkman one sad morning awoke from her sweet dream of bliss to find herself wedded to a drunkard! Only they who like her have experienced a similar awakening can know the bitterness of that hour, and yet methinks she was happier than the haughty Lina, for her love was no idle passion, and through weal and woe she clung to her husband, living oft on the remembrance of what he had been, and the hope of what he might be again, and when her little Willie was first laid upon her bosom, and she felt her husband's tears upon her cheek as he promised to reform for her sake and for his son's, she would not have exchanged her lot with that of the proudest in the land. That vow, alas, was ere long broken, and then, though she wept bitterly over his fall, she felt that she was not desolate, for there was music in her Willie's voice and sunshine in his presence.

But now he was dying, he was leaving her forever, and as she thought of the long dark days when she should look for him in vain, she staggered beneath the heavy blow, and in tones as heart−broken as those which had fallen from Lina Hasting's lips, she prayed "If it be possible let this cup pass from me," adding, "Not my will, oh God, but thine be done."

"I will do all things well," seemed whispered in her ear, and thus comforted she nerved herself to meet the worst. All the day she watched by her child, chafing his little hands, smoothing his scanty pillow beneath his head, bathing his burning forehead, and forcing down her bitter tears when in his disturbed sleep he would beg of his father to "bring him an orange—a nice yellow orange—he was so dry."

Alas, that father was where the song of the inebriate rose high on the summer air, and he heard not the pleadings of his son. 'Twas a dreary, desolate room where Willie Parkman lay, and when the sun went down and the night shadows fell, it seemed darker, drearier still. On the rude table by the window a candle dimly burned, but as the hours sped on it flickered awhile in its socket, then for an instant flashed up, illuminating the strangely beautiful face of the sleeping boy, and went out.

An hour later, and Willie awoke. Feeling for his mother's hand, he said; "Tell me true, do drunkards go to heaven?"

"There is for them no promise," was the wretched mother's answer.

"Then I shall never see pa again. Tell him good−by, good−by forever."

The next time he spoke it was to ask his mother to come near to him, that he might see her face once more. She did so, bending low and stifling her own great agony, lest it should add one pang to his dying hour.

"I cannot see you," he whispered, "it is so dark—so dark."

Oh, what would not that mother have given then for one of the lights which gleamed from the windows of the stately mansion where Eddie Hastings was watched by careful attendants. But it could not be and when at last the silvery moon−beams came struggling through the open window and fell upon the white brow of the little boy, they did not rouse him, for a far more glorious light had dawned upon his immortal vision—even the light of the Everlasting.

In her tasteful boudoir sat Lina Hastings, and at her side, on a silken lounge, lay Eddie, calmly sleeping, The crisis was past—she knew he would live, and her cup of happiness was full. Suddenly the morning stillness was broken by the sound of a tolling bell. 'Twas the same which, but for God's mercy, would at that moment, perhaps, have tolled for her boy, and Lina involuntarily shuddered as she listened to the strokes, which, at first were far between. Then they came faster, and as Lina counted *five* she said aloud, '"Twas a child but two years older than Eddie."

Later in the day it came to her that the bereaved one was her early friend, whom now she seldom met. Once Lina would have flown to Mabel's side, and poured into her ear words of comfort, but her heart had grown hard and selfish, and so she only said, "Poor Mabel, she never was as fortunate as I"—and her eye glanced proudly around the elegantly−furnished room, falling at last upon Eddie, whom she clasped to her bosom passionately, but without thought of Him who had decreed that not then should she be written childless.

The humble funeral was over. The soft, green turf had been broken, and the bright June flowers had fallen beneath the old sexton's spade as he dug the little grave where Willie Parkman was laid to rest. In the drunkard's home there was again darkness and a silence which would never be broken by the prattle of a childish voice. Sobered, repentant, and heartbroken, the wretched father laid his head in the lap of his faithful wife, beseeching of her to pray that the vow that morning breathed by Willie's coffin and renewed by Willie's grave might be kept unbroken. And she did pray, poor Mabel. With her arms around the neck of the weeping man, she asked that this, her great bereavement, might be sanctified to the salvation of her erring husband.

"I will do all things well," again seemed whispered in her ear and Mabel felt assured that Willie had not died in vain. 'Twas hard at first for Robert Parkman to break the chains which bound him, but the remembrance of Willie's touching message—"Tell pa good−by, good−by forever," would rush to his mind whenever he essayed to take the poisonous bowl, and thus was he saved, and when the first day of a new year was ushered in, he stood with Mabel at the altar, and on his upturned brow received the baptismal waters, while the man of God broke to him the bread of life. Much that night they missed their child, and Mabel's tears fell like rain upon the soft, chestnut curl she had severed from his head, but as she looked upon her husband, now strong again in his restored manhood, she murmured—"It was for this that Willie died, and I would not that it should be otherwise."

Fifteen years have passed away since the day when Lina Hastings breathed that almost impious prayer—"Send upon me any evil but this," and upon the deep blue waters of the Pacific a noble vessel lay becalmed, Fiercely the rays of a tropical sun poured down upon her hardy crew, but they heeded it not. With anxious, frightened faces and subdued step, they trod the deck, speaking in whispers of some dreaded event.

There had been mutiny on board that mat−of−war−a deep−laid plot to murder the commanding officers, and now, at sun−setting, the instigators, four in number, were to pay the penalty of their crime. Three of them were old and hardened in sin, but the fourth, the fiercest spirit of all 'twas said, was young and beautiful to look upon. In the brown curls of his waving hair there were no threads of silver, and on his brow there were no lines save those of reckless dissipation, while his beardless cheek was round and smooth as that of a girl. Accustomed from his earliest childhood to rule, he could not brook restraint, and when it was put upon him, he had rebelled against it, stirring up strife, and leading on his comrades, who, used as they were to vice, marveled that one so young should be so deeply depraved.

The sun was set. Darkness was upon the mighty deep, and the waves moved by the breeze which had sprung up, seemed to chant a mournful dirge for the boy, who, far below, lay sleeping in a dishonored grave, if grave it can be called, where

"The purple mullet and gold fish rove, Where the sea flower spreads its leaves of blue Which never are wet with the falling dew, But in bright and changeful beauty shine Far down in the depths of the glassy brine."

Over the surging billow and away to the north ward, other robins are singing in the old maple−tree than those which sang there years ago, when death seemed brooding o'er the place. Again the summer shadows fall aslant the bright green lawn, and the soft breezes laden with the perfume of a thousand flowers, kiss the faded brow of Lina Hastings, but they bring no gladness to her aching heart, for her thoughts are afar on the deep with the wayward boy who, spurning alike her words of love and censure, has gone from her "to return no more forever," he said, for he left her in bitter anger. For three years the tall grass has grown over the grave of her husband, who to the last was unloved, and now she is alone in her splendid home, watching at the dawn of day and watching at the hour of eve for the return of her son.

Alas, alas, fond mother, Mabel Parkman in her hour of trial, never felt a throb of such bitter agony as that which wrung your heart− strings when first you heard the dreadful story of your disgrace. There were days and weeks of wild frenzy, during which she would shriek "Would to heaven he had died that night when he was young and innocent," and then she grew calm, sinking into a state of imbecility from which naught had the power to rouse her.

A year or two more, and they made for her a grave by the side of her husband, and the hearts which in life were so divided, now rest quietly together, while on the costly marble above them there is inscribed the name of their son, who sleeps alone and unwept in the far−off Southern Seas.

The End.