



A FOOL
IN
SPOTS.

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES.





71-
60

W. O. Kieffer







" 'She is beautiful!' he exclaimed." Page 77.

A FOOL IN SPOTS

BY

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES.

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To my dear Mother and Father.

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A FOOL IN SPOTS.

CHAPTER I.

TWO ARTISTS.

They were seated tete-a-tete at a dinner table.

“Tell me why you have never married, Milburn,” and the steel eyes in Willard Frost’s face searched through his glasses.

Robert Milburn’s answer was a shrug, and a long cloud of smoke blown back at the glowing end of his cigar.

“Tell me why,” persisted the keen-eyed Frost.

“Because it is too expensive a luxury; besides, a man who has affianced a career like mine must take that for his bride,” was Robert’s answer.

“Admitting there is warmth and color in some of your artistic creations, old fellow, I should think you would find these scarcely available of winter nights, eh?”

Robert laughed; his laugh was short, though, and bitter. He had taken keen pleasure in the cynical

worldly wisdom and unsentimental judgment of this man.

“If you can't afford the wife, then let the wife afford you,” began Frost's logical reasoning. “You have brain, muscle and youth. Marry them to that necessary adjunct which you do not possess, and which the government refuses to supply. This is perfectly practical. The whole question of marriage is too much a matter of sentiment; too little a matter of judgment. Now, the son of a millionaire without an idea above his raiment and his club, devoid of morals and of brains, marries the daughter of a silver king. What is the result? A race of vulgar imbeciles.”

Here Frost, more wickedly practical, continued: “Now, you are of gentle blood, being fitted out by nature with the most unfortunate combination of attributes. Nature has given you much more than your share of intelligence and manly beauty, together with most refined and sympathetic sensibilities and luxurious tastes, and then has placed you in an orbit representing intelligence, aristocracy and wealth. Here she has left you to revolve with the greater and lesser luminaries, and that with the slenderest of incomes, which is not as yet greatly increased by your profession. You doubtless find that it requires considerable finan-

ciering to do these things deemed necessary to maintain your position in the constellation."

"It is rather annoying to be poor," Robert answered in a carefully repressed voice. A hard sigh followed, and there flashed through him the hot consciousness of the bitter truth. For that special reason no word had ever crossed his lips that could, by any means, be twisted into serious suit with the fair sex. It was generally accepted that he was not a "marrying" man.

They were, both of them, men who would at first sight interest a stranger. The younger of the two you might have seen before if you frequented the ultra-fashionable dinner parties, luncheons, etc., of polite New York. Anywhere, everywhere, was Robert Milburn a special guest and a general favorite.

He was medium-sized, delicately featured, with a look of half-lazy enthusiasm. You would set him down at once as an artistic character; at the same time, there was in his make-up and bearing, that which bespeaks an ambitious nature. His companion, who appeared older, was a man of statelier stamp, tall and sufficiently athletic. His face was well finished and had a certain air of self-possession, which not a few name self-conceit, and resent accordingly.

“Ah! Robert, you have entirely too much sentiment, my boy. Do not waste yourself. I will cite you a girl—there’s Frances Baxter. True, she is not good looking, in fact, I presume quite a few consider her extraordinarily plain. But that excessive income is worth your while to aspire to—such a name as Milburn is certainly worth something.”

With an earnestness of tone and manner which the gossipy nature of the talk hardly seemed to call for, Robert nervously threw aside his crumpled napkin and looked sharply at his companion, saying:

“Surely, then, I may do something better with it than sell it.”

“There, we will not argue, I am too wise to oppose a man who is laboring under the temporary insanity of a love affair. I had feared that you were not so level-headed as is your wont. Come, who is the woman? Is it the Southern girl at the Stanhope’s?”

“Of whom do you speak?” asked Robert, looking pale and annoyed.

“Of Miss Bell—Cherokee Bell—to be sure.”

“You honor me with superior judgment to so accuse, whether it be true or not,” and upon Milburn’s face there was that expression which tells of what is beyond.

The other smiled meaningly, and raised his brows.

“Ah, my dear boy,” he mutely commented, “I am sorry my supposition is true, but it leaves me wiser, and no transparent scheming goes.”

“Tell me your opinion of her, Milburn, I am interested deeply.”

“Well, I have always said she was positively refreshing,” began Robert. “She came upon us to recall a bright world. She came as a revelation to some, a reminiscence to others, and caused our social Sahara to blossom with a suddenly enriched oasis.”

“Yes, she has that indescribable lissomeness and grace which she doubtless inherits with her Southern blood. I was attracted, too, by the delicacy of her hands and feet, of which she is pardonably proud. But that scar or something disfigures one hand.”

Robert spoke up quickly: “That is a birth-mark, I think it is a fern leaf.”

“A birth-mark! Oh hopelessly plebeian, don’t you think?”

“Your Miss Baxter has a very vivid one upon her neck.”

“I beg pardon, then, birthmarks are just the thing.”

Frost had commenced in a bantering mood, but now and again his voice would take a more serious tone. .

“Joking apart, Miss Bell is charming. She is, thanks to God, a being out of the ordinary. She has a style unstinted and all her own. I have upon several occasions made myself agreeable, partly for my own gratification and partly because I saw in her eyes that she admired me.”

Frost leaned back in intended mock conceit, no small portion of which appeared genuine.

Robert gave way to laughter, in which just a tinge of annoyance might have been detected.

“She is quite accustomed to these attentions, for all her life adoration has been her daily bread.”

“I should like to know how you are so well posted?” asked Frost, with a dark flash in his grey eyes.

Robert Milburn lifted his head proudly, and answered quietly: “I have known her since she was a little slip of a lass.”

“And how did the meeting come about? you were brought up in Maryland, I believe.”

“True, but in the early '80s I spent one spring and summer South. I was at ‘Ashland.’ You know that is the old home of Henry Clay. It is about in the center of the region of blue grass,

down in Kentucky. Clay's great grandson, by marriage, Major McDowell, owns this historic place. He is a well-mannered and distinguished host, and allowed me to fancy myself an artist then, and I made some sketches of his horses—he is a celebrated stock breeder.”

“How I should enjoy seeing a good stock farm; that is one pleasure I am still on this side of,” put in Willard. “Go on, I meant not to interrupt you.”

“The Major often saddled two of his fine steppers and invited me to ride over the country with him. It was upon one of these jaunts that I met the girl. It happened in this way: We were in the blue grass valley just this side of the mountainous region. A turn-row, running through a field of broken sod was our route, to avoid a dangerous creek ford. With heartsome calls and chirruping, six plowmen went up and down the long rows. The light earth, creaming away from the bright plowshare, heaped upon their bare feet. I thought, ‘What is so delicious as the feel of it—yielding, cool, electrical, fresh.’ We stopped to watch them. They tramped sturdily behind the mules, one hand upon the plow-handle, the other wrapped about with the line that ran to the beast's head. Presently, they all fell to singing a song—a relic, it must have been, from the

old care-free days. Over and over they chanted the rude lilt, and their voices were mildly sweet. We stopped to listen, for their song was like no other melodies under the sun."

"But where does the girl come in? I expected to hear something of her," interrupted Willard, with an impatient gesture.

"Oh, yes! She is just down a trifle farther in the pasture lands with an 'ole Auntie.' The Major addressed the negress as 'Aunt Judy.' They were welcoming the new comer—a calf. The Auntie wore a bandana and a coarse cotton print, over which was a thin, diamond-shaped shawl. Her subdued face was brown—the brown of tobacco—and her weary eyes stole quick, wondering glances at us, and instinctively she took the child's hand, as if to be sure she was safe.

"Now I come to Cherokee—let me try to describe her to you. In coloring, delicacy, freshness, she was a flower. Her hair was combed straight back, but it was perversely curly; and the short hairs around her forehead had a fashion of falling loosely about, which was very pretty. She was slim, her drooping-lashed eyes wore a soft seriousness. She at once chained my vagrant fancy and I promised myself that would not be the only time I should look upon her. On the homeward way the Major

told me she was the only child of Darwin Bell, an excellent man. A man of good blood, good sense and piety, 'but the best of all,' continued the Major, 'he was a gallant Confederate captain.'

"Then he happened to recall the fact that I was of the other side and said: 'I beg your pardon young man, but Darwin and I were army mates, and that eulogy was but a heart-throb.'

"He had quite a little to tell of the negress. She was Cherokee's 'black mammy,' and her faithfulness was a striking illustration of the devotion of the slaves. It seems to me that the most callous man or woman could not fail to appreciate little touches, here and there, of the sweet kindly feeling that nestles close to the core of honest human hearts. I went home that night in a softer mood."

"Softer in more senses than one, I judge, also poorer," Frost returned, amusedly.

"You mean I had lost my heart?" the other asked in an odd tone.

"To be sure, but tell me more of Miss Bell, she is very like a serial story, and I want awfully to read the next chapters."

"Then you must learn the sequel from her."

"That is not quite fair of you, but I have a mind to; in fact, I know I cannot resist cultivating your blonde amaryllis, if you don't object?"

Willard Frost smiled half-chaffingly, and quite enjoyed the expression of surprise and anxiety upon his companion's face.

"That is a matter of the utmost indifference to me," was the icy answer. The speaker's hand, as it lay on the table, opened and shut in a quick nervous fashion, which showed that he was more annoyed than he looked, whereupon Frost waxed more eloquent and earnest.

"I mean to enter, though well I know, when love is a game of three, one heart can win but pain."

"But that would surely be mine, for what chance has a poor devil of an artist like me with the invincible Frost?"

"I come under the same heading," returned Willard, "I am an artist too."

"Yes, but it would keep me in a desperate rush to run ahead of you—you the prince of the swagger set, a member of half a dozen clubs, owner of the smartest of four-in-hands, a capital dinner-giver, and a first-rate host, and, accompanying these, a plethoric purse to make all hospitalities easy."

As Robert spoke, Frost poured out the last of the second bottle of champagne and looked carelessly at the bill for it, which the waiter had presented to the other.

“Suppose you find you a champion to do your battle—a John Alden?”

“He might do as Alden did, and keep the prize. My chum, Latham, is the only one I dare trust to win and divide spoils, and he is abroad now, you know.”

“Right glad I am, for Marrion Latham is a marvellous success with womankind. Still, I want some one to oppose me, for no game is worth a rap for a rational man to play unless he has competition”—this with decided emphasis.

“What’s the matter with Fred Stanhope? I think he will make it interesting for you.”

“Oh, I want a man, not a sissy. He is just the son of Mr. Stanhope. He hasn’t enough sense to grease gimlets. He is a rich-born freak, and I think he has set out to make a condign idiot of himself, in the briefest, directest manner, and he will doubtless succeed. I prefer you for a rival.”

“But Frost, I would be powerless, quite powerless, with you in the field.”

“Ah, you idealize me, make me too great a hero,” answered Frost, quite pleased within himself.

“Not a hero,” spoke Robert slowly, “but a smooth calculating man of the period, just the manner of man to take with that type of woman.

She, this charming, intense creature, is so innocent, so 'un-woke-up', I might say."

"I am a holy terror at awakening one, and if there is any money with it I shall exert myself to arouse her."

There was an awkward silence. Frost paused and lighted a cigarette.

"Has she any plantations, stock farms, and the like? You seem so well up in her history."

"No, with the exception of a thousand dollars or so, she is absolutely without means."

"That settles it," said Frost, flippantly. "You and your John Alden may open negotiations for her beauty and innocence, but they are too tame for me."

"You are a fisherman, Frost, and if you can't catch a whale you catch a trout, and if you can't catch a trout you would whip in the shallows for the poor little minnows."

"Minnows have their use as bait," returned the other, with a meaning smile.

"But not to catch whales with, and you direct the training of my harpoon toward a big haul, yet you can stop to fish where you get but a nibble? What a peculiar adviser—rather inconsistent, don't you think?" observed Robert, with a cynical sense of amusement. "I shall keep an eye on you."

“And I shall keep an eye on that fact,” muttered Frost to himself when he had left his friend. “It is not much, but it would answer the small demands of an honest girl. I will see about that *thousand dollars.*”

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS AND SCHEMES.

Willard Frost's observations rang in Robert Milburn's ear, not without effect, as he walked to his room that evening, albeit, his conscience refuted the arguments. He whiled away an hour or more piecing together the broken threads of their discussion. Frost had said, and in truth, that Miss Baxter was the richest prize of the season. She had turned all heads with her fabulous wealth. He had said, "A union of wealth and genius is as it should be." That speech had a mild influence over Robert. There was something very soothing and agreeable to be called a rising genius, and, then, the thought that other men would be gnashing their teeth was a stimulant to his vanity.

Miss Baxter was a sharp girl, and she had an exquisite figure which she dressed with the best of taste. What if her nose was a trifle snub, and her mouth verging on the coarse, she had a large capital to contribute to a copartnership.

But when love, or whatever else by a less pretty name we may call the emotion which stirs within

us, responsive to the glance or touch of a woman, sweeps man's nature as the harpist the strings of his harp, all thoughts pass under the dominion of the master passion; even the thought of self, with all its impudent assertiveness, changes its accustomed force, and sinks to a secondary place.

Love is a disturber and routs philosophy, and as for matrimony, Robert rather agreed with the philosopher who said, "You will regret it whether you marry or not." An old painter had once told him that in bringing too much comfort and luxury into the home of the artist, it frightened inspiration.

"Art," he said, "needs either solitude, poverty or passion; too warm an atmosphere suffocates it. It is a mountain wind-flower that blooms fairest in a sterile soil."

From the scene-house of Robert's memory came visions strangely sweet; they came like the lapse of fading lesson days, gemmed here and there with joys, and crimsoned all over with the silken suppleness of youth and its delights.

Again the glamour of gold and green lay over the warm South earth. New leaves danced out in the early sunshine, dripping sweet odors upon all below. Robins in full song made vocal the budding hedge-rows from under which peeped the hasty gold of the crocus flower. By fence and field peach trees

up-flushed in rosy growth, and the wild plum's scented snowing made all the days afaint and fair. And again the woods were brave in summer greenery; hawthorn—dogwood, stood bridal all in white.

Matted honeysuckle, that opened as if by magic in the dewless, stirless night, arched above a garden gate, wherefrom, with hasty thrift, tall lilacs framed a girl in wreathen bloom.

From the moment the gleam of that sweet face of hers touched him, the world, he felt, would lose its luster if Cherokee did not smile on him, and him alone, of all the world of men.

All the wealth, fashion and talent of the rest of women in their totality, were of no more meaning to him than the floating of motes in the great sun-beam of his love for this girl. This fact made all other resolutions impossible—glaringly impossible.

With this honest conviction in his manly breast he went to bed, and the blessed visitor of peace placed fingers upon his eyelids to keep watch until the morrow.

* * * * *

Two ladies, in loose but becoming morning gowns, sat, at the fashionable hour of eleven, breakfasting in a dainty boudoir in an extension to a fine resi-

dence on Fifth Avenue. The table, a low square table covered with whitest linen, was set before a great open fireplace, where gas gave forth flashes of lurid lights which were refracted by the highly polished surface of the silver tray, teapot, sugar and creamer.

The elder lady had the morning paper in her lap and she sat sipping her tea. She scarcely looked her four and forty. Youth was past, but the charm of gracious maturity lay in her clear glance and about the soft smiling mouth. The girl had turned her easy chair away from the table, perching her pretty feet on the brass rail of the fender. Her aristocratic brown-blonde head was bending over the *Herald*.

“Here is another puff about Willard Frost, the portrait painter,” she said complacently. “He has become the rage; I suppose the fact that he is a romantic figure of an unconventional type is one reason as well as his artistic qualities.”

“And, too, because he is unmarried,” said the elderly lady. “Society is strange, and when the gods marry they lose caste. If he should bring home one day a beautiful wife, I fancy few women would care about sitting for portraits then.”

“I cannot understand that; why is it?” inquired the girl, innocently.

“Because women declare against women. I wouldn’t be surprised if they were already angry with you.”

“Why?”

“I have thought that he fancied you and showed you preference.”

“He has been quite nice, but I thought it was generally understood that he would make love to Miss Baxter.”

“I may be wrong, but I sometimes imagine you like him, and I do not blame you either, my dear; many a girl has married less attractive men than your artist.”

“Oh, he is handsome, has a magnificent build, and that voice—” murmured the girl, clasping her hands over her knee and looking into the fire.

The other watched her intently and said slowly: “I had hoped to save you for my boy—he is our best gift from God, and you—come next.”

The girl smiled softly, “Oh, Fred doesn’t care for me; he says I remind him of hay fields and yielding clover. I take it that he means I am too ‘fresh,’ ” observed the girl, half seriously.

“Not at all; what is purer and sweeter than to be forest-bred? Why, after all these long years, I tire of my city fostering and long for the South country where your mother and I grew into woman-

hood. And while Fred chaffs you about being a country girl, he is really proud of you. He often talks to me: 'Why, mother,' he tells me, 'I never saw anything like it; as soon as she appeared she shone; a sudden brightness fills the place wherever she goes; a softened splendor comes around.' And dear, I am not blind, I see you are besieged by smiles and light whispered loves—you hold all hearts in that sweet thrall; you are the bright flame in which many moths burn."

"You are both very, very, kind—Fred and you"—Here she was interrupted by a maid entering with a card.

"Mr. Willard Frost."

"Ah, Cherokee, what did I tell you? He has even taken the liberty of calling at unconventional hours."

As Frost waited below he nervously moved about; there was a sort of sub-conscious discomfort, as of one whose clothes are a misfit. The least sound added to his uneasy feeling.

"Am I actually in love with her?" he asked, "or does her maidenly and becoming coyness excite my surfeited passion? Is it something that will burn off at a touch, like a lighted sedge-field," he reflected. "Would I marry her if I could? Well, what's the difference? The part I have undertaken

is a good one; I will see it through and risk the winning."

When Cherokee appeared he thought her lovelier than ever. He looked hungrily at her fair, high-bred face, her enigmatical smile that might mean so much or so little. She gave him her hand in kindly welcome.

"You will pardon my stupidity to-day, for I shouldn't have come feeling so badly, and I should not have come at all had I not wanted a kind word of sympathy," he said, when the first salutations were received.

"You did quite right," she answered, "burdens shared are easier carried. What is your trouble?"

"I would not confide in many, but somehow I have always felt we were vastly more than common friends. Do you feel that way about it?" he asked, in weighing tones.

"I take great delight in your companionship," she told him, frankly.

"And it is these subtle, intelligent sympathies which make you most dangerously charming. Now, I have a question; do not answer me if you think it wrong of me to ask, but did you ever like a man so well that you fancied yourself married to him?"

She laughed a care-free, girlish laugh.

"Why no, now that you ask, I'm sure I never did."

Then there was a long, uncomfortable pause, broken by saying: "Ah, well, there's time enough, only be sure that you know your heart, if you have any; have you?"

She laughed again her gay little laugh. "I'll tell him that if he ever comes."

He had a far-away look, and breathed long and deeply. Suddenly he spoke up.

"Dearest love," taking both her hands and looking with gravity into her face, "I did not mean to say it yet, but I must. I love you—I love you—and I would show it in a thousand ways. Be my wife."

She listened to each word intently, her face neither flushed nor paled. She spoke very deliberately: "I—your wife, Mr. Frost? No. You interest me, but if I care for you, there is something that mars its fullness. Forgive me for saying it plainly, but I do not love you."

"But, little woman, you cannot but awaken to it sometime. It is a heart of stone that will not warm to the touch of such love as mine. Love is dependent upon contact; we are only the wires through which the current throbs—lifeless before they are touched, and listless when sundered."

He attempted to take her in his arms, but she slipped from his embrace, and naively replied, "If

that's your theory, there's one remedy: I'll break your circuit."

"Was there ever such a tangle of weakness and strength in woman?" he asked himself. He bit his lips and marvelled; he had again been thwarted. Pretty soon he leaned heavily on the table, and looked the embodiment of despair.

"What makes you so gloomy?" asked Cherokee, sweetly.

"Because I am a lost and ruined man. I never felt quite so alone and friendless."

"Why friendless? Tell me what it is that makes you so downhearted?" Her tones were well calculated to reassure him.

"I am suffering from the inevitable misery which, as a ghost, follows the erring," he said, and his voice was hard.

"Tell me all about it, Mr. Frost, that I may be in sympathy with you."

"Then I will tell you all," raising a face that looked worn and worried. "There is nothing of sentiment in my misfortune; as rascally old Panurge used to put it, 'I am troubled with a disease known as a plentiful lack of money.'"

"Why, Mr. Frost, I thought you were rich; the world takes it that way."

"I did possess a fair competency until two weeks



" 'He has become the rage.' " Page 23.



ago, but an unfortunate investment in Reading swept it away like thistledown in the wind. The friends to whom I could apply for aid are in the same boat. For one of them, I, very like the fool Antonio, have gone security for a thousand dollars. To-morrow that must be paid else I lose my pound of flesh, which, taken literally, means my studio, pictures, and, worst of all, my reputation."

"And you call yourself a fool for helping a friend; I am surprised at that."

"You are right. I shouldn't feel that way, for he is noble beyond the common; his faults, such as they are, have been more hurtful to himself than to others." Frost spoke magnanimously.

"Who is the friend?" she asked, so impulsively that it bore no trace of impertinence.

"Pardon me, but I would not mention his name; however, you know him quite well."

Cherokee turned her face full upon him and asked bravely: "Will you let me help you both?"

He appeared startled: "You little woman, you! What on earth could you do but be grieved at a friend's misfortune?" She little knew that all this was but to abuse that intense, fond, clinging sympathy.

"I have fourteen hundred in my own name, will you use part of that?"

“Great heavens, no. I would become a beggar first!”

“But if I insist, and it will save you and—him?”

Willard Frost sat for a time without speaking; apparently he was weighing some profound subject. At last he looked up and gathered Cherokee’s hands in his.

“I appreciate the spirit that prompts you to make this heroic offer to me. When will you need this money?”

“Not for two months yet, I expect to spend the winter in ‘Frisco’ with Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope.”

“Are you absolutely in earnest about our using it?”

“Never was more in earnest in my lifetime,” she answered, solemnly.

“Then I will take it, though I feel humbled to the very dust to think of these little hands saving me.”

He bent and kissed them as reverently as though she had been his patron saint. As she gave him the check for one thousand dollars, Cherokee thought his trembling hands told, but too well, of humbled pride.

“That was a stroke of genius—a decided stroke of genius,” he said to himself, as he passed into the club house that day.

CHAPTER III.

AN HONEST MAN'S HONEST LOVE.

It was far into twilight when Robert Milburn rang the bell at the Stanhopes. He had called to escort them to the closing ball of the Manhattan season.

"I have not seen you for more than a week, Robert. I fear you have been worrying or working too hard," said Cherokee, looking at him searchingly and anxiously.

"Ah, not working any more than I should, yet there has been a terrible weight on my mind—a crushing weight."

"Then, let us remain at home to-night; I prefer it."

"You must have read my mind, I wanted so much to stay, but the fear of cheating you of pleasure kept me from suggesting it."

So it was agreed upon that they would not go to the ball.

"Now tell me what makes you overtax your strength?" said Cherokee, sweetly and solicitously.

"I must get on in my profession, so that one day you will be proud of me." His enthusiasm inspired her.

“I am that already, and shall never cease to hope for you and be proud of your many successes. A great future is waiting to claim you, Mr. Milburn.”

“Not unless that future’s arm can hold both of us, Cherokee, for you are still all I really want praise from—all I fear in the blaming. But, sweetheart, you have dropped me as a child throws away a toy when it is weary. When Frost told me he had been here it started afresh some thoughts that I find lurking about my mind so often of late.”

Did her bowed head mean an effort to hide a face that told too much?

“I believe you are sorry he is not with you here now.”

She laid her hand in playful reproach upon his lips. “Sorry, you foolish boy! I am glad you are here, isn’t that enough?”

“I hope so; forgive me, Cherokee, but you do not know the world. It is deeper, darker, wider, than you have ever dreamed, and there are some very queer people in it. I shall keep my eyes open, and if I can help it, you shall never know it as I do.”

“Why, what harm can come to me? What could the world have against me?” and her innocent face looked hurt.

“Nothing, except your beauty and purity, and either is a dangerous charge. I wish you could

have always lived among the bees and bloomings, with the South country folk.”

“Why, do you find it annoying to have me near?”

“No, but very annoying to have you near others I know. I cannot quite understand some men—for instance, Willard Frost.”

“I think he is a very warm friend of yours.”

“Probably so, probably so. But, Cherokee, tell me, in truth, do you love him?”

“I do not,” she answered, promptly, and there was nothing in her eyes but truth.

“My God,” Robert cried within him, “you have been merciful. Cherokee, listen to me—I know you already understand what I am about to say: You have known from the first that you are the greatest of what there is in my life. There is no joy through all the day but that it brings with it a desire to share it with you. I often awake with your half-spoken name on my lips, as though, when I slipped through the portals of unconsciousness into the world of reality, I came only to find you, as a frightened child awakes and calls feebly for its mother. I look to your love for the sweetness of home. I need you; can you say ‘We need each other?’ ”

The adoration he expressed for her filled her with innocent wonder and gratitude. His overpowering

love and worship for her startled her by its force into a sweet shame, a hesitating fear. She was looking at him with her eyes softly opening and closing, like the eyes of a startled doe, as though the wonder and delight were too great to be taken in at once.

At length she made answer, hesitatingly, "And—this—beautiful—love—is—for—me?"

"It is all for you," he said, tenderly.

"Robert, there is a feeling for you which I think is a part of my soul, but I do not know that it is love. It came to me—this feeling—so long ago that I believe that it has a seven-years' claim. It was far back yonder, when I played at "camping out" under the broad white tents that the dogwoods pitched in the forest. I spent hours and hours in my play making clover chains to reach from my heart to yours—"

Here he interrupted her. "And it did reach me, finding fertile soil in which to grow. Tell me you have kept your part alive."

"I cannot tell yet, I am going to test it. I believe I will imagine you feeling the morning kiss of Miss Baxter, and watching her good-night smile, and see if I would care."

"Please do, but tell me why you said Miss Baxter? Why not any other lady of my acquaintance?"

“I suppose it is because I often hear that you are awfully fond of her.”

“That is not true, my dearest. I like her for the reason she thinks worlds of Marrion Latham, the dramatist. By the way, I had such a good letter from him to-day, so full of wonderful sympathy and friendship. I have often told him of you. I love that fellow. He knew I loved you before you did, I guess. You know, men in their friendships are trustful, they impose great confidences in each other, and are frank and outspoken. Even the solid, practical outside world recognizes the bonds of such faith, and looks with contempt upon the man who, having parted with his friend, reveals secrets which have been told him under the sacred profession of friendship.”

“Why is it, Robert, that women cannot be true, or a man and woman cannot form a lasting, loyal friendship?”

“The first case, jealousy or envy breaks; the second generally ends in one falling in love with the other, and that spoils it,” he explained.

She looked up archly: “Which will be the most enduring, your friendship for Marrion, or your love for me?”

“Please God that both shall last always,” he answered, with reverence.

“How good it seems to hear you say that.” Then she impulsively held out her hands saying: “I do care.”

Robert, trembling from head to foot at the mad audacity of his act, bent down to taste from the calyx of that flower-face the sweet intoxication of the first kiss. The worried look had gone out of his face.

“So you will wait for me until I have made a name that will grace you! How brave of you to make me that promise. Cherokee are you all mine? Then there are only two more things required in this—the sanction of the State, and the blessing of God. May He keep a watch over both our lives.”

“I pray that your wish be granted,” she murmured, with a tender voice.

“Now, my little woman, be very careful of the people you meet. Unfortunately, one forgets sometimes when one is in danger. You are a woman, sweet, passionate and kind; just the favorite prey.”

She looked at him intently, as if endeavoring to divine his underlying thoughts.

“What do you mean, sweetheart?”

He knew by the tremor in her voice she was hurt.

“I mean, dear, that lions are admitted into the fold because they are tame lions—look out for them.”

The next moment he was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE SOCIAL REALM.

Carriages, formed in double ranks by the police, lined the pavement of several blocks on —— street, and from them alighted, as each carriage made a brief stop at the entrance, men and women of fashion, enveloped in heavy wraps, for the night was cold. Beneath the heavy opera coats, seal-skins, etc., ball dresses were visible, and feet encased in fur-lined boots caught the eyes of those who stood watching the guests of the —— ball as they entered the building.

Music filled the vast dance-hall. High up in the galleries musicians were stationed, who toiled away at their instruments, furnishing enlivening strains of waltzes or polkas for the dancers. To the right, adown corridors of arched gold, the reception rooms were filled with metropolitan butterflies.

The scene was an interesting study. Foremost of all could be noticed the voluptuous freedom of manner, though the picturesque grace of the leading lights was never wholly lost. They were dis-

solute, but not coarse; bold, but not vulgar. They took their pleasure in a delicately wanton way, which was infinitely more dangerous in its influence than would have been gross mirth or broad jesting. Rude licentiousness has its escape-valve in disgust, but the soft sensualism of a cultured aristocrat is a moral poison, the effects of which are so insidious as to be scarcely felt until all the native nobility is almost withered.

It is but justice to them to say, there was nothing repulsive in the mischievous merriment of these revelers; their witticisms were brilliant and pointed, but never indelicate. Some of the dancers, foot-weary, lounged gracefully about, and the attendant slaves were often called upon to refill the wine glasses.

In every social gathering, as in a garden, or in the heavens, there is invariably one particular and acknowledged flower, or star. Here all eyes followed the beautiful, spirited, inspiring girl, who was under the chaperonage of Mrs. Stanhope. This fresh, beaming girl, unspoiled by flattery, remained naive, affectionate and guileless.

During the changing of groups and pairs, this girl heard the sweet, languid voice of Willard Frost. Through the clatter of other men it came like the silver stroke of a bell in a storm at sea. She

flushed radiantly as he and Miss Baxter joined her party.

"Ah, my dear Miss Bell, you are looking charming," he exclaimed, effusively. He took her hand, a little soft pink one, that looked like a shell uncurled.

"Come, honor Miss Baxter and me by taking just one glass of sherry," and he called a passing waiter.

Cherokee looked at him with startled surprise. "How often, Mr. Frost, will I have a chance to decline your offers like this? I tell you again, I have never taken wine, and I congratulate myself."

"Are you to be congratulated or condoled with?" There was irony in Miss Baxter's tone, though her laugh was good natured, as she continued, "I see you are yet a beautiful alien, for a glass of good wine, or an occasional cigarette is never out of place with us. All of these nervous fads are city equipments."

"Then, if not to smoke and not to drink are country virtues, pray introduce them into city life," was Cherokee's answer.

"Ah, no indeed, I would never take the liberty of reversing the order of things, for they just suit me," and Miss Baxter's bright eyes twinkled under drooping lashes. As she smiled she raised

a glass of wine to her lips, kissed the brim, and gave it to Willard Frost with an indescribably graceful swaying gesture of her whole form.

“Here’s to your pastoral sweetheart, the sorceress, sovereign of the South.”

He seized the glass eagerly, drank, and returned it with a profound salutation.

The consummate worldlings were surprised to hear Miss Bell answer:

“Thank you, but how much more appropriate would be, ‘Here’s to a Fool in Spots!’”

Willard replied, with a shake of the head:

“Ah, no, you have too much ‘snap’ to be called a fool in any sense, besides, you only need being disciplined—you’ll be enjoying life by and by. When I first met our friend Milburn he was saying the same thing, but where is he now?—”

Here Miss Baxter laid her pretty jeweled hand warningly upon his arm.

“Come, you would not be guilty of divulging such a delicious secret, would you?”

He treated the matter mostly as a joke, and returned with a tantalizing touch in his speech:

“Robert didn’t mean to do it. We must forgive.”

Cherokee looked puzzled as she caught the exchange of significant smiles. She spoke, as always, in her own soft, syllabled tongue.

“What do you mean, may I ask?”

Willard Frost coughed, and took her fan with affectionate solicitude.

“It may not be just fair to answer your question. I am sorry.”

“Mr. Milburn is a friend of mine, and if anything has happened to him why shouldn't I know it?” she inquired, somewhat tremulously.

No combination of letters can hope to convey an idea of the music of her rare utterance of her sweetheart's name.

“But you wouldn't like him better for the knowing,” he interrupted. “Besides, he will come out all right if he follows my instructions implicitly.”

She stared blankly at him, vainly trying to comprehend what he meant. Then there came an anxious look on her face, such a look as people wear when they wish to ask something of great moment, but dare not begin. At last she summoned up courage.

“Mr. Frost,” she said, in a weak, low voice, “he—Robert—hasn't done anything wrong?”

“Wrong, what do you call wrong?” was the laconic question, “but I trust the matter is not so serious as it appears.”

“Ah, I am so foolish,” and she smiled gently.

“No, it is well enough to have a friend’s interest at heart, and you won’t cut him off if you hear it—you are not that sort. I know you are clever and thoughtful, and all that, but you possess the forgiving spirit. Now, unlike some men, I judge people gently, don’t come down on other men’s failings. Who are we, any of us, that we should be hard on others?”

“Judge gently,” she replied.

“I hope I always do that.”

“If I only dared tell her now,” said Frost to himself, “but it’s not my affair.”

He saw the feminine droop of her head, and the dainty curve of her beautiful arm.

“She is about to weep,” he muttered.

Miss Baxter, who had been amusing herself with other revelers, turned to interrupt: “Mr. Frost, you haven’t given him dead away?”

This, so recklessly spoken, only added to Cherokee’s discomfort. A flush rose to her cheek. She asked, with partial scorn:

“Do you think he should have aroused my interest without satisfying it?”

“Please forgive him, he didn’t intend to be so rude; besides, he would have told you had I not interrupted. It was thoughtless of you to make mention of it,” she said, reproachfully, to the artist.

The while he seemed oddly enjoying the girl's strange dry-eyed sorrow.

Just here, Fred Stanhope came up to tell them the evening pleasures were done. Cherokee could have told him that sometime before.

Willard Frost looked remarkably bright and handsome as he walked away with Miss Baxter leaning upon his arm.

“What made you punish that poor girl so? What pleasure was there in giving Mr. Milburn away, especially since you were the entire cause of it?” she went on earnestly, and a trifle dramatically.

“A man has no right to give another away—no right—he should——”

“But Frances,” remonstrated Frost, lightly, and apparently unimpressed by her theory, “I was just dying to tell her that Milburn was as drunk as a duchess.”

CHAPTER V.

THE IMAGE OF BEAUTIFUL SIN.

In his fashionable apartments, Willard Frost walked back and forth in his loose dressing-gown. Rustling about the room, his softly slippers feet making no noise on the floor, he moved like a refined tiger—looked like “some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort, in story, whose periodical change into tiger from man was either just going off or just coming on.”

A good opportunity for consideration, surrounded by the advantages of solitude. He moved from end to end of his voluptuous room, looking now and again at a picture which hung just above a Persian couch, covered with a half dozen embroidered pillows.

What unmanageable thoughts ran riot in his head, as he surveyed the superb image and thought that only one thing was wanting—the breath of life—for which he had waited through all these months.

For two heavy hours he walked and thought; now he would heave a long, low sigh, then hold his breath again.

When at last he dropped down upon his soft bed, he lay and wondered if the world would go his way—the way of his love for a woman.

* * * * *

Cherokee met Willard Frost on Broadway the next morning—he had started to see her.

“Let me go back with you and we will lunch together—what do you say?” he proposed.

“Very well, for I am positively worn out to begin with the day, and a rest with you will refresh me,” she said sweetly.

They took the first car down town and went to a café for lunch. Willard laughed mischievously as he glanced down the wine list on the menu card.

“What will you have to-day?”

“What I usually take,” she answered, in the same playful mood.

“I received that perplexing note of yours, but don’t quite interpret it,” he began, taking it from his pocket and reading:

‘DEAR MR. FROST:

I am anxious to sit for the picture at once. Of course you will never speak of it. Don’t let anyone know it.

Yours, in confidence,

CHEROKEE.’

“It is very plain,” she pouted. “Don’t you remember I had told you I was going to have my portrait made for Mrs. Stanhope on her birthday. That doesn’t come just yet, in fact it is three months off, but you know we are going to ‘Frisco’ for the winter, and there isn’t much time to lose; I have been busy two months making preparations.”

“What! Are you going, too? I was thinking a foolish thought,” he sighed. “I was thinking maybe you would remain here while they were away.”

“Not for anything; I have been planning and looking forward to this trip a whole year.” She seemed perfectly elated at the thought.

“There is nothing to induce you to remain?”

“Nothing,” she answered, with emphasis.

“I have an aunt with whom you could stay, and we could learn much of each other. Do stay,” he insisted.

“I must go, though I shall not forget you in the ‘winter of our content.’”

“That’s very kind, I am sure, but I have set my heart on seeing you during the entire season, for Milburn, poor boy, is so hard at work he will not intrude upon my time often. Besides, he is getting careless of late—doesn’t want society. The fact is, I believe he is profoundly discouraged. This work of art is a slow and tedious one. But he keeps on

at it, except when he has been drinking too heavily."

"Drinking! Mr. Frost, you surely are misinformed; Robert never drinks."

Her manner was dignified, though she did not seem affected, for she was too certain there was some mistake.

"I hope I have been," he said, simply.

He saw at once that she would not believe him. For love to her meant perfect trust; faith in the beloved against all earth or heaven. Whoever dared to traduce him would be consumed in the lightning of her luminous scorn, yet win for him, her lover, a tenderer devotion.

"So you are going to 'Frisco,' and I cannot see you for three long months? Well, I must explain something," he began. "It is rather serious, it didn't start out so, but is getting very serious. I got your note about the money more than a week ago—" His voice trembled, broke down, then mastering himself, he went on, "I could not meet the demand. Ah, if I could only get the model I wanted, I could paint a picture whose loveliness none but the blind could dispute—a picture that would bring more than three times the amount I owe you."

He watched the girl eagerly, the while soft sensations and vague desires thrilled him.

Wasn't it a wonder that something did not tell him, "It is monstrous, inhuman to thus prey upon the credulity of an impulsive, over sensitive nature." Not when it is learned that whatever of heart, conscience, manliness, courage, reverence, charity, nature had endowed him at his birth, had been swallowed up in that one quality—selfishness.

"I wish I could help you," Cherokee said timidly, "for I need the money. All I had has gone for my winter wardrobe."

"Then I will tell you how to help us both. The model I want is yourself." He spoke bravely now.

"Me?"

"Yes, if you will let me, I can do us both justice, and you will be counted the dream of all New York."

She listened to his speech like the bird that flutters around the dazzling serpent; she was fascinated by this dangerous man, and neither able nor honestly willing to escape.

"Besides, I will make your portrait for Mrs. Stanhope free of charge," was the artist's afterthought.

"I could not accept so much from you," she answered, promptly.

"I offered it by way of rewarding your own generosity, but come, say you will pose for me anyhow."

She regarded him frankly and without embarrassment.

"I will if it is perfectly proper for me to do so. Surely, though, you would not ask me to do it if it were wrong."

"Not for the world," he replied magnanimously. "It is entirely proper, many a lady comes there alone. 'In art there is no sex, you know.'"

"But I am not prepared now, how should I be dressed?"

"In a drapery, and I have all that is necessary. Say you will go," he pleaded.

She hesitated a moment.

"Well, I will," was the unfortunate answer.

Within an hour, master and model entered the studio.

"Now, first of all," observed the master, "you must lay aside all reserve or foolish timidity, remembering the purity of art, and have but one thought—the completion of it. In that room to your right you will find everything that is needed, and over the couch is a study by which you may be guided in draping yourself."

As the door closed behind Cherokee, Willard Frost caught a glimpse of a beautiful figure, "The Nymph of the Stream." He listened for a couple of minutes or more, expecting or fearing she would

be shocked at first, but as there was no such evidence he had no further misgivings. A thousand beautiful visions floated voluptuously through the thirsting silence. They flushed him as in the wakening strength of wine. And his body, like the sapless bough of some long-wintered tree, suddenly felt all pulses thrilling.

His hot lips murmured, "Victory is mine. Aye, life is beautiful, and earth is fair."

Then the door opened and the model entered. She did not speak but stood straight and silent, her hands hanging at her side with her palms loosely open—the very abandonment of pathetic helplessness.

The master drew nearer and put out his hands. "Cherokee," he said.

But he was suddenly awed by a firm "Stop there! I have always tried to be pure-minded, high-souled, sinless, but all this did not shield me from insult," she cried, with a look of self-pitying horror.

He drew back, and his temper mounted to white heat, but he managed to preserve his suave composure.

"My dear girl, you misunderstand me; art makes its own plea for pardon. You are not angry, are you?"

She looked straight at him, her bosom rose and fell with her quick breathing, and there was such an eloquent scorn in her face that he winced under it, as though struck by a scourge.

“You are not worth my anger; one must have something to be angry with, and you are nothing—neither man, nor beast, for men are brave and beasts tell no lies. Out of my way, coward!”

And she stood waiting for him to obey, her whole frame vibrating with indignation like a harp struck too roughly. The air of absolute authority with which she spoke, stung him even through his hypocrisy and arrogance. He bit his lips and attempted to speak again, but she was gone from the studio.

Every step of her way she saw a serpent crawl back and forth across her hurried path, and she mused to herself: “Let him keep the money, my virtue is worth more to me than all that glitters or is gold.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHITE ROSES.

Robert Milburn, bent at his desk, his fair head in his hands, was bewildered, angry, in despair.

“Can this be true?” he asked himself. “Is there a possibility of truth in it?”

The air of the gray room grew close, oppressive to the spirit, and at the darkening window he arose from the desk. He put on his long rain-coat, and with a hollow, ominous sound, the door closed behind him and he left the house.

As along he went, Robert caught sight of the bony face of an American millionaire and a beautiful woman in furs, behind the rain-streaked panes of a flashing carriage. On the other side he observed a gigantic iron building from which streams of shop-people poured down every street homeward; these ghastly weary human machines made a pale concourse through the sleet.

Further on his way a girl stood waiting for some one on the curb. He looked at her, dark hair curled on her white neck, her attire poor and common; but she was pretty, with her dark eyes. A

reckless, plebeian little piece of earth, shivering, her hands bare and rough, the sleet whipping her face, on the side of which was a discoloration—the result of a blow, perchance. Then he turned his eyes from her who had drawn them.

The arc light above him hung like a dreadful white-bellied insect hovering on two long black wings, and he saw a woman in sleet-soaked rags, bent almost double under a load of sticks collected for firewood. Her hair hung thin and gray in elf-locks, her red eyelids had lost their lashes so that the eyes appeared as those of a bird of prey. The wizened hands clutching the cord which bound the sticks seemed like talons. She importuned a passer-by for help, and, being denied, she cursed him; and Robert watched the wretched creature crawl away homeward—back to the slums.

These were manifestations of the life of thousands in metropolitan history. Robert shook himself, shuddering, as though aroused from a trance.

He had started out to go anywhere or nowhere, but the next hour found him in the presence of Cherokee, and she was saying:

“How awfully fond you are of giving pleasant surprises.”

“I am amazed at myself for coming such a night, and that too without your permission.”

"We are always glad to see you, but Fred and I had contemplated braving the weather to go to hear Paderewski," she said, sweetly.

"Then don't let me detain you, I beg of you," he answered, with profound regret.

"Oh, that's all right, we have an hour or more, I am all ready, so you stay and go in as we do."

"No, I will not go with you, but will stay awhile, since you are kind enough to permit me." And he laughed, a little mournfully.

"Cherokee, I have come for two reasons—to tell you that I am going home to Maryland to see a sick mother, and to tell you——" He paused, hesitating, a great bitterness welled up in his breast; a firmness came about his mouth and he went on:

"It is folly for you to persuade yourself that you could accommodate your future life to sacrifice, poverty—this is all wrong. When we look it coldly in the face it is a fact, and we may dispute facts but it is difficult to alter them."

There was no response from her except the clasping of the hand he held over his fingers for a moment.

"I had no right that you should wait for me through years, for your young life is filled with possibilities. I, alone, make them impossible, and I must remove that factor."

“Robert! Robert! What does all this mean?” Her breathless soul hung trembling on his answer.

“It means that I am going to give you back your liberty.”

“And you?” she gasped.

“I will do the best I can with my life. Please God, you shall never be ashamed to remember that you once fancied that you could have cared for me.”

And then he could trust himself no further; the trembling fingers, the soft perfume he knew so well in the air, and the surging realization that the end was at hand, made him weak with longing.

Cherokee was at first shocked and stunned at what he was saying? For a moment the womanly conclusion that he no longer cared for her seemed the only impression, but she put it from her as being unworthy of them both.

Her manner was dignified, yet tender, as she began:

“Robert, I suppose you have not spoken without consideration, and if you think I would be a burden to you, it is best to go on without me.” She ended with a deep-drawn breath.

“That sound was not a sob,” she said bravely, “I only lost my breath and caught it hard again.”

“Yes, Cherokee, I am going without you, going out of your life. Good bye.”

“You cannot go out of it,” she answered, “but good bye.”

“Good bye,” he repeated, which should only mean, “God bless you.”

There was a flutter of pulses, and Robert walked away with head upheld, dry-eyed, to face the world. Unfaltering, she let him go, the while she had more than a suspicion of the lips whose false speaking had wrought her such woe.

When he reached his room he unlocked the drawer, produced from it a card, and looked long and tenderly upon the face he saw. He bent over and kissed the unresponsive lips. This was his requiem in memory of a worthier life. Then lighting a match he set it afire, and watched it burn to a shadowy cinder, which mounted feebly in the air for a moment, making a gray background against whose dullness stood out, in its round finished beauty, the life he had lost—echoing with a true woman’s beautiful soul.

As the ashes whitened at his feet, he thought, “Thus the old life is effaced, I will go into the new.”

The midnight train took him out of town, and Cherokee was weeping over a basket of white roses which had come just at evening.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CALL OF A SOUL.

Now and again Cherokee kissed the roses with pangs of speechless pain. The fragrance that floated from their lips brought only anguish. To her, white roses must ever mean white memories of despair, and their pale ghosts would haunt long after they were dead.

All day the family had been busy packing, for soon the Stanhopes would close the house and take flight. Cherokee had been forced to tell them she had changed her mind and would go to the country; she needed quiet, rest. Pride made her withhold the humiliating fact that she had just money enough to take her down to the South country.

There was a kind, generous friend, who, at her father's death, offered her a home under his roof for always, and now that promise came to her, holding out its inducement, but she would not accept it; somehow she felt glad that the time of leaving the Stanhopes was near. This pleasant house, these cheerful, affectionate surroundings, had become most intolerable since she must keep anything

from them—even though it be but an error of innocence.

“Let me forget the crushing humiliation of the past month,” she told herself, “I must try to be strong, reasonable, if not happy.” She must find some calling, something to sustain herself, to occupy her hands and time. The soft, idle, pleasant existence offered by the friend would enervate rather than fortify—would force her back on herself and on useless regrets.

As she sat in her own room, holding the blank page of her coming life, and studying what the truth should be, there arose before her inner gaze two scenes of a girlish life; fresh, vivid were they, as of yesterday, though both were now of a buried past.

First she recalled the hour when sorrow caught her by the hand, dragged her from the couch of childhood to a darkened room where lay the sphinx-like clay of her mother—the lids closed forever over what had been loving gleams of sympathy—the hands crossed in still rigidity. Her little child heart had no knowledge of the mysteries—love, anguish, death—in whose shadow the zest of life withers. She knew their names but they stood afar off, a veiled and waiting trio.

She crept, sobbing, from that terrible semblance of a mother to the out-door sunshine, and the yard,

where the crape-myrtle nodded cheerfully to her just as it did before they frightened her so. The dark house she was afraid of, so she had gone far out of doors. The little lips that had lately quivered piteously, sang a tune in unthinking gaiety, and life was again the same, for she could not then understand.

The other scene was a radiant, sparkling, wildly joyous picture. The world, enticing as a fairy garden, received her in her bright, petted youth—her richly endowed orphanhood had been a perpetual feast. In this period not one single voice of cold or ungracious tenor could she recall.

But now she looked full over that garden, once all abloom. Here a flower with blight in its heart, yonder one whose leaves were falling. There whole bushes were only stems enthorned, and stood brown and bitter, leaves and flowers withered or dead.

“So,” thought she, “it is with my life.” A rap on the door brought her into the present. It was the delivery of the latest mail: some papers, a magazine, and one letter. The letter was post-marked Winchester, Ky. With a little sigh of triumphant expectation, she broke the seal. It, to her thinking, might contain good news from friends at home.

It only took her a moment to scan it all.

“I am sick and needy. Won't you help me for I am dying from neglect.” This was signed:

“Black Mammy,

“Judy. (her X mark.)”

Cherokee read it again. Her eyes closed, and then opened, dilating in swift terror. Her slave-mother suffering for the necessities of life. She who had spent years in chivalrous devotion to the Bell family now appealed to her, the last of that honored name.

A swift pain shot through her veins—a sudden increased anguish—a sense of something irremediable, hopeless, inaccessible, held her in its grip, and a voiceless, smothered cry rent her breast. Tears gushed from her eyes, scalding waters which fell upon her hands and seemed to wither them. Even the fern-leaf, the birth-mark, looked shrunken and shrivelled, as she gazed at it; something told her to remember it held the wraith of a life.

Cherokee was wild with grief. She went to the window and looked far out into the night, letting her sight range all the Southern sky, and the stars looked down with eyes that only stared and hurt her with their lack of sympathy. A gentle wind



"The sweet intoxication of the first kiss." Page 36.

crept by, and a faint sibilance, as of taut strings throbbled through the coming night. It was Fred, with his violin, waiting for her to come down to accompany him. But she did not go—she had no thought of it being time to eat or time to play—she had forgotten everything, except that a soul had cried to her and she must answer it in so niggardly and miserly a fashion.

Now three, four, five hours had gone since the sunken sun laved the western heaven with lowest tides of day. The tired world, that ever craves for great dark night to come brooding in with draught of healing and blessed rest that recreates, had been lulled to satisfaction. Still mute sorrow held Cherokee, and it was nearly day when peace filled her unremembering eyes and she had forgotten all.

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFE'S NIGHT WATCH.

It was a dull, wintry day; blank, ashen sky above—grassland, sere and stark, below. Weedy stubble wore shrouding of black; everything was still—so still, even the birds yet drowsed upon their perch, nor stirred a wing or throat to enliven the depressing wood. A soiled and sullen snowdrift lay dankly by a road that had fallen into disuse. It was crossed now for the first time, maybe, in a full year. A young woman tramped her way along the silent waste to a log shanty. Frozen drifts of the late snow lay packed as they had fallen on the door sill.

She rapped at the door and bent her head to listen; then she rattled it vigorously, and still no answer. She tried the latch, it yielded, and she entered. The light inside was so dim that it was hard at first to make out what was about her. Two hickory logs lay smouldering in a bank of ashes. She stirred the poor excuse for fire, and put on some smaller sticks that lay by the wide fireplace. By this time her eyes had become accustomed to the dimness, and she looked about her. There

were a few splint-bottomed chairs, a "safe," a table, and a bed covered with patched bedding and old clothes, and under these—in a flash she was by the bed and had pushed away the covering at the top.

"She is dead," Cherokee heard herself say aloud, in a voice that sounded not at all her own; but no, there was a feeble flicker of pulse at the shrunken wrist that she instinctively fumbled for under the bed clothes.

"Mammy wake up! I have come to see you—it's Cherokee, wake up!" she called.

The faintest stir of life passed over the brown old face, and she opened her eyes. It did not seem as though she saw her or anything else. Her shrivelled lips moved, emitting some husky, unintelligible sounds. Cherokee leaned nearer, and strained her ears to catch these terrible words:

"Starvin'—don't—tell—my—chile."

With a cry she sprang to her feet; the things to be done in this awful situation mapped themselves with lightning swiftness before her brain; she started the fire to blazing, with chips and more wood that somehow was already there. Then she opened the lunch she had been thoughtful enough to bring; there was chicken, and crackers, and bread. She seized a skillet, warmed the food,

hurried back to the bed, and fed the woman as though she had been a baby.

Soon she thought she could see the influence of food and warmth; but it hurt her to see in the face no indication of consciousness; there was a blank stare that showed no hope of recognition.

As she laid the patient back upon the pillow of straw there was a sound at the door, a sound as of some one knocking the mud from clumsy shoes. A colored woman stepped in.

“How you do, Aunt Judy?”

“Don’t disturb her now, she is very weak,” warned Cherokee.

The visitor looked somewhat shocked to see a white lady sitting with Aunt Judy’s hand in hers, softly rubbing it. “What’s ailin’ her?” she questioned in a whisper, “we-all ain’t hearn nothin’ at all.”

“I came and found her almost dead with hunger, and she is being terribly neglected.”

“Well! fo’ de lawd, we-all ain’t hearn nary, single word! I ’lowed she was ’bout as common; course I know de ole ’oman bin ailin’ all de year, but I didn’t know she was down. I wish we had ha’ knowed it, we-all would a comed up and holped.”

“It is not too late yet,” said Cherokee, gently.

“Yes um, we all likes Aunt Judy, she’s a good ole ’oman, I thought Jim was here wid her. Don’t know who he is? Jim is her gran’son, a mighty shiftless, wuthless chap, but I thought arter she bin so good to him he’d a stayed wid her when she got down. But I’ll stay and do all I kin.”

Cherokee thanked her gravely, gratefully.

The darkey went on whispering:

“De ole ’oman bin mighty ’stressed ’bout dyin’. She didn’t mind so much the dyin’ ez she wanted to be kyaried to de ole plantation to be buried ’long wid her folks. Dat’s more’n ten or ’leven miles, and she knowd dey wouldn’t haul her dat fur—’spec’yly ef de weather wus bad. I ’spec worrin’ got her down.”

Cherokee told the visitor to try and arouse her, now that she had had time to rest after her meal.

She took up one of her worn brown hands.

“How do you feel, Aunt Judy?”

“Porely, porely,” she stammered almost inaudibly.

“Why didn’t you let we-all know?”

“’Thar warn’t nobody to sen’ ’roun’.”

“Whars Jim?” the visitor enquired.

Her face gloomed sadly.

“Law, hunny, he took all de money Mas’r left me, and runned away.” She looked up with tears in her eyes.

“Tildy, I mout’ent o’ grieved ’bout de money, but now dey’ll bury me jes like a common nigger—out in de woods.”

“Maybe not, sumpin’ mite turn up dat’ll set things right,” she said, comfortingly.

The old woman talked with great effort, but she seemed interested in this one particular subject.

“Tildy, I ain’t afeard ter die, and I’se lived out my time, but we-all’s folks wus buried ’spectable—buried in de grabe-yard at home. One cornder wus cut off for we-all in deir buryin’ groun’; my ole man, he’s buried dar, and Jerry, my son, he’s buried dar, and our white people thought a sight o’ we-all. Dey’ed want me sent right dar.”

“Whar dey-all—your white folks?” asked Tildy, wistfully.

“All daid but one—my chile, Miss Cheraky. I wus her black mammy, and she lub’d me—if she was here I’d——” She broke down, crying pitifully—lifting her arms caressingly, as though a baby were in them.

Cherokee knew now that she would recognize her, so she came up close to her.

“Yes, Mammy, you are right, our loved ones should rest together, I will see that you go back home.”

“Oh, my chile!”—she caught her breath in a sob of joy, “God A’mighty bless you, God A’mighty bless you!”

“Don’t excite yourself, I shall stay until you are well, or better.” Cherokee stooped and patted her tenderly.

“My chile’s dun come to kyar ole mammy home,” she repeated again and again, until at last, exhausted from joy, she fell asleep.

Tildy and the young white lady kept a still watch, broken only by stalled cattle that moed forth plaintive pleadings.

CHAPTER IX.

A KENTUCKY STOCK FARM.

Cheerless winter days were gone. Spring had grown bountiful at last, though long; like a miser

“Had kept much wealth of bloom,
Had hoarded half her treasures up in winter’s tomb.”

But her penitence was wrought in raindrops ringed with fragile gold—the tears that April sheds. Now vernal grace was complete; the only thing to do was to go out in it, to rejoice in its depth of color, in its hours of flooded life, its passion pulse of growth.

“Ashland,” that peerless Southern home, was set well in a forest lawn. The great, old-fashioned, deep-red brick house, with its broad verandas, outlined by long rows of fluted columns, ending with wing rooms, was half ivy-covered. A man came out upon the steps and looked across his goodly acres. Day-beams had melted the sheet of silvery dew. A south wind was asweep through fields of wheat, a shadow-haunted cloth of bearded gold, and blades of blue grass were all wind-tangled too. How the

wind wallowed, and shook, with a petulant air, and a shiver as if in pain. The man looked away to the eastward, to where even rows of stalls lined his race-course—a kite-shaped track.

A darkey boy came up with a saddled mare, and the master took the reins, put foot in the stirrup and mounted to the saddle. He was a large, finely built man, fresh in the forties; kindness and determination filled the dark eyes, and the broad forehead was not unvisited by care. The hand that buckled the bridle was fat, smooth and white, very much given to hand-shaking and benedictions. As he was about to ride away, the jingling pole-chains of a vehicle arrested his attention. Looking around the curve, he saw a carriage coming up—a smartly dressed man stepped out, who asked:

“Have I the honor—is this Major McDowell?”

“That is my name, sir; and yours?”

“Frost—Willard Frost,” returned the other, cordially extending his hand.

The Major said, warmly:

“Glad to know you, Mr. Frost; will you come in?” and the Major got down from his horse.

“Thanks. I came with the view of buying a racer. Had you started away?”

“Only down to the stables; you will come right over with me,” he proposed.

“Very good. To go over a stock farm has been a pleasure I have held in reserve until a proper opportunity presented itself. Shall I ride or walk?”

“Dismiss the carriage and be my guest for the day, I will have you a horse brought to ride.”

“Oh, thank you, awfully,” returned the profuse stranger. And he indicated his acceptance by carrying out the host’s suggestion.

“Call for me in time for the east-bound evening train,” he said, to the driver.

Pretty soon the Major had the horse brought, and they rode down to the stables.

“I think, Mr. Frost, I have heard your name before.”

The other felt himself swelling. “I shouldn’t wonder; I am a dauber of portraits, from New York, and you I have heard quite a deal of, through young Milburn.”

“Robert Milburn! Why bless the boy, I am quite interested in his career; he, too, had aspirations in that line. How did he turn out?” asked the Major, with considerable interest.

“Well, he is an industrious worker, and may yet do some clever work, if drink doesn’t throw him.”

“Drink!” exclaimed the other, “I can scarcely believe it. He impressed me as a sober youth, full

of the stuff that goes to make a man. What a pity; I suppose it was evil associations."

"A pretty girl is at the bottom of it, I understand. You know, 'whom nature makes most fair she scarce makes true.' "

The Major re-adjusted his hat, and breathed deeply.

"Ah! well, I don't believe in laying everything on women. Maybe it was something else. Has he had no other annoyance, vexations or sorrow?"

"Yes, he lost his mother in mid-winter, but I saw but little change in him; true, he alluded to it in a casual way," remarked Frost, lightly.

"But such deep grief seeks little sympathy of companions; it lies with a sensitive nature, bound within the narrowest circles of the heart; they only who hold the key to its innermost recesses can speak consolation. From what I know of Robert Milburn this grief must have gone hard with him."

Here they came upon the track where the trainer was examining a new sulky.

"Bring out 'Bridal Bells,' Mr. Noble. I want to show the gentleman some of our standard-breds."

The trainer's lean face lighted with native pride. With little shrill neighs "Bridal Bells" came prancing afield; she seemed impatient to dash headlong

through the morning's electric chill. Pride was not prouder than the arch of her chest.

"What a beauty, what a poem!" Frost's enthusiasm seemed an inspiration to the Major

"She is marvellously well favored, sir; comes from the 'Beautiful Bells' family, that is, without a doubt, one of the richest and most remarkable known. If you want a good racer she is your chance. Racing blood speaks in the sharp, thin crest, the quick, intelligent ear, the fine flatbone and clean line of limb."

Frost looked in her mouth, put on a grave face, as though he understood "horseology."

The Major gave her age, record, pedigree and price so fast that the other found it difficult to keep looking wise and listen at the same time.

The trainer then brought out another, a brown horse with tan muzzle and flanks.

"Here, sir, is 'Baron Wilkes'; thus far he has proven an extremely worthy son of a great sire, the peerless 'George Wilkes.' He was bred in unsurpassed lines, is 15½ hands high, and at two years old took a record of 2:34¼."

"Ah! he is a handsome individual; look what admirable legs and feet," exclaimed the guest.

"And a race horse all over. But here comes my ideal," he added, with pride, as across the sward

pranced a solid bay without any white; black markings extending above his knees and hocks. A horse of finish and symmetrical build, well-balanced and adjusted in every member. The one prevailing make-up was power—power in every line and muscle. Forehead exceedingly broad and full, and a windpipe flaring, trumpet like, at the throttle.

“Now I will show you a record-breaker,” the while he patted him affectionately.

“This is ‘Kremlin,’ unquestionably the fastest trotter, except illustrious ‘Alix.’ Under ordinary exercise his disposition is very gentle, there being an independent air of quiet nonchalance that is peculiarly his own. Harnessing or unharnessing of colts, or the proximity of mares, doesn’t disturb his serene composure. But roused into action his mental energies seem to glow at white heat. He is all life, a veritable equine incarnation of force, energy, determination—a horse that ‘would meet a troop of hell, at the sound of the gong,’ and, I might add, beat them out at the wire. His gait, as may be judged from his speed, is the poetry of motion; no waste action, but elastic, quick, true. He is a natural trotting machine. His body is propelled straight as an air line, and his legs move with the precision of perfect mechanism.”

“What shoe does he carry?” asked the New Yorker.

“Ten ounces in front, five behind.”

“He is certainly a good animal, I should like to own him; but, all around, I believe I prefer ‘Bridal Bells.’ To own one good racer is a pleasure. I take moderate, not excessive, interest in races,” explained Frost.

“It is rather an expensive luxury, if you only view it from the standpoint of pleasure and pride.”

“Oh, when we can afford these things, it is all very well, I have always been extravagant, self-indulgent,” and he took out his pocket book.

“I must have her,” counting out a big roll of bills and laying them in the Major’s hand. “There is your price for my queen.” And “Bridal Bells” had a new master.

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRTH-MARK.

Like most Southerners, Major McDowell had the happy faculty of entertaining his guests royally.

The New Yorker was there for the day, at the kind solicitation of the Major and his most estimable wife. Afternoon brought a rimming haze; the wind had hushed, and the thick, lifeless air bespoke rain. A cloud no bigger than a man's hand had gathered at low-sky; then mounted, swelling, to the zenith, and wrapped the heavens in a pall and covered the earth's face with darkness that was fearfully illumined by the lightning's glare.

Host and guest stood by an open window looking to the southward. Rain came down, pelting the earth with a sheeted fall that soon sent muddy runnels adown every fresh furrow. Before the rain was half over, horses were led from their stalls to the dripping freedom of wide pasture lands.

How green, and still, and sweet-smelling it lies. No wonder the animals ran ecstatically about, neigh-

ing, prancing, nipping one at the other, snatching lush, tender mouthfuls between rolls on the soft, wet turf.

“A goodly sight, Major; I see that you have peculiar advantages of soil and climate for stock-raising,” remarked the guest.

“That must be true, and it is a recognition of that superiority that sends breeders from all parts of the world to Kentucky. ‘Kentucky for fine horses, good whiskey, and pretty women,’ is a maxim old and doubtless true.”

“I can vouch for the first two, but it has not been my luck to meet many of your fair women.”

“Well, it is proof true,” said the Major; “look for yourself,” and he pointed to the forest lawn where a young woman was coming between the elm rows, a child’s hand in each of her own. Her figure preserved that girlish accent which few women manage to carry over into womanhood.

She had blonde-brown hair, and blue eyes—very dark and tender. She looked up as she passed the window, and was none the less charming for her startled look. The quick averted glance sent a blush to the face of Willard Frost.

Some imagine that only virgins blush; that is a mistake. A blush signifies but a change in the circulation of the blood; animals can blush. The

rabbit is so sensitive that its ears are dyed crimson at the least sudden impression.

“That is Cherokee Bell, the prettiest of them all; yes, and the best.” The Major’s tone was deep and earnest.

The guest immediately grasped the water bottle, poured himself a glass and drank it off slowly, with majestic mein, to calm himself.

“She is beautiful!” he exclaimed, and shutting his teeth together: “Why in the name of heaven did I run upon her”—this to himself.

“My wife and I have always been very fond of her—she is our governess.”

“Your governess!” Frost’s smile of superiority lighted his face as he added: “I had thought I would like to know more of her, but——”

“She seldom meets strangers,” said the Major quietly, and looking steadily at him. “She has had some little experience in the outer world. She is more contented here with us.”

“How long has she been with you?”

“Six months and more.”

Frost’s voice was unsteady as he asked, “Hasn’t hers been a life of romance? She looks like a woman with a history.”

“You are a regular old gypsy at fortune telling. She has had a varied life, poor child.”

“And the scar I noticed upon the back of her right hand. How did that happen?”

“I will tell you,” answered the Major, suggesting—“Maybe you’d like a smoke; suppose we go on the veranda?”

The guest assented, and taking his hat from a table, followed the other.

Scent of the lilacs fanned through the ivy, and the sodden trees dropped rain on the drenched grass.

“I think,” said the Major, as they turned at the end of the veranda to retrace it again: “as you seem greatly interested in my pretty governess, I will give you the history of what you call a scar—that is a fern-leaf—a birth-mark.”

Frost puffed away in a negligent manner of easy interest, and said:

“I should like to hear it.”

“It takes me back to distant, cruel days of war—her father, Darwin Bell, was my friend; we were comrades; he had been brought up on a big plantation, just this side of the mountainous region—it is sixty miles from here—to the northwest. That mountain and the valley on which he lived were favorite haunts of mine in those memorable early days of my life. I was three years Darwin’s junior, and never had I realized his being ahead of me until, at twenty-one, he brought home a wife.

Soon the war broke out; he was no coward, not half-hearted, and when the summons came he was ready to go. I was to enlist at the same time. We, like hundreds of others, had only time to make hasty and almost wordless farewells. He had to leave this young wife in the care of servants, Aunt Judy, and I believe her husband's name was Lige, and she had a son. They were to guard his love-nest while he went out to fight for the Southern cause.

“Aunt Judy made many promises; I remember how good were her words of comfort. He respected her as sacredly as the leaves of his dead mother's Bible, and the safety of his saber. Her brown, leathery face was showered with tears as the young husband and wife, hand in hand, went to the gate; she drew back and sat down on the door-steps, not daring to intrude on those last few moments.

“The pale little wife could not trust herself to speak; she could only cling to Darwin, as, whispering tender words of endearment, he caught her in his arms in a last embrace; then tearing himself away, and strangling a sob, he mounted his horse and started for the war.

“She watched us go, and, no doubt, deadly fear for his safety must have clutched at her heart, and the longing to call him back, to implore him for her

sake not to risk his life, must have been almost irresistible.

“But the thought of manhood and country flashed into her mind, no doubt, and nerved her; for, when he turned to wave a last farewell, her face lighted with a brave, cheering smile, which lived in his heart the whole war-time. I will not take time to tell of the trials and discomforts; you know enough of that by what you’ve read.

“It was six or maybe seven months afterward when we were back in old ‘Kaintuck;’ the day of which I speak, we of the cavalry, against customary plans, were set in the forefront, not on the wings.

“As the mist lifted, we looked across the valley to see the Kentucky river gleaming in the sun. It was a familiar sight, a house here and there, nearer to us a little church, with its graveyard surrounding; we could see the white headstones, and the old slate ones like black coffin lids upright. The noise of war, it seemed to me, was enough to rouse the dead from the buried rest of years

“The church reminded me that it was Sunday; with some prickings of conscience for having forgotten, I lowered my head, and asked that the right might triumph, and that a peace founded on righteousness might be won through the strife.”

“And don't you think your prayer has been answered?” asked the listener, interrupting.

The other dropped his voice:

“I am not discussing that question,” and he kept on with his recital.

“Later in the day, Darwin came to me, his face aglow, his eyes bright with eager delight, and in great excitement.

“‘I am just two miles from home; if I can get a permit I am going there to-night.’

“I exclaimed: ‘You are mad, man, they are so close to us that the sentinels almost touch each other, we will have a skirmish inside of an hour!’

“‘I am going when the fight is done, if I am spared.’

“I knew him, and he meant it, but I was almost certain he would be killed. My prediction proved true, we did have a fight; and for a time they had the advantage, and no one knew how the day would have gone had not a gallant soldier, too impulsive to obey orders, charged with his men too close to our cannon. Poor fellow! he died bravely, but his rash act gave us the victory; they retreated in good order and molested us no further. Darwin arranged for a leave of an hour's absence and went home, but his unthinking haste nearly cost him his life. He barely made into the mountainway when

a scout fired upon him. The scout could not risk the unknown way of the mountain, so Darwin was saved.

“He galloped about the gloomy gorges fanged with ledges of rock, and it was as easy for him to find his way there as in a beaten path. He fired, now here, now there, until the mountain seemed alive with armed men. By the time the smoke reached the tree tops here, he was away a hundred yards.

“By midnight he had rejoined us; having assurance of his wife’s well-being, and the faithfulness of Aunt Judy, who nightly slept on the family silver, Darwin, pretty well fagged out, dropped down to sleep. I had gotten aroused by his coming, and could not go back to sleep, myself.

“I marvelled, as I looked across at the young soldier, to find neither bitterness nor dissatisfaction on his face, which, even in repose, retained something of its former bright expression; and it bore no traces of the weary war, save in a certain hollowness of the cheeks. I thought that to have to be away from a young wife was enough to justify a man in cursing war, but he looked happy, as he lay there wrapped in profound slumber; beside him lay his saber, and the keen wind flapped vigorously at the gray cloak in which he was envel-

oped, without in the least disturbing him. A more perfect picture of peace in the midst of war, of rest in strife, you could not find.

“I said to myself, proudly: ‘The man that can wear that look after continued hard duty, without comfortable quarters, is made of brave mettle.’

“Lying in damp fields of nights was calculated to make us feel little else but cold and stiffness.

“The next night, by some means, he went home again to say ‘good bye,’ he told me, though, I suppose, he had said that when he left before; but that was none of my business; I was glad he could have the privilege again.

“Aunt Judy stood sentinel, and for safe quarters, the wife took Darwin up-stairs. He had told them how he got into camp the night before. The good woman-guard had to strain her eyes, for night was coming fast; the fog, a sad, dun color, was dense, deadly.

“Pretty soon she heard the sound of horses feet; she was all nervous, for she feared it was ‘dem blue coats comin’.’ With trembling voice she called, ‘Leetle Massa! dey’s comin’, dey’s comin’!’ Jerry was standing inside the buggy-house, with Massa’s horse ready for him. Aunt Judy couldn’t make the captain hear. Her alarm was not unfounded; already two Federals shook the door, while a third watched

the surroundings, ready to give the alarm; they were pretty certain a Confederate was visiting here, and were determined to capture him.

“Quick as a flash Aunt Judy took in the situation; she could hear them storming at the door; they meant to be admitted, if by force. There was handling of a faded gray coat—a sacred keep-sake of hers—and a hurried whisper:

“‘Run to de mountain, dey’ll follow; do as massa done.’

“The next minute horse and rider, as one, went dashing through the dusk; the scheme acted like a charm. The Federals soon followed in swift pursuit, and, until it was almost over, Darwin knew nothing of his peril. He was deeply moved by this heroic act, the while his mind was filled with grave fears for the safety of the boy. They waited until ample time for his return, and kept up spirits until the horse came up, riderless. A great unwonted tumult stirred and lashed the calm currents of his blood into a whirling storm.

“This was enough; he started out on his search. The women would go with him—what more natural—any of us would have let them go. The faint flarings of dawn lit their perilous way. Of course the women were more or less nervous; though the whole world was ‘still as the heart of the dead,’

they were being alarmed by all sorts of imaginary things. Aunt Judy was pitiful. She bore up under it for the young woman's sake, but now and then she would lag behind and cry softly to herself, for her boy was dear to that old heart. When they began to go up the side of the mountain, Darwin had to go first to break back the thick undergrowth. Presently he stumbled and had to catch at hazel bushes to keep from falling.

“‘Good God!’ he exclaimed, ‘and he tried to save me from this!’

“But his words seemed to die away within his lips, and in dreadful self-reproach he bent over Jerry, shuddering at the deathly cold of his face and hands. There, before them, the boy Jerry lay, spent and done. His head rested upon a bed of blood-withered ferns.”

Frost gazed at the vaulted expanse a moment, then said:

“So that accounts for the birth-mark?”

“Yes, and partially for her being here. Loyal to that noble slave, she came down and nursed Aunt Judy five weeks, until she followed her boy to that land lit by the everlasting sun. Listen!” The Major heard the piano; taking his handkerchief he wiped his eyes. “Pshaw, tears! why I am as soft as a girl, but that music makes my eyes blur; I

am back in my twenties when I hear 'Marching Through Georgia.'

"Darwin's child has been badly used since he died. He left her the small sum of thirty-seven hundred dollars—not much. No, but enough to keep a girl in a modest way. But she was deluded into going away to New York in high society, and she got back here without a cent. She is working now to pay for the burial of Aunt Judy."

The other did not ask what became of her money, but the Major answered as if he had.

"My wife tells me that a man actually borrowed a part of it; what a contemptible thing for a man to do."

The singing was still heard, and Frost appeared absorbed in that. He made no answer, but commented:

"What a delicious quality of voice she has. It seems as though it were impregnated with the tender harmony that must reign in her soul. But, pardon me, I must go into Lexington, the carriage is waiting."

"Won't you spend the night, Mr. Frost?" asked the Major.

"Thank you, sir, I have greatly enjoyed your hospitality, but I must catch the first east-bound train."

The crouching heart within him quailed like a shuddering thing, and he went away very like a cur that is stoned from the door.

CHAPTER XI.

HEARTS LAID BARE.

They sat in the breakfast room—the family and Cherokee.

“Did I tell you, wife, that when Mr. Frost was here he brought me news of Robert Milburn?”

The tall, graceful woman thus addressed looked from the head of the table, and showing much interest, questioned:

“Indeed! well, how was he doing? I grew very fond of the boy when he was here.”

“The news is sad; he has gone to drinking,” said the Major, sorrowfully.

“I don’t believe it; we have no reason to take this stranger’s word; we don’t know who he is.” Turning to Cherokee she asked:

“Did you ever hear of Mr. Frost in New York?”

With a suppressed sigh, she answered:

“He is an artist of considerable note, I knew him very well.”

Suddenly Mrs. McDowell remembered that this was the bold man of whom Cherokee had told her

much; so she questioned her no more, for she was always tender and thoughtful of others.

The Major did not understand any connection of names, and he again alluded to the subject.

“This New Yorker said it was about a girl; but the whole thing, to me, savors of some man’s hand—one who did not like him well.”

Here the wife changed the subject by asking:

“Who got any letters?” I didn’t see the boy when he brought the mail.”

“Cherokee must have had a love letter or a secret,” remarked the Major cheerily. “I saw her tearing it into tiny bits, and casting them in a white shower on the grass.”

“Come, come, girlie, tell us all about it;” then suddenly the lady said: “How pale you are!”

“I do not feel well this morning,” she answered; “the letter was from a friend of other days.” She stumbled to her feet in a dazed sort of way, and hurried out of the house.

There was a touch of chill in the air, and the roses drooped; only wild-flower scents greeted her as she stopped and leaned against the matted honey-suckle arch by the garden gate. She searched the vine-tangle through, without finding one single blooming spray. This was Saturday; no school to-day. She felt a vague sense of relief in the

thought, but what should she do with her holiday. She had lost her usual spirits, she had forgotten to be brave. The letter, maybe, or the stranger guest, had made the pale color in her cheeks; the eyelids drooped heavily on the tear-wet face, and checked the songs that most days welled perpetually over unthinking lips.

She had never told of Robert's treatment of her; of his cold leave-taking, his altered look, for her to remember always. She had been bearing it in silence. Bred to the nicest sense of honorable good faith, she had kept it alone. But to-day she was weakening; she was agitated, and in a condition of feverish suspense and changeful mind.

Sunrays shone upon her hair as she leaned against the arch, her head bowed on her clasped hands, her slender figure shaken with grief. She heard voices and quick treading on the gravel walk.

"You haven't aged at all, though it has been eleven years since I was here."

"Life goes fairly smooth with me; and you have been well, I trust." She knew that was the Major's voice, and in the lightning flash of her unerring woman's instinct she knew the other, as he said:

"I have been blessed with sound body, but life has passed roughly with me since my mother died. You have heard it?"

“Yes.”

“She made home so dear to my boyhood; so real to my after years. She was ever burning there a holy beacon, under whose guidance I always came to a haven and to a refuge.”

Then they suddenly came upon Cherokee, partly concealed.

“I told him we would find you down among the flowers, you little butterfly. Why didn't you tell me Robert was coming, he is one of my boys?” and the Major laid his hand affectionately on the man's shoulder; then, without waiting for an answer, he left them together.

Holding out one hand: “I am glad to see you, Cherokee,” and he drew closer.

She crimsoned, faltered, and looked toward the ground, but did not extend her own hand.

“Thank you,” was all she could utter.

He went on: “The very same; the Cherokee of old;” he mused, smiling dreamily, “her own self, like no other.”

Moving a step within the vine covert she said with a shadowy smile:

“I wish I were not the old self. I want her to be forgotten.”

“That is impossible—utterly impossible; I tried

to deceive myself into the belief that this would be done; you see how I have failed?"

Raising her eyes full to his, but dropping them after the briefest gaze, she said, timidly:

"Why have you come back?"

"I have come back to mend the broken troth-
plight; I have come back to be forgiven," he
answered, humbly.

"You have come back to find a wasted youth, a
tired woman who has been the victim of a lie, told
in the dark, with the seeming verity of intimate
friendship. You have come back to find me
stabbed by a thousand disappointments, striving
with grim indifference, learning to accept, unques-
tioning, the bitter stone of resignation for my daily
bread. I would scarce venture now to spread poor
stunted wings that life has clipped so closely that
they bleed when they flutter even toward the
smallest hope."

He fiercely cried, and clinched his hands together,
with one consuming glance at her:

"I was to blame, Cherokee, for believing that you
had promised to marry Fred Stanhope; Willard Frost
is charged with this as well"—he bit his lips hard.

"And it was to the same man that I owe the
death of innocence." Her voice was scarcely more
than a whisper.

Robert Milburn turned upon her a piteous face, white with an intensity of speechless anguish. He staggered helplessly backward, one hand pressed to his eyes, as though to shut out some blinding blaze of lightning.

“Innocence! great God! He shall die the death——”

“Ah, you do not understand,” she hastily interrupted. “I mean that I thought all men were brave, honorable in everything, business as well as socially; but he was not a brave man; it was a business transaction in which he did me ill. I had measured him by you.”

This was a startling relief to him:

“Thank heaven I was mistaken in your expression of ‘death of innocence.’ But you humiliate, crush me, with a sense of my own unworthiness, to say I have been your standard. What made me listen to idle gossip of the Club—why did I act a brute, a coward?” his lips moved nervously.

“Dearest, show yourself now magnanimous, forgive it all, and forget it. You are so brave and strong—so beautiful—take me back.”

“Was it I who sent you away?”

“Oh! do you not see how humiliating are these reminders? I have confessed my wrong.”



“ ‘ Here’s to your pastoral sweetheart, the sorceress, sovereign of the South.’ ” Page 40.



“But would I not still be a burden; you said I could not bear poverty?” she asked.

He looked up with an expression of painful surprise:

“Don’t, don’t! I know now that love is the crown and fulfillment of all earthly good. Have you quit caring for me? I infer as much.”

Hastening to undo the effect of her last words, she said:

“Forgive me, Robert, what need I say? You read my utmost thoughts now as always. I have not changed towards you.”

His sad expression gave place to exquisite joy and adoration.

“I am grateful for the blessing of a good woman’s love.”

They passed out of the gate, down through the browning woods, and all things were now as they, of old, had been. The bracing, cool October air was like rare old wine; it made their flagging pulses beat full and strong. In such an atmosphere, hand in hand with such a companion—a woman so sweet, so young, so pure—Robert could not fail to feel the fires of love burn brighter and brighter. Her forgiveness was spoken from her very soul. Rarely has a wave of happiness so illumined a woman’s face as when she said, “I

love you so now, I have never understood you before." There was a degree of love on her part that was veritable worship—her nature could do nothing by halves. Her soul was so thrilled by this surcharged enthusiasm, it could hold no more. There is a supreme height beyond which no joy can carry one, and this height Cherokee had attained. The restraint of her will was overthrown for the moment, and now the pent-up passion of her heart swept on as a mountain torrent:

"Oh, my dearest love, how have I lived until now? What a lovely place this world is with you—you alone. Kiss me! kiss me!" She grasped his hand with sudden tightness, until his ring cut its seal into the flesh. He bent over her head, put her soft lips to his, and folded her in his arms. "Sweet-heart, I shall never go away without you."

All this meant so much to Cherokee—these hours with him—these hours of forgetfulness of all but him—these hours of abandon, of unrestrained joy, flooded her life with a light of heaven. She had given her happiness into his keeping; and he had accepted the responsibility with a finer appreciation of all it meant than is shown by most men.

Where could there have been a prettier trothing-place than here in the free forest, where the good God had been the chief landscape gardener. Here

was the God-touch in everything. Well had the red man called this month the "moon 'o falling leaves." Softly they came shivering down, down, down, at their feet, breathing the scent of autumn. Now, and here, nature is seen in smoother, softer, mellower aspect than she wears anywhere else in the world. It was nearing the nooning hour when, together, the lovers' steps tended homeward, and when they reached the house, Robert vowed it would never again be in him to say that he didn't love the South and the country.

With what a young, young face Dorothy met the Major. As she looked up she saw his wide kind eyes smiling; he leaned forward and laid his hand upon her, saying, "My little girl, after all, love is life."

At these words a tall, slight woman raised her head—a secret bond of fellowship seemed to have stirred some strange, mysterious sympathy. The Major crossed over to her; what though time had stolen away her youth—her freshness gone, there was still sweet love gleaming in her lined face—it could not be that they were old. Tenderly he took her warm soft hand in his, and told her how he loved her. The sweethearts looked on and rejoiced; neither whispered it to the other, but deep in the heart each said, "So shall ours be forever."

“Come, let me bless you my children,” and the Major’s wife slipped a hand into one hand of each, and drew them closer. Robert’s eyes lit up; his brave mouth was smiling quietly, while dimples broke out on Cherokee’s face.

“I trust the dark is all behind, the light before, and that you are at the threshold of a great, enduring happiness—but remember that Time will touch you as your joy has done, but his fingers will weigh more heavily—it is then that you must cling all the closer.”

CHAPTER XII.

SUNLIGHT.

The marriage was to be celebrated in two weeks. Cherokee had too much common sense to wish an elaborate wedding, when it would necessitate more means than she possessed.

The Major and his wife, who was the personification of lovable good nature, considered together, and graciously agreed to extend to Robert, for these two weeks, the hospitality of their roof. What a sweetly good wife the Major had! The graces of her person corresponded to the graces of her mind. The beauty of her character found a fitting symbol in the sweet, gentle face—the refined, expressive mouth, that gave out wise counsel to Cherokee, in whom she felt so deep an interest.

Cherokee had the dimmest memory of her mother, whom she lost when she was a child in words of three letters, frocks to her knees, infantine socks, and little shoes fastened with two straps and a button. The Major's wife was so full of charity and tenderness that she did her best to compensate for the unhappy want of a mother. She now gave

her assistance in every particular relating to the preliminaries of the wedding.

There is an old saying that "honest work is prayer." If thus reckoned, there was a deal of praying at Ashland now. At the door, most times, was a large carriage, of the kind which the Major used to call a barouche, with an immense pair of iron-gray horses to it, and on the box was a negro coachman, ready at a moment's notice to let down the steps, open and close the door, clamber up to his seat, and set off at a brisk pace along down a winding avenue of laurels, to town.

As for Robert, it was the union of inspiration and rest that made the days so wholesome and unique. It was agreed that he and the Major should be no care to the busy ones; they were to find their own entertainments. One or two days had been passed in hunting expeditions. They had bagged quail until the artist fancied himself a great success as a huntsman. Then there were morning strolls where he could take his thoughts and ease in the fulness of all the falling beauty and grandeur of the season. Light winds strewed his way broadcast with leaves—leaves that were saturated, steeped, drunken with color. What a blessed privilege for a man with artistic tastes. There was nothing second-rate about here. The air, as well as the leaves, was

permeated, soaked through and through, with sunlight—quivering, brilliant, radiant; sunlight that blazes from out a sky of pearl, opal and sapphire; sunlight that drenched historic "Ashland" with liquid amber, kissed every fair thing awake, and soothed every shadow; sunlight that caresses and does not scorch, that dazzles and does not blind.

Upon one hunting trip the Major took Robert up near Cherokee's old home—the woods and fields where her childhood passed. It was well worth the day's ride. What various charm lies in this region. The wood is alive with squirrels too. They stole upon two of these shy wood-rangers, who were busy in their frolic, chasing one another around a huge hickory nut tree.

"Ssh!" whispered Robert, as he motioned the Major to lay down his gun. He wished to watch their antics. They were young ones who, as yet, knew not the burden of existence whose pressure sends so many hurrying, scurrying, all the day long, laying up store of nuts against the coming cold. To these two, life, so far, meant a summer of berries, and milky corn, and green, tender buds, with sleep in a leaf-cradle, rocked by soft summer winds; with morning scampers through seas of dew-fresh boughs. Only glimmering instinct tells them of imminent, deadly change, and, all unknow-

ing, they make ready against it, in such light-hearted, hap-hazard fashion. Now they cease their scampering and drop down to earth, burrowing daintily in its deep leaf-carpet. One rises upon his haunches with a nut in his paws, the other, darts to seize it, and for a few minutes they roll over and over—a furry ball, with two waving, plummy tails. It flies swiftly apart, the finder hops upon a rotting tree trunk to chatter in malicious triumph. His mate sits, dejected, a yard away, as his sharp teeth cut the hull; she has given up the contest and is sore over it, though nuts are plentiful, and the yield this year, abundant. Presently, she creeps past to the log's other end; the other looks sharply at her out of the corner of his eye, then, darts to her side, pats her lightly between the ears, and, as she turns to face him, drops the nut of contention safe within her little paws. At once she falls to ravenous gnawing. He looks on, rubs his head caressingly against her, then darts away to find a new treasure that has just dropped from above; for well they know none were more rightful heirs to nature's bounty.

The men looked on in silent interest; this was a pretty sight indeed, and few manage to steal upon it for more than a moment. Their luck was due to the youth of the pair, who thought they risked

nothing by such delicious idling—nor, indeed, did they; for when the watching was over, the intruders shouldered their guns and left them to life. The Major's next turn was toward the big south wood, whose edge they saw fringing the top of the bluff. This bluff faces north, a sheer wall of grey-blue limestone, seamed and broken into huge ledges. All manner of wild vines grow in the clefts, grape-vines, wild ivy, poison-oak, trail down into the water. The crown and glory of it, though, was its ferns. The trailing rock-fern runs all over the face of it, each seam and cleft is a thick fringe of maiden-hair ferns, wherever it gets good root. Foxes live in the caves along the bluffs, but the men looked with keenest search and they could not catch a glimpse of one.

Thinking of this, the Major recalled to mind a memorable and exciting chase in which they had run the fox into this very place. He had distanced them by one second, and they lost the game.

While they stood there, letting their horses drink, the Major recounted the things of interest about the hunt.

“It is such royal sport,” declared Robert, “there is nothing so invigorating as a lively chase, though as a sport its palmiest days are in the past. To be a ‘master of fox-hounds’ was once a country

gentleman's crowning distinction. The chase, when spoken of now, has a reminiscent tone, an old 'time flavor.' "

"Notwithstanding our neighboring young men keep up this pastime of old days, I go but rarely, now," said the Major. "Various modern innovations, from wire fences to democratic ideas, have conspired to ruin the country—for fox hunting. Unsportsmanlike farmers will not tolerate broken fences and trampled crops."

"I should so enjoy just one stirring chase. I wonder if we could get up a 'swagger' affair, including the girls?" asked Robert.

"Most assuredly."

And on the way home, they planned the hunt.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PICTURESQUE SPORT.

“Resounds the glad hollo,
The pack scents the prey;
Man and horse follow,
Away, hark away!
Away, never fearing,
Ne'er slacken your pace—
What music so cheering
As that of the chase.”

It is dawn. The cool black darkness pales to tender gray. Singeth not the ballad-monger—

“A southerlie wind, a clouded skye
Doe proclaime it huntynge morning?”

Now the long notes of mellow-winded horns come strongly up-wind, undervoiced with a whimpering chorus from the hounds. The fox-hunters are out. What a picture! Eleven blue-grass beauties, all roundnesses and curves, mounted upon eleven Kentucky horses. An equal number of cavaliers put in, made a fair and gallant sight. The company willingly recognized as their chief, the new arrival and visitor, whose noble head and

clear-cut features were really quite imposing. Cherokee started out as his companion, and she occupied, with sufficient majesty, her place of triumph. She was upon "Sylvan," a splendid lead-white horse, who was the pride and pet of her care. What a horse—what a rider! Where could you find such hand, seat, horse, rider—so entirely, so harmoniously, at one? It is a rhythm of motion, wherein grace has wedded strength. Mark the fire, the spirit of the beast; his noble lift of head, arching neck, with its silky, flowing mane; his clean flat leg, his streaming tail of silver shining. How he loves his mistress who sits him so light, so firm, so easily swaying; she bends him to her will by master-strength; yet pats and soothes as she might a frightened child. Sweetness and strength! that is all the magic. The rein is a channel through which intelligence goes most subtly. Good Sylvan knows and loves his rider—feels her vividly to the core of his quick sense; will serve her unquestioning to the limit of his speed and stay.

"The hunters have started in a south-easterly direction, the musical-winding of horns, wreathing like a thread of gold, through the heart of the town.

Listen! they are now at the creek ford; hear the splash and beat of hoofs. The dogs ahead, are

running in leaping circles through field and wood. A whimpering challenge comes sharply from the left; nobody heeds it—it is only the puppy, out for a first run, as yet scarce knowing the scent he seeks. Most likely he is trailing a rabbit—but no; a bell-like note echoes him. Trumpet, king^m of the pack, cries loud and free—all the rest break out in thrilling jangle, and set all the valley a-ring. Up, up, it swells, truly a jocund noise, under these low pale clouds, this watery moon, this reddening east. They are headed up wind, the cool air goes back heavy-freighted with the wild dog-music. Hoof-beats sound sharply through it. Sylvan is close behind the leading hound. What sharp, exultant shrilling comes out from the followers' throats. All the hunt is whooping, yelling, as it streams through dusk of dawn. Up, then down, they go; along a gentle slope from whose sparse flints the hoofs strike fire. A fair world smiles up from either hand, but they have no eye, no thought for it. The thrilling, breathless motion wraps them away from other senses; they are drunken with "wine o' the morning." Truly, it is the breath of life they draw, in this rush through the dew-fresh air.

Note the leader now, urging his mare; what feet are hers—small, firm, unerring. Her skimming gallop is as the flight of a bird—her leap a

veritable soar. See! the fox has doubled; now the full cry rings down-wind. See the dogs tumbling, writhing over that crooked fence. They had been running always on view—heads up, tails down—so close upon their quarry there was no need to lay nose to the tainted herbage that he had crossed. They caught the scent hot in the air. All the hunters knew it when they heard the last wild burst of furious dog-music. So hearing, they sat straighter in the saddle, gave the good beasts the spur; a little while and they would be “in at the death;” the next field, certainly the next hill-side, must bring it. So they crash, pell-mell, over the low roadside fence, as the hounds top the high one bounding the pasture land. But now Trumpet stops short, flings his nose to wind, and sets up a whimpering cry—he has lost the trail. The fox has either dodged back under the horses’ feet, or hidden so snug that the dogs have over-run him. Look at the true creatures, panting with lolling tongues, as they run crying about the field, dazed out of all weariness by this astounding check. A minute—two—three—still the trail is lost. There is babble of yelps and shouting, each master calling loudly to his most trusted hound. The leader’s horse champs on the bit, frets lightly against the rein. Sylvan, too, prances gaily under check. This ringing run has

but well breathed him—the noise of it has set his fine blood afire. Soon a horn breaks faintly out, is instantly from lip, and all the field is in motion. The fox is cunning, but Trumpet is cunninger. He has followed the fence a hundred yards, picked up the trail where the sly thing leaped to earth after running along the rails, and is after it, calling, with deepest notes, to man and beast to follow and save the honors of the field. How straight he goes; his fellows streaming after can do no more than yelp, as with great leaping bounds they devour the grassy space. Nearer, nearer he comes to the dark, sweated, hunted thing that seems a mere shadow on the ground in front of him, so straight, so skimming is his steady flight toward the bluff beyond; his den is there. To it he strains, yet never shall he gain. Almost Trumpet is upon the prize; his hot breath overruns it; it darts aside, doubles—but all in vain. Quickly, cruelly, his jaws close upon it. The leading horseman, Robert, snatches it away, and blows a long blast of his horn. Trumpet stands aquiver with delight, and leaps up for a pat of the hand, while Robert flings the dead fox at his feet before the eyes of all the field.

CHAPTER XIV.

WEDDED.

It was the seventeenth of October—the wedding day at “Ashland.” Little ruffles of south wind blew out of a fair sky, breathing the air of simplicity into grandeur. Up among the ivy leaves, a couple of birds flashed and sang. But indoors, people were so mightily interested in a pair of unwinged lovers, that these two sang their song out, and then flew away unheard.

Carriages bearing guests to the wedding were already rolling past. Those who alighted were the intimate friends. No stranger’s curious stare would fall upon this scene to contrast with its fairness. No shadow was necessary to the harmony of it.

Robert stood at an upper window, and his eyes fell upon the matted honey-suckle where Cherokee had first lifted so sad a face to him—so sad, that, though the first throb of grief awakened by his mother’s death had scarcely yet been stilled, he forgot his own sorrow in the effort to bring happiness again to her—his living love. How his words of tenderness had made her face soft like the late

sunshine of a summer day. He looked with emotion upon the scene whose vividness came back with double force to-day. Could all this influence be as fleeting as it was charming? What would be his verdict at the end of a year—what hers?

He was called clever, and “people of talent should keep to themselves and not get married.” Yet his love had overruled the sage’s counsel. This feeling for Cherokee he knew could not be called another name less sweet. Since the first sight of her he had worshipped her from afar, as a devout heathen might worship an idol, or as a neophyte in art might worship the masterpiece of a master. And she was proud of him, too; women want the world’s respect for their husbands. Would he, could he, do anything to make her and the world lose that respect? No, he thought not now—he would be away from his old associations and temptings. “Artists are such funny chaps, they all have the gift of talk and good manners,” he mused, “but they are generally upon the verge of starvation; they are too great spendthrifts to be anything else but worthless fellows. Now I am not a spendthrift, and if I can but conquer *one little evil*, of which I should have told her, maybe, I will break the record they have made.”

Lost for a time in this reverie, he was dead to the passing of the precious moments. Recalled to himself, he turned quickly to the clock—it still wanted five and twenty minutes to twelve.

As for Cherokee, there were no moments of sober reflection. She was too much in love to calculate for the future, and did not imagine that so delicious a life could ever come to an end. Happy in being the help-mate of Robert, she thought that his inextinguishable love would always be for her the most beautiful of all ornaments, as her devotion and obedience would be an eternal attraction to him.

There was but one thing now left undone. She slipped out the side entrance, down into the lawn where Sylvan was. She laid her soft cheek against his great silvered neck. "I am going away," she whispered, half aloud, as though he could understand. "But you know he must be very kind and dear if I leave my good friends and you, for him, you brave, big beast; how I hope your next mistress will care for you as I have." She pressed his neck affectionately, the while his eyes mirrored and caressed her, and, when she started back towards the house, he followed her with a tread that was pathetic.

Inside, the rooms, and halls, and stairway, were wreathed about with delicate vines and roses. All

Ashland was in attendance, if not in the house or on the verandas, then gazing through the windows; or waiting outside the gate. Even the negroes, as they peered, tiptoe, had a sense of ownership in the affair.

It was noon—that supreme moment of life and light. The tall silver-faced clock rang out twelve silvery chimes as ten maidens, in wash-white, entered, strewing flowers in the path. These white robed attendants, standing now aisle-wise, made a symphony of bloom. All eyes followed the bride as she appeared on the arm of the handsome, kindly Major, full of dignity, full of sweetness as well. Every heart burst forth into an exclamation of delight and admiration. There was youth, sweetness and love on her flushing face. Few brides have looked happier than Cherokee; few men have looked more manly than Robert Milburn, as he met and took her hand for life.

The ceremony was followed by a shower of congratulations. A hurried change to her going-away gown, and they were ready to take their final leave. The Major and his wife said good-bye, and then again, good-bye, with a lingering emphasis that made the word as kind as a caress.

A few minutes more and they were gone. There was nothing left but the scattered rice on the ground,

and Sylvan, with bowed head—as though he knew the hand of Cherokee had now another charge; while over all sifted the long benediction of sunlight and falling leaves.

CHAPTER XV.

· CHLORAL.

It was a half hour past midnight. A cab drew up in front of a residence in New York, and two men bore something into the outer doorway.

The bell gave a startling alarm, and presently, from within, a voice asked, with drowsy tremor :

“Is that you, Robert, husband?”

“Open the door quickly,” some one insisted.

“But that is not Robert’s voice,” she faltered.

“Madam, a friend has brought your husband home.”

This assurance caused the door to be quickly opened.

“Good heavens! is he ill? Is he hurt? Bring him this way,” she excitedly directed.

The silken draperies of the bed were trembling, showing that she had just left their folds. After depositing the burden, the cab man bowed, and left them.

“It is not at all serious, my dear madam,” the friend began, “but the truth is—” here he hesitated

confusedly, he did not mean to tell her the truth at all; anything else but that.

“Oh, sir, tell me the worst; what has happened?” and she leaned lovingly over the unconscious man; she looked so earnest in her grief—so unsuspecting—that Marrion was convinced that this was the first “full” of the honeymoon. “I will help him out of this,” he said to himself.

“Robert had a terrific headache at the club, and we gave him chloral—he took a trifle too much—that is all—he will be quite himself by morning.”

“Oh! sir, are you sure it is not fatal?” Cherokee asked, anxiously, “absolutely sure? But how could anyone be so careless,” she remonstrated.

“I do not wonder that you ask, since it was Marrion Latham who was so thoughtless.”

“Marrion Latham! my husband’s dearest friend.”

“I am what is left of him,” he answered, laughingly.

She extended her hand, cordially:

“I am glad to meet you, for Robert loves you very dearly, and came near putting off the wedding until your home-coming.”

“I am very sorry to have missed it. Have I come too late to offer congratulations?”

“No, indeed, every sunset but closes another wedding day with us,” and she kissed the flushed

face of the sleeper she so loved. Too blind was that love to reveal the plight in which this accident had left him. Call it accident this once, to give it tone. Cherokee willingly accepted for truth the statement that Marrion had made. Enough for her woman heart to know that her husband needed her attention and love. There over him she leaned, her hair rippling capewise over her gown, while from the ruffled edge her feet peeped, pink and bare. She was wrapped in a long robe of blue cashmere, with a swansdown collar, which she clasped over her breast with her left hand. It was easy to be seen there was little clothing under this gown, which every now and then showed plainly, in spite of the care she took to hide it.

Art was powerless to give these fine and slight undulations of the body that shone, so to speak, through the soft and yielding material of her garment. Marrion studied the poem she revealed; he saw she had a wealth of charms—every line of her willowy figure being instinct with grace and attractiveness, as was the curve of her cheeks and the line of her lips. Imagine a flower just bursting from the bud and spreading 'round the odor of spring, and you may form some faint idea of the effect she produced. To Marrion she was not a woman, she was *the* woman—the type, the abstrac-

tion, the eternal enigma—which has caused, and will forever cause, to doubt, hesitate and tremble, all the intelligence, the philosophy, and religion of humanity.

All his soul was in his eyes; Eve, Pandora, Cleopatra, Phyrne, passed before his imagination and said: "Do you understand, now?" and he answered: "Yes, I understand."—Robert was safe at home and was now sleeping quietly, so Marrion thought he had done his duty.

"I shall leave you now, Mrs. Milburn; he will be all right when he has had his sleep out."

"Oh, do not leave us, what shall I do without you?" she pleaded in child-fashion.

"If it will serve you in the least, I shall be glad to remain," he assured her, as he resumed his seat.

After all, he did not know but that it was best for him to stay. Too well he knew that to every sleep like this there is an awakening that needs a moderator.

Marrion Latham was a tall, splendid-looking man, with a proud, commanding manner. His intimates styled him, "The Conqueror." He had always had a handsome annuity besides the income he realized from his plays. He had enough money to make the hard world soft, win favors, gild reputation, and enable one to ride instead of walk

through life; consequently, he had self-indulgent habits, and was destitute of those qualities of self-endurance and self-control that hard work and poverty teach best. Yet he had that high sense of honor which is most necessary to such an imaginative, passionate and self-willed nature as he possessed.

While he sat there quietly, Robert became restless. The stupor was wearing off, and the dreaded awakening came.

"May I trouble you for a glass of water?" was Marrion's request, that would absent Mrs. Milburn for awhile.

Robert made a ferocious movement, and began thumping his head.

"Wheels in it," he muttered.

"Be quiet, she does not suspect you," Marrion whispered.

Cherokee came back to find her husband in the delirious throes of his spree. With sweet and tender solicitude, she asked:

"Do you feel better, dear?"

"I have been desperately ill," was his almost rational response.

"Bravo," was Marrion's mental comment, "so far, so good." Now, if she would only allow him to be quiet; but who ever saw a woman tire of ask-

ing questions, and who ever saw a drunken man that did not have a tongue for all ten of the heads he imagined he had?

Cherokee chimed in again:

“I have been very uneasy about you. You know I expected you home by ten.”

“Ten! Fifty would be more like it. I know I took that money.”

“What do you mean, Robert?” she asked, as she stared at him, amazed and wounded.

“He means nothing, he is flighty; that’s the way the medicine affects one,” Marrion explained.

“I tell you she is deucedly pretty”—with this Robert calmed down for awhile.

“He is surely out of his head, Mr. Latham.”

“No, I am not,” thundered Robert, “I should feel better if I were,” and all at once he came to his senses.

“What does this mean? What am I doing, lying down in my dress suit?” he demanded, “and it is broad day.”

“It means that you have kept me up all night lying for you,” whispered Marrion.

“The devil you say! have I had too much?”

Cherokee had gone from the room with the stain of wild roses on her cheek, for she had at last

understood the situation, and its terrible significance.

“I will leave you now, old boy, and I hope this will not occur again. You have an angel for a wife.”

“Thank you, Latham, stay for breakfast with us.”

“No, I have an appointment early this morning.”

At the door he turned and called to Milburn:

“Oh, Milburn, when you have the headache again, there is one thing you must not forget.”

“What’s that?”

“Chloral,” he answered, chaffingly.

CHAPTER XVI

A BOLD INTRUDER.

That evening Robert did not go down town to dinner, but stayed at home, by way of doing penance. He sat in his room, reading; suddenly he threw aside the paper and said:

“What nonsense to pretend to read in a home like this, I ought to give all my time to adoration of you; few men are so blessed.”

“How lovely of you to say that; you are the very best husband in all the world, I know you are.”

“And you, my wife, are just what I would have you be.”

She lifted her face and looked ardently into his:

“I am so happy; are you?”

“As happy as I ever wish to be in heaven,” he replied, with great earnestness.

“Oh, don't say that, it is irreverent—sacrilegious——”

The sentence was cut short by the servant entering and announcing:

“Mr. Latham, Mr. Frost.”

Cherokee, in astonishment, asked:

“Surely it cannot be Willard Frost?”

“S—h—! he will hear you,” warned the husband.

“Then it is he.”

“I shouldn’t wonder, though I do not see what brings him here.”

“He must have been invited; brazen as he is, he never would have intruded here unasked,” she guessed.

“Now, since you speak of it, I did meet him at the Club last night, with Marrion.”

“And you invited him here?” Anger and sorrow were blended in the voice of Cherokee as she asked the question.

“I don’t think I did, though something was said about his calling. The fact is, I had been taking a little too much—too much——”

“Chloral. Yes I understand now, but how could you be friendly with him after the way he had treated me.”

There was reproach in her tones, that told more strongly than her words, of suppressed indignation. Robert noticed it and was visibly embarrassed.

“You forget he gave us a thousand dollar wedding present. He is really a good fellow when you come to know him thoroughly; besides, he is one of the most successful artists in New York,

and can be of great service to me. I want to get to the front, you know."

Cherokee had never told Robert of their meeting, nor that very amount he had so contemptuously returned to her in the guise of a gift—of the reception, and Willard's boast that she would again receive him. She regretted that now; surely the knowledge on the part of the husband would have restrained him.

"You must go to them," she said at length, "they will think strangely of the delay."

"I must go; surely you will accompany me."

"Don't ask it, Robert; make some excuse; I can't meet that man."

"Nonsense! the embarrassment will be but momentary. You surely won't stand in the way of my success; besides, Marrion is there, and I am sure you will enjoy knowing him better."

"Do you really wish me to see this other man, Willard Frost?"

"I do; how can I expect him to be my friend if you fail to receive him?"

"You are everything to me, husband, and I will obey you, although I never expected to be called upon to make a sacrifice like this."

In the meantime, the guests awaited in the library.

“Latham,” said Frost, “you are a first-rate fellow to arrange things so that I can again meet the lovely Mrs. Milburn.”

“‘Again meet her!’ then you know her already?”

“Know her?” the brief interrogatory, with the accompanying shrug of the shoulders and significant laugh, formed a decided affirmative answer.

A swift flush of indignation swept across Marrison Latham’s features. The manner of his companion annoyed him.

“Why have you never called here before?” he asked, coldly.

“We had a trifling misunderstanding some time ago. Report had it that she was somewhat interested in me, and that too, since my marriage to Frances Baxter.”

“And it was to gain admission here that you insisted on Robert’s drinking last night, even after I asked you not to do it?”

“Oh, no, I like Milburn and want to help him in his art. I was free to call without a special invitation, though I was not sorry when he insisted upon my coming.”

“Hush! here they are.”

The two men rose. Willard Frost’s gaze went straight to the tall, lithe figure that came forward to meet her guests.

Nature had made of her so rare a painting—her's was a beauty so spirituelle—that it awed to something like reverence, those who greeted her. The flush of indignation had disappeared from her face, but the excitement, the agitation through which she had passed had heightened her color as well as her beauty.

The first thing that Marrion said, aside to Robert, was:

“How is that head?”

“That's one on me, gentlemen. Have cigars, it's my treat.”

“With your gracious permission,” remarked Marrion, bowing to the hostess.

“I am pleased to grant it, if you enjoy smoking,” and she handed them matches.

“It is some time since we have met, Mrs. Milburn,” said Frost, with cold courtesy, while the other men were talking together.

“Yes, it is quite a long time. Your wife is well, I trust.”

“I am sorry, but I really can't enlighten you on that point.”

“Is she out of the city?”

“I am told so. The fact is, she has recently taken a decided liking to a young actor. I understand that she is going upon the stage.”

Cherokee was speechless. The coolness and impudence of that man had completely dumbfounded her.

“She preferred histrionic art to my poor calling,” he continued; “I have instructed my attorneys to take the necessary legal steps to leave her free to follow it.”

Here Robert and Marrion joined them, and the conversation became general.

“By the way,” said Latham, when they got up to leave, “I had almost forgotten my special mission; I came to invite you to a box party next Wednesday evening.”

“We shall be most charmed to go,” replied Cherokee, who had resolved to make herself agreeable. “What is the play?”

“It is my latest.”

“We shall be well entertained, if it is one of yours,” cried Robert enthusiastically.

“And the name of your play, Mr. Latham?”

“When Men Should Blush.”

“An odd title, but he is famous for thinking of things that no one else ever thought of,” put in Frost

“Yes, I occasionally think of you,” added Latham, good-naturedly.

“You forget that thoughts and dreams sometimes

assume the form of nightmares; you had better leave me out—I might be an unpleasant incubus to encounter.”

Latham smiled, and there was the least tinge of a sneer in his smile.

When Cherokee closed her eyes to sleep that night, she could only see Willard Frost—the one man in all the world whom she loathed; the coldest, most unsympathetic creature that ever got into a man's skin instead of a snake's.

True, he was handsome, but for the red lips that seemed to indicate sensuality, and the square, resolute jaw that showed firmness of purpose.

* * * * *

On Wednesday evening all kept their engagement. Lounging in handsome indifference, surrounded by his invited guests, Marrion saw the curtain rise at —— Theater.

His box was the center of attraction. Wild, fervid, impassioned was the play—this youngest creation of his brain. The shifting scenes were gracefully sudden, the denouement clever, and, as the curtain went down on the admirable drama, he had shown the audience that there was something new under the sun.

With some, to write is not a vague desire, but an imperious destiny. This was true of Marrion Latham; to this man of only eight and twenty years, heaven had entrusted its solemn agencies of genius. What a vast experience he must have had, for few people become great writers without tasting all these fierce emotions and passionate struggles. It is said that we must measure our road to wisdom by the sorrows we have known. Whatever grief he had borne had been in silence, and his laugh was as joyous as when a boy.

He was of high lineage, and Southern born; he came of a stock whose word was as good as their oath, and his success did not make him cut his actors on the street, as some dramatists have been known to do.

He had arranged a little supper after the play. Cherokee, pleased with the fine mind of her host, and having determined not to stand in the way of her husband's advancement, was the life of the table. She did not put herself forward or seek to lead; much of the charm of her words and manner rose from utter unconsciousness of self.

She was both too proud and too pure hearted for vanity, spoke well, and to the purpose. If but a few words, they were never meaningless; and pervading all she said there was that aroma of culture

which is so different from mere education. Should she have had no charm of face, her gifted mind alone would have made her attractive beyond most women.

During the supper the talk drifted on woman's influence. Frost asserted that no woman ever reformed a man if his own mind was not strong enough to make him brace up; he would keep on to the end, an erring, stumbling wretch.

"You are mistaken," returned Marrion, "many a good woman, mother, wife, has borne the cross to where she could lay it aside and take a crown. Take the drink habit, for instance; once an excessive, always one. Now, I can drink or let it alone."

"I detest a drunkard," said Frost, laconically.

"But somebody's father, brother, or husband, might be strong in all other points and weak in that one," Cherokee spoke, just a trifle severely.

"And woman has the brunt of it to bear," said Marrion.

"I hold that we are nearer true happiness when we demand too little from men than when we expect too much," was Frost's retort.

Here Robert turned to Marrion:

"I see, from your play, that you believe in an equal standard of morals. You propose to be as lenient with women as with men."

“Say, rather, I am in favor of justice,” was the manly reply.

“This doctrine of yours is quite dangerous,” Frost interrupted, to which Marrion answered:

“It is the doctrine of Him who teaches forgiveness of sins.”

“Ah, Latham, you have taken a stupendous task upon yourself, if you mean to reform men,” laughed Frost.

“Some men and beasts you can improve, but other natures—like wild hyenas—once wild, wild forever,” was Marrion’s bright rejoinder.

“I am not looking for them,” was the answer.

“Come to the office with me for a moment,” Willard Frost turned to Robert, when the suggestion for returning home had been made. “There is a fine painting in there that I want you to see.”

They were nearly half an hour absent, but, engaged in pleasant conversation, Cherokee and Marrion did not notice the lapse of time. When the men came back, the quick eye of Marrion noticed that Robert had been drinking, and that near the border line of excess.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ERRAND OF MYSTERY.

It was some months afterward. Cherokee, gowned in violet and gold, was on her way to the Chrysanthemum Show, where she felt sure of meeting some of her friends. She was walking briskly, when she was importuned by an old man for help. Dropping some coins into his entreating palm, she passed on.

How little we know whom we may meet when we leave our doors, and before entering them again. Often one's whole life is changed between the exit and entrance of a home.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Milburn, how pleased I am to meet you here. Are you out for pleasure?"

Whose voice could that be but Willard Frost's, sounding in her ears like clods on a coffin.

"Yes, I presume one would call it pleasure, going to the Chrysanthemum Show and to get some flowers for hospital patients. You know the sick love these little attentions."

"There, that's an illustration of what I am con-

templating. Do you know I think you are just the person I wanted to meet this morning?"

"Why?" she asked, indifferently.

"Because you can do a great kindness as well as give pleasure to some one who is in need of both, if you will?"

"You want me to help some one who is in distress?"

"I do. Will you?"

"How much does the person need?"

"Your presence would be more good than any service you could render."

"Then I will go and get my husband to accompany us. He is charitable, and likes to do these things with me."

"I have just come from his studio; he is very busy now, and I think he would prefer not being interrupted. I have been down all the morning giving a few criticisms on that 'Seaweed Gatherer.' That is truly a work of art. But surely you will not refuse me that friendly service."

"Where would you have me go, and whom to see?"

"A young girl who is dying without a kind word."

"A woman—has she no friends or means?"

"I am the only friend she has, the pure, noble, unfortunate," he said, aiming at tenderness.

“Indeed, I never refuse to help anyone, when I can, but really I prefer someone to be the bearer.”

“Yes, but she has requested me to bring you; this desire comes from a dying human being.”

“But, pray what does she know of me; I do not understand?” she asked, disapprovingly. “You might get yourself and me into a scrape.”

“She has been a model for Robert as well as myself; you have seen her at the studio, and she fairly worships your beauty, your gentleness.”

“Strange my husband has never mentioned her reduced condition. I fail to recall her,” and she drew back with a sinking of heart; she wanted to do what was right, always.

“Oh, think again. I am sure you saw her when you and Robert came to see my ‘Madonna’; I was working on her then.”

“Yes, I do recall a beautiful girl who was posing that day. If it is from her, this request, I will go.”

“Thank you, thank you; she will be so nearly happy, for she has never failed to speak of you whenever I have seen her. I shall never forget how she raved when she saw you, and a question she asked.”

“What was that?”

“‘Does her heart fulfill the promise of her eyes?’ she asked me, as though the answer was of great importance.

“I asked what she meant.

“She answered, ‘They promise to make some one happy; to remove all troubles and cares, making a heavenly paradise upon this earth?’ She wanted to see you, so that you might swear that this promise would be kept.”

“She must be an enthusiast,” Cherokee reflected, losing all sense of the strangeness of this question for the time.

They started on in the direction that Frost wanted to go. She felt as though she was walking through yellow rustling leaves, as she had done back in her lesson-days, when she was trying to steal away from the teacher or playmates on the lawn.

More than once, as she hurried along, Cherokee asked herself if she were not imitating the leopard, and developing another spot of foolishness.

When they reached the place there was nothing strange or unusual about it. He opened the door and walked in, as though he was accustomed to going there; then he softly pushed an inner door and peeped in.

“She is sleeping now, poor tired soul; her great-

est blessing is sleep"—offering Cherokee a chair, "we will wait awhile."

She nervously looked about her. Her beautiful eyes, so pure, so clear, so unshadowed by any knowledge of sin, knew nothing of the misery that had been in the enclosure of these walls.

Presently a frail, crooked woman came in, abruptly. Cold and bitter was her gaze:

"Why did you not come sooner?" she demanded of Frost, sternly.

"It was impossible; am I not in good time?"

"Yes, for you a very good time—she is dead," and a short, quick gasp came from the withered frame.

"Do you mean it?" he said, looking at the woman who seemed quite overcome, in spite of her hard, cruel face.

"Go and see for yourself," and she pointed to the room he had entered before.

Cherokee stood silent, and bowed, as became the house of mourning.

"No, if she is dead, we need not go in," Frost said, quickly.

But the old woman recoiled a step: "I understand you are ashamed of her."

"No, not that, but it is now too late to grant her request."

“I would know it, and it would do no harm for me to know that you could keep your word.”

“Then we will go in; you lead the way.”

Cherokee hesitated, and the miserable woman, seeing this, cried in sudden excitement:

“Is your wife afraid of her, now that she is dead?”

Willard Frost, at the mention of wife, started. He had, after all, forgotten to explain that to Cherokee.

“Do not heed her wild fancy,” he whispered, as he motioned her to go in front.

Instinctively the hag folded her wasted hands; most piteously she raised her bewildered eyes, imploringly, to Cherokee.

“Won’t you please go in, for if she can see from the other world to this, she will be pleased.”

“If it pleases you, I will go in for your sake.” As they entered the waiting doorway, Frost walked to the low lounge—he was more deeply moved than he cared to show. There, before him, lay the pulseless clay, the features horribly distorted, the hands and limbs terribly drawn.

“This,” he said to Cherokee, “was caused by paralysis. Nature was once a kind mother to her.”

He shook his head, musingly, and ran his fingers over the sleeper’s hands. At first he did it with a

sort of tentativeness, as if waiting for something that eluded him. All at once he leaned over and kissed the hands—he seemed moved by a powerful impulse. Through his mind there ran a thousand incidents of his life, one growing upon the other without sequence; phantasmagoria, out of the scene-house of memory.

He saw a vast stretch of lonely forest in the white coverlet of winter, through which a man followed a desolate track. He saw a scanty home, yet mirthful, and warm from the winter wood. Again he saw that home, when even in the summer height it was chilled and blighted. Then, there, he saw a child with red-gold curls, and he wondered how fate would deal with that baby—a laughing, dimpled romper, without a name.

These are a few of the pictures he saw.

Cherokee, ever gentle in her ministries, spoke kind words to the old woman, whom she supposed was the mother.

She had come too late for another good; the dead do not answer even the most loving, the sweetest voices, and this girl had joined the mysteries. So, what was left but to offer prayers and tears for the living?

While Cherokee talked, the woman sat very still, her face ruled to quietness. At length she said:

“She is better dead.”

The comforter looked surprised; what a strange way for a mother to speak.

“Let us go, now,” urged Frost, impulsively. As they passed out, he placed money in the woman’s hand.

“Put her away nicely.”

Motioning him back, the woman caught his arm and whispered:

“By the right of a life-long debt, I now ask for peace.”

“Is that all?” he sneered.

“And I hope you will be a better man,” she added.

They were on their way home. A flush crept slowly up Willard Frost’s face, then, heaving a sigh and quickly repenting of it, he tried to laugh, to drive away the impression of it.

It had been dismal within, but it was lovely without. The gray transparency of the atmosphere lent a glamour to the autumn hues, like flimsy gauze over the face of some Eastern beauty, and the seductive harmony of the colors acted like magic music on the spirit.

“That dead girl was once the most exquisite piece of flesh I ever saw. This is truly a legend of the beautiful. She supported herself by posing for

artists, as long as her beauty lasted," so Frost began his story, "but six months ago she was stricken with paralysis, which so misused her that it took the bread from her mouth, and but for me they would have starved.

"I had great sympathy for the girl, and from her face I had made many hundreds, so I considered it my duty to look after her in this dark hour of affliction."

"That was just and noble," said Cherokee, forgetting for a moment the record of the man.

He went on: "She loved me devotedly, though she knew I was married, and during her illness she fancied she would be perfectly happy if she convinced herself that I was not ashamed to present her to my wife."

"Then it was your wife she wanted to see, and I was to be presented under false colors," she demanded, rather sternly.

"It would have been all the same to her, she never would have been wiser."

"Mr. Frost, I believe you would do anything, and let me say, just here, my courtesy to you is not real. I do it because, strange to say, my husband likes you."

Just then they reached her stopping place.

There was considerable commotion on the car, Frost caught her arm:

“Wait a moment, until they put that drunken brute off.”

Suddenly, Cherokee wrenched herself away, and stepped quickly, unassisted, to the street.

In front of her was the man they had assisted from the car. A gentle arm was passed through his:

“Come, Robert, we will go home together.”

She never looked back, although Willard Frost stood and watched them, a mingled smile of pity and triumph upon his sinister face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIMELY WARNING.

Robert sat in his studio, when presently the door opened.

“My dear Latham,” cried the artist.

“Well, Milburn, how are you?”

They were, at last, alone together. Involuntarily, and as if by an irresistible impulse, Marrion began at once:

“Robert, I must speak to you on a delicate subject. You are my friend, a man for whose interests I would all but give up my life,” and his mission flashed across the other’s mind.

“What are you driving at?”

“At the question whether or not you will stop to think.”

“I most frequently stop and forget,” was the good-natured reply.

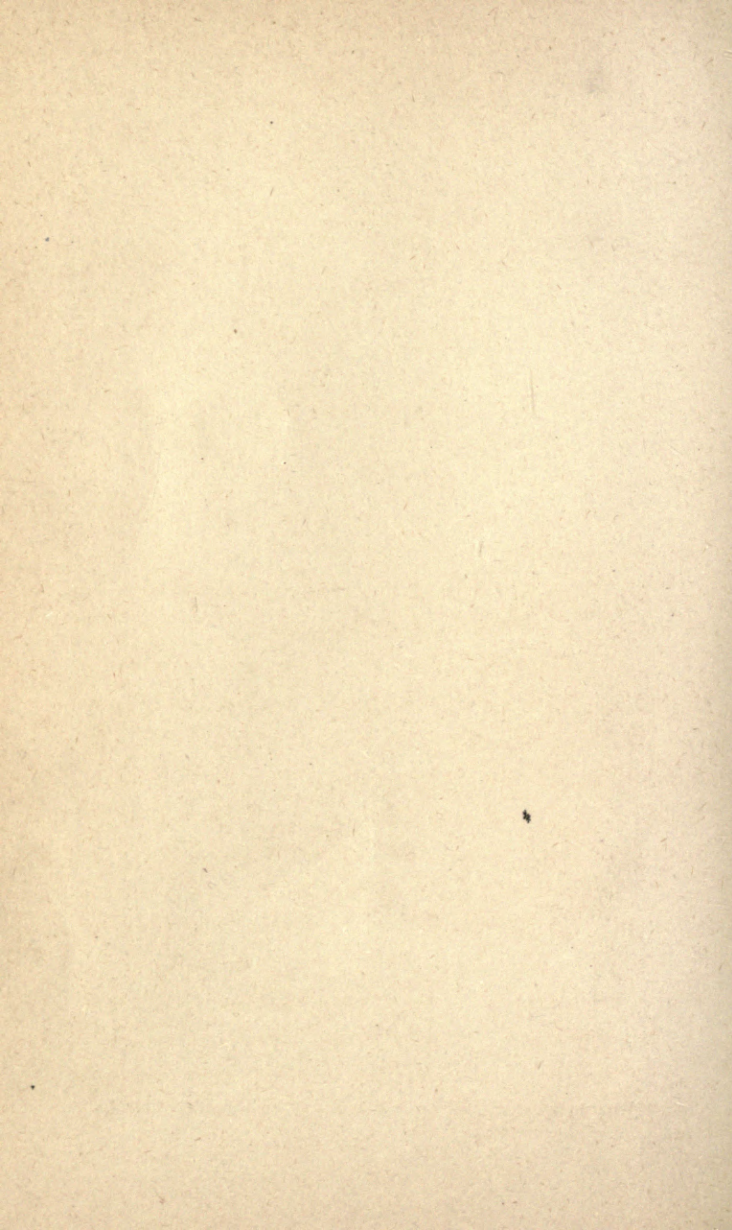
“That is too true; you surely do not realize how you have behaved the past few months.”

“Well, and what of it? I should like to know whom I have hurt besides myself.”

“Everyone who cares for you.”



" But he was suddenly awed by a firm ' Stop there! ' " Page 50.



“But, look here, Latham, I am able to take care of myself.”

“It is a little remarkable you do not prove that statement.” Here he assumed a more dignified manner.

“You mean my drinking; well, I pay for it, and——”

“If the matter ended with the price, there would not be so much harm done,” retorted Latham.

“Very few know I ever touch a drop.”

“But those who know are your nearest and best friends, or should be.”

“Oh, well! the best of us are moulded out of faults;” the other eyed him fixedly.

“And these faults have a tendency to produce blindness. I believe you fail to see that your morbid cravings for drink and fame are making your domestic life trite and dull—more than that, miserable. You are losing sight of home-life in this false fever of ambition, and,” he added gravely, “grieved, ashamed I am to say it.”

“This is startling, to say the least of it,” Robert exclaimed, as he nervously thrummed the desk by his side. “Here I have been imagining myself the model husband. True, I drink occasionally.”

“You mean, occasionally you do not drink,” Marrion interrupted.

“Look here, Latham; if this came from another than you, I should say it is none of your —— business.”

“Say it to me, if you feel so disposed. I only speak the truth.”

“But I must be walked with, not driven; bear that in mind, old boy.”

“I want to ask you, Robert, if you ever observed that the desire for distinction grows upon us like a disease?”

“I believe it does, since you speak of it.”

“You know it, for you have been gradually growing weaker in everything else, since your ambition has been set stark mad over that contest.”

“Why should not I let everything else go? Think of it; who ever paints the acceptable ‘Athlete’ is to be acknowledged famous, even more famous than he ever dreamed.”

“How do you know that?”

“How do I know it? By the fact that it gets the mention honorable in the palace of art, which is a great step—a veritable leap I would say—towards fame.”

“What good are words of applause echoing through the empty walls of a ruined home?”

“Ruined home,” Robert repeated, “preposterous! My wife has all the money she wants;

dresses second to none in the set in which she moves. What more could a woman want?"

"A husband and his love," said Marrion, emphatically. "Would you say you had a wife and that wife's love, if half the time she was in no condition to care for your home?"

"That is not a parallel case. Drinking in a man is not so bad, it is a popular evil; more men drink than sin in any other way."

"And all the other sins follow in its train."

"You know, Latham, I am moral in the main. I need a stimulant; it is something a brain worker must have. Besides——"

"Besides what?"

"I am not happy since I became so ambitious," said Robert, gloomily, and, continuing—"I cannot stand the bitterness of self-reproach. When reason is wide awake, remorse fastens its fangs upon it. I—" His head fell heavily upon the table, and he lay there in silent suffering.

"It is your yielding to temptation, more than your ambition, that hurts a refined nature like yours; but as long as you can feel sorrow you are not wholly bad."

"I don't know, Marrion, for brooding over this unfortunate habit I have all unconsciously drifted into, sometimes drives me almost mad; it is then

that the tempter gets in his work. Something tells me there is but one way to get swift relief—drink and forget.”

“But what of the wife? Does it speak to you of the wearing ache of her waking—of the lonely hours of her watching alone, while your conscience rests in soothing sleep?”

“Yes, I think of her love, her patience, but the best of us have our faults, and a woman should not demand from the busy, anxious spirit of man all that romance promises and life but rarely yields.”

“You have been blessed with one who demands nothing; she suffers in silence. Her very gentleness, her patient womanliness should win you to right. But, my friend, she pines for your attention—those little things that would tell her she was appreciated. She is like a tendril, accustomed to cling, which must have something to twine around, and make wholly its own.”

“I never give her a cross word; I leave her to do as it best pleases her.”

“There, that is the mistake. The secret of the danger lies in that one act of yours. How many have I known, lovely and pure like your wife, who have suffered their unguarded affections—the very beauty of their nature—to destroy them.”

“That is true; I have known many such cases,” admitted Robert.

“Then, in the name of God, pull yourself together, man; brace up, I will help you all I can.”

Robert raised his head:

“Marrion, I have never esteemed you half so much as I do now; your interest is unselfish and sincere, I know that.”

“It is, Milburn, and I am glad you take it as I meant it. It has been said, the loves and friendships of life are its sweetest resources. All else—special achievements, creative genius in any form of manifestation—ministers to them. To live in an atmosphere of sympathy is to live in an atmosphere of heaven, and often it is true that a man must hold his friends unjudged, accepted, trusted to the end.

The artist reached out his hand, and the other quit speaking.

“There is my hand and promise to leave drink alone when I have finished my picture. Even now, I would give the world to look straight into God’s good face and smile with the glad lips my mother used to kiss.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLAINT OF PAIN.

Cherokee was sad; what wife is not who has a drunken husband? Drearly broke the winter days, and drearily fell the winter nights. One by one, she often watched the neighboring lights go out, and human sounds grow still. When the phantom-peopled dark closed around her companionless hours, then would come the frightful waiting—in the watches of the night.

Waiting in that awful hush that stifles the breath of hope; then, day after day of longing; can you imagine it? Forever busy at the one unending task of dragging through the weary hours, from the early, painful waking of dawn, alone with sorrow, to the tardy, feverish, midnight sleep—alone with sorrow still.

Like a good woman she sought to hide her husband's faults, and keep the watch alone; but Marrion was like one of the family; he was there at any and all hours, and she could not keep the truth from him; he was sorry for her, and had such a sweet, gentle way of ministering. To the anguish

of her face he often made reply, "Yes, I know how you feel about it, and I will try to help you if there is a way."

Cherokee had somehow learned to expect everything from him. She looked to him for advice and assistance. At first she could see no harm in his guidance—his help. But Marrion had that vivid, intense nature which gives out emotional warmth as inevitably as the glow-worm sheds its light when stirred. She had discovered this, and had endeavored to cool the relationship, but the tingling feeling was there, and in both herself and him she had detected a sense of mutual dependence.

His voice and step thrilled her, and her smiles were brighter when he came about. He always had an amusing story, a ready reminiscence; for, having been the world over, he had gleaned something from everywhere that had possibly escaped the eyes of others.

To Cherokee he seemed the most original person, acquaintance with him being like the doorway of a new life—to another world. Such was the dangerous channel into which they had drifted, neither discovering their peril until escape seemed almost impossible.

"What shall I do?" she questioned herself, so many countless, maddening times. Her determina-

tion arrived at again and again, was to fly from the glowing thistle that might stunt all Life's roses, and make them come to the dropping at half blow. About Marrion Latham she was insane.

"Insane?" you say. That's a harsh word isn't it? But in love are any of us particularly sane? Something said to her, "try to realize that happiness is not for woman, but as years go on you will not mind that. Only be true to your sense of right and you will find sweet peace, and a great content will be sure to come at last."

She felt that the best plan for her was to take her husband away from his associates, herself away from hers, and let time and change bring about a reformation, and, in spite of the warning, she hoped that the old fond love would come to them again.

There is no period in life when we are more accessible to friendship than in the interval which succeeds the disappointment of the passions. There is then, in those gentler feelings, something that keeps alive but does not fever the affections. Marrion had influenced himself to believe that such was his interest in Cherokee, but he was never more deceived.

Cherokee's trouble in regard to her husband, and her fear of the growing regard for Marrion were

not her only annoyances; occasionally she met Willard Frost.

She could not avoid treating him politely, her duty towards her husband forced her to do that; but she regarded him with veritable repugnance.

One evening, Robert had invited Marrion to dinner, and the latter had arrived before her husband. As he and Cherokee sat waiting, the maid entered with a package. It was an exquisite surprise. Though it was well into March, winter's keen blast had not so subdued the spring warmth as to keep it from bringing into quick bloom the pansies and jasmynes.

"Robert knows how dearly I love flowers; he has sent them on to make me happier and announce his coming, the dear boy," she exclaimed with a touch of her old time impulsiveness. She kissed them, and questioned if they had brought back her lost faith—her girl's joy in loving.

"I wish I could keep them alive always," she sighed, sweetly.

While she began to arrange them in the vase, her maid, whose eyes appeared like leaves of dusty mullein, stared at her because she had kept her waiting.

"What shall I say to the messenger?"

"Tell him there is no answer."

“Here is his card, madam.”

Cherokee stared wildly, as if a serpent had wriggled around her feet.

“It is from Mr. Frost—this gift,” and she ventured an imploring glance into Marrion’s face.

“What would you do with them?” he asked.

“Do? What can I do but send them back.”

As Marrion watched her admiringly, and saw her take each flower and lay it carefully back into the box, he felt that his quiet friendship was tottering above a molten furnace.

“I trust you approve of my course, Mr. Latham?” she queried, as Annie took the box away.

“It would make me perfectly happy if I were the husband.” He supplemented the impulsive words with a decided blush, in which Cherokee could not choose but join. Then he cried:

“Why didn’t we meet before, you and I?”

She didn’t answer this, for, hearing steps in the passage, she ran out to meet her husband; whether he was drunk or sober she never failed in her little tenderness, that should have brought to him an over-payment of delight.

CHAPTER XX.

A CROP O' KISSES.

It was six o'clock, and the lowering sun had singed the western sky with a scallop of faded brown.

April, with her wreathed crook, was leading her glad flock about the hem of the city's skirt, winding a golden mist away into the country's lushways. Nature's voice sounded: "Oh heart, your winter's past."

But it was not true with Cherokee, as she sat by the window waiting for her husband. The room was quite still; she was only half admitting to herself that it had come—the divide; in her hand she held a dainty pair of white gloves; in one of the fingers there was a crumpled paper—a note, maybe—but this she did not know, though what husband would believe it?

Presently he came in, and she greeted him as usual, though he had been cross that morning.

"I can't imagine why I am so tired all the time, it seems I do very little," he said, as he dropped wearily down on a couch near by.

“It is not so wonderful to me that you are tired, you are overworked,” she said, sitting beside him, “once in a while you should call a halt.”

“I mean to sometime, but not yet, I cannot stop yet.”

“Have you secured your model for the Athlete?”

“Not yet, they are hard to find. I must have a man with solid and graceful curves of beauty and strength, and they are not picked up every day. Few men are of perfect build.”

“Mr. Latham has a fine physique, why don't you get him?”

“What an idea! Do you suppose for a moment that a man of his means would hire himself out by the hour for such a price as I could afford to pay? Don't let me hear you speak of it again, he would positively be insulted.”

Presently Robert's eyes were attracted toward the floor:

“What is that?” he asked, pointing to a white something.

“I did not know I dropped them?” and she sprang hastily, as if to conceal what it was.

“Bring it to me. What is it?”

She bowed her head low and made no answer.

“Look here, Cherokee, I will see what it is,” and he laid his hand on her arm.

She raised her eyes to him and began bravely enough:

“Robert, it is best that you do not see——”

“What, you refuse? It is not necessary for my wife to keep anything from me.”

“Even if it could only annoy you?”

“Yes, if it half killed me, I would insist upon knowing.”

“I don’t mean that you ought not, that I—Oh!”

“Come, Cherokee, don’t get so confused, you can’t make a success of deceiving me. I presume I know it anyway. Anna said you had received flowers last night from Frost—I guess that is the love letter that came with them.”

Suddenly her gentle eyes looked startled; she was humiliated.

“I would not have believed that you would question the maid about the conduct of your wife.”

He watched her for a moment in troubled silence, but did not speak.

“Robert, do you think this is a manly, honorable way to act?”

“It is—is what you deserve,” he answered coldly.

“You are mistaken; while Anna Zerner was making her report, did she inform you that I returned Mr. Frost’s flowers?”

“No. She did not tell me that; I supposed you kept them.”

He looked at her squarely.

“Nothing has ever shaken my faith in you, Cherokee, until now, and this I must and will understand. Take your choice between force and persuasion.”

A deep wave of self-conscious color rushed over her face; suddenly she grew very pale, and her whole attitude toward him stiffened.

She laid the little white gloves in his hands, saying:

“I did not care to worry or accuse you.”

He shrank back, and they eyed each other fixedly.

“I call this a mean, contemptible trick,” he said, bitterly, “and now what are you going to do about it?”

“I have done all I intend to do,” she said, calmly.

“And pray what’s that?”

“Mended a rent in the fore-finger.”

Robert felt abashed at this, though there were still some ugly lines between his brows.

“Let’s kiss and make up,” he said, and as she wound her arms about him, his whole manner changed, softened into melting.

“I did not read the note in the glove, if you believe me.”

“I do believe you, for it was not a note, but a programme of ‘Ogallalabs’;” then he laughed. “And the gloves belong to Marrion’s sweetheart; he left them at the studio and I just——”

“Oh! that will do,” she said merrily, as she supplemented his explanation with kisses.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HOPE OF CHANGE.

They were christening Marrion's new spider, Robert and Cherokee.

"We will drive an hour or so longer, if you are not too tired."

"I am not at all tired; let us go on," she insisted.

"I will show you where Latham's fiancee lives," he carelessly proposed.

"When are they to be married?" she asked, scarcely above her breath.

"I don't know the date, but she will get one of the finest boys on earth. They will have this magnificent country home to spend their summers in, and that is such a blessing—the air out there is so pure and sweet and healthful. It is a great pity that everybody can't get an occasional taste of country life."

"I did not know we had come so far, but here we are in the woods—the real country. I can almost hear the frogs calling from slushy banks, and the faint, intermittent tinkle of cow-bells steal-

ing over pasture lands. I do love the country!" she exclaimed, fervently.

"So do I," laughed Robert, "but the country has its tragedies, too. For example: my old-maid Aunt once made me weed the onion bed on circus day. I would have had to ride a stick horse to the town, four miles away, where the tent was pitched, but children would do almost anything to get to a circus."

"Yet you did not get to that one?" asked Cherokee, gaily.

"No, and for fifteen years I treasured that against my Aunt."

"And I should not wonder if you hold it still."

He dropped his voice to the register of tenderness and said, sadly: "I hold nothing against her now. The dear old creature had sorrow enough—she died unmarried."

Then they came to the home he was to show her. After that there was a lull in the conversation.

If Cherokee had but known that the plighted troth was broken—had gone all to pieces, in fact—she might have felt some relief for that dull ache she felt. Suddenly she turned to her husband:

“Robert, I have a great favor to ask?”

“What’s that?”

“Let’s take a vacation. Change would help us both.”

“I am too busy, Cherokee, I cannot leave my work now. People are never contented. Those in the depths of the country sigh for the city excitement, and those in the city long to be soaked in sunshine and tangled in green fields.”

“I suppose it is selfish. I shall not ask you again,” she answered, resignedly.

“If things were different, nothing would please me more than to take an outing by mountains or seaside.”

“Neither for me,” she answered. “I would rather spend the summer down at my old home in Kentucky; you know my cousin owns it, and no one lives there at present. I should like to go back where I could sit again beneath a big, low moon, and hear the reapers sing—where I could see the brown gabled barns, and smell the loose hay-mows’ scented locks.”

“If that’s all, you can go to any farm and see as much.”

“That isn’t half; I want to see my mother’s grave, with its headstone that briefly tells her record, ‘She made home happy,’ ” and then she said, with a little sigh: “There is still another reason—I would have you all to myself a whole season.”

“Would you really like that?” he asked, brightening.

“More than anything.”

“Then I promise you, you shall go.”

As they drove up to the stoop, upon their return, they saw Marrion waiting.

When he assisted Cherokee to the street, he fancied he never had seen in her manner so much softness, so much of that sweet, wonted look that goes with domestic charm. Her fine, regular features expressed nothing sadder than a pleased pensiveness.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HOME IN THE SOUTH.

They had gone to the country—to Kentucky. The wind seemed to blow out of all the heavens across the greening world. With what light touch it lifted the hazel, bent to earth at morning. How gentle to the wind-flower—its own spoiled child.

Quiet brooded over the wide, gray farm-house. All the doors stood open to the soft air, and Cherokee had gone into the garden, where the commonplace flowers were in disarray. Her straying foot crushed memoried fragrance from borders all overgrown; wild thyme ran vagrantly in happy tangle everywhere. She did not like to see such riotous growth where once had been borders, clean and kept.

The breeze came to her like the soothing touch of a friendly hand; the tall elms, nodding, seemed to outstretch their arms in blessings on her head, murmuring, in leaf music, "Be kind to her." The effect was subtle as the viewless winds that in their

very tenderness are uplifting. Those same trees had bent their strengthening shade in those other days, when she was but a learner in the infant school of sorrow, and scarcely able to spell its simplest signs. She rambled through the laurel greenery, her soul full-charged with its own feelings, nor able to restrain their passionate flow. Pretty soon Robert joined her, saying:

“I have a surprise for you; my model is coming to-day.”

“Why, who on earth?”

“Bless the dear old boy, it is Latham.”

Striving to be strong, she said, softly: “I trust you are hopeful, now.”

“Yes, I am greatly helped up. He will likely not be here until the night train. I am going for a short hunt,” and shouldering his gun he walked towards the woodland.

When Cherokee had watched him out of sight she went into the house. So Marrion was coming into her life again—the wound must be cauterized before it had time to heal. She wearily dropped her head upon the broad window-sill.

The train had already whistled for the station, and Marrion was on his way to the farm-house; he could see the red roof and chimney tops, half hid in leaves, as he passed down a road where wild elders bloomed by rail fences.

The glimmering water-line flowed on westward between broad fields of corn and clover. Down in the deep wood he crossed the stream; here he got out, unreined his horse to let it drink, then he lay down on the cool brink and let the living water lave his lips.

This was surely a place of delight. The creek was no sluggish stream, crawling between muddy banks, but a young water-giant, turbulent and full of crystal bravery. A vernal harmony of subtle sweets loaded all the air, while the winds echoed their chant of rejoicing that mingled with the waters' sweep and swell, and away up among the tallest trees the forest organ was playing the anthem of resurrection.

Somehow there stole over him a spell of rhythmic motion; the scene was wholly intoxicating. It seemed that he had escaped from the soulless tumult of the blistering street and found himself in a virgin world. Wood-birds bathing in the ripples left them dimpling with delight as they, twittering, flew away. Ivy dangled wantonly about him,

while trailing moss seemed grasping him with its waxen tendrils.

Overhead, in the intense blue, where soft clouds drifted like mantles that angels had thrown away, a wizard haze quivered and quivered. The great dark shadow of the present was lifted, and light beamed in where light might never be again. He forgot, for the moment, that he held two lives in the hollow of his hand; he forgot that just ahead of him lay the untried road where he would surely stagger, maybe fall.

Arousing himself from the reverie, he reined his horse and drove on. The remainder of the road was even prettier than the first part had been. Riotous bees stole sweets from blooms before unknissed, and the blossoming peach shed warm its rosy flush against pale drifts of apple boughs.

* * * * *

Sundown was stealing through the land as he reached the door where Cherokee met him. Latham's greeting was grateful, apologetic, most painfully self-reproachful.

"I want you to know it was in his interest that I came."

“Yes, I know that,” and her face strangely softened.

“I just couldn’t refuse him, though I knew it might cost——”

“Hush,” she warned, “we must bear it,” then her eyes fell; she held her breath, and this electrical sympathy between heart and heart told her that she had betrayed herself to him.

Only a moment he hesitated, the next he laid his hand on the back of the chair she had just taken.

“Cherokee, I have a question to ask you; it is best that all should be clear between us, for I want to be your friend—want you to come to me feeling that I would protect you in all things except——”

“Except that I will allow you to advise me.”

“Then tell me, what is Willard Frost to you?” he asked, with quick breath.

“Nothing at all, I only tolerate him because Robert says he needs his influence,” she answered, solemnly.

“Well, I can’t understand how a man like that could help anyone, and I was shocked when I heard of your going with him to visit that patient.”

“Marrion, I thought my husband wished me to go.”

“On the contrary, he was hurt. It was not the

mere fact of going; it was how it looked to the world, such things are so often misjudged. Forgive me if I talk plainly, but a woman can defend her virtue easier than her reputation. Frost is publicly over-fond of you. He names your beauty to low men at clubs, and that is calculated to injure you."

"Yes, I wish he lived in another part of the world. He has done me more harm than everybody else in it."

Then they talked of other things.

"How glad I am that you will pose for the Athlete. Robert will surely win now, for I don't think you have a counterpart presentment on earth," she declared.

"To the world's advantage, no doubt; but tell me," he said, suddenly changing the subject, "are you happier here?"

"Happier than I have been for some time"—her voice trembled.

In her expression Marrion caught an attempt at excess of content and he wondered at it, for he knew so much of her inner life, though he had never questioned her. In that life he found a great deal to keep her from being glad. He felt a sudden twinge of conscience, too, for he knew that much of the satisfaction he saw upon her face was assumed,

lest her sad looks might be construed into a reproach for his coming."

"And how is Robert doing?" he paused, looking at her with half-pitying fondness.

"When he first came he did remarkably well; we spent a short time with our friends, the McDowells, at Ashland. They sent over and had everything arranged here before our coming, even the dinner served the day we arrived. Robert was, or seemed to be, highly pleased with the way we live in this part of the world. During our stay at Ashland, we went with our friends to one of the Governor's Friday receptions; it was an affair of State, but under Southern auspices seemed almost our own. A congenial, pleasant party, each endeavoring to make you feel at home. Fresh, pretty girls served the ices, and chatted merrily a moment or so, then passed on

"Robert looked at this dazzling South-scene, and in its stead fancied the gray-robed eastern zone dropping stiff, scentless, pensive-hued flowers. I use this illustration to you because you appreciate things high-sounding. But the joke on him and his metropolitan training was this—the first thing he remarked on was the unusual brightness and pretty gowning of the attendant waiters, 'But the cool effrontery of their conduct,' he said, 'roused

my ire and almost took away my presence of mind—why they even dared ask me if the evening had been an enjoyable one, and hoped to see me there often.’ He told us how he wiped the perspiration from his brow, and told himself the confounded impudence and intrusion ought to be swiftly checked, but for the life of him he couldn’t think of an effectual way of doing it. We asked him what he finally did. ‘I just took it all, and smiled back,’ he answered, with a crestfallen air.

“What was his astonishment when we told him he was smiling at the Governor’s daughters, and the queens of the social world. We quite enjoyed his discomfort, but he could not reconcile the difference in our ways and the ones he had known.

“Of late he seems to be falling back in his old ways,” she went on, her voice sinking lower yet. “I hope your presence will be strength in his weakness”—she sighed deeply, but the expression on her face was one of kindly resignation rather than hopeless grief.

Marrion started; every syllable of that sweet tremulous voice seemed to unnerve him utterly.

“I don’t want it to make your days darker, at least”—then he added:

“It is better not to be too good to men,” and there was in his voice an accent of kindly warning.

Cherokee listened pensively the while; she could see the path to be trodden by Robert's side, uphill, rough, bristling with thorns.

"I have tried to do what is my part, my duty always."

"And let me tell you how grandly you have succeeded."

Thrilling and flushing she heard this compliment.

"We are Rebels, both of us; perhaps you are partial," she suggested.

"I do admire you, that you are a Southerner, and more because you are a Kentuckian, but surely you would not accuse me of running my political prejudice into individual instance; I want to give you justice, that's all."

He met her eyes wide open to his, and he read, even then, something of the genuine unalterableness of her estimate of him. It was not necessary for her to return a word.

"Speaking of our home, Kentucky," Cherokee began, "why is it that writers quote us as illiterate and droll? It rather makes me lose interest in stories, or books, when I see such gross errors, whether they are willful or not."

"It is but a crop of rank weeds—this class of literature, people have no right to represent others they know nothing of, or discuss a subject to which

they have scarcely been introduced. My characters are actual men and women. I have one they cannot fail to appreciate; you will see yourself as others see you," he said, in softer tones.

An ecstasy of hope lighted her face.

"Will my husband appreciate me then?"—she regretted the question before she had voiced it.

"Will he appreciate you then? Listen, don't think that I speak to praise my own powers as a playwright. I have been a moderate success, but I don't regard myself as a genius. The play will be a success on account of the leading character which I hope to draw true to life. Robert loves you now, but when he sees my play he will worship you then."

There was that in his earnest, enthusiastic face that told her Robert would not be alone in his devotion.

"What do you call your play?"

"I've not determined yet; though I've thought of dubbing it 'A Womanly Woman, or My Heroine.'"

"Don't do that, for I am anything but a heroine."

"No woman was ever a truer one. What title would you propose?"

"You want something that would suggest my real character—my striking characteristics?"

“Most assuredly.”

“Then, remember, that I am always stumbling along, allowing myself to be deceived and duped into doing silly things, and sometimes, as you have just told me, compromising things; weigh all these and call your play ‘A FOOL IN SPOTS.’” She laughed merrily, but there was a certain earnestness in her jest.

“But where is Robert?” Latham suddenly asked. While avowing his devotion to his friend, he had not until now thought of asking this question, nor had it occurred to Cherokee to explain his absence.

“He took his rifle and went out for a hunt,” she said, after a moment’s silence. “He begged that you would excuse him.”

“I find ample excuse in the pleasure of being alone with you.”

“Don’t say that; we must do nothing but what will profit and further the end he seeks.”

“Trust me, I hope to be strong; we must see a little of each other.”

“This is surely best,” she answered, with suppressed emotion.

“And yet, and yet,” he added, as if speaking to himself, “I have much to communicate to you, but loyalty to my friend forbids confidences, though it

is not wrong of me to say I want to see you perfectly happy."

Her lips moved nervously.

"Oh, how sweet your words, and uplifting, I shall keep heart, and work; I have much on my hands, as you see," and so saying she pointed to a litter of correspondence on the table.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STRANGE DEPARTURE.

The old home rose coldly gray 'gainst the darkness of a threatening sky. But yesterday the scene had been one of almost unearthly sweetness and placidity. Ideal summer seemed to have enthroned herself never more to be dislodged, but the morrow brought a storm, phenomenal in its force and destructiveness.

At first one could see, away to the west, but a broad gash of crimson, a seeming wound in the breast of heaven, and could scarcely hear the rising wind moan sobbingly through the trees that with knotted roots clung undisturbed to their vantage ground. Electricity, very like an uplifted dagger, kept piercing with sharp glitter the density of the low hanging haze. Gradually the wind increased, and soon, with fierce gusts, shook the trees with shuddering anxiety. An appalling crash of thunder followed almost instantly, its deep boom vibrating

in suddenly grand echoes; then, with a whirling, hissing rush of rain, the unbound storm burst forth, alive and furious. After an hour there was a temporary lull, the wind no longer surged with violence, rain fell at intervals, a sullen mist obscured earth and heaven.

Robert was preparing to confront the weather when there came a loud knock on the door. Throwing it wide open there stood, in bold relief against the back-ground of dense fog, a sturdy, seafaring figure, dripping like a water dog. Rain was running in little rivers from his soft slouched hat, his weather-beaten face glowing like a hot coal, the only bit of color in this neutral-tinted picture.

“Come inside, the sight of a fire on such a day as this won't hurt you,” said Robert, cheerily, motioning his visitor toward the kitchen where a warm fire blazed.

“Much obliged to you, sir,” returned the intruder, stepping onto the door-mat, and shaking the rain from his hat.

“Another time I'll come in,” and once more shaking the rain from his dripping garments he fumbled for something in the farthest end of his capacious pockets.

“Here's a note—they'll be waiting at the station for you, sir.” These words followed in the uncon-

trolled audibility of a man's voice. There was a rustle of paper, and the next minute Robert told the man :

“That's all right ; I'll be there by eight.”

The light all gone out of her face, Cherokee turned appealingly to Marrion :

“What does this mean—where is he going?”

Shaking his head, sadly :

“I can't tell what he ever means of late.”

Closing the door with an impatient bang, the husband was saying :

“I can't wait for breakfast ; I am going away.”

“Isn't this rather sudden—what is so important as to make you go without your breakfast?” she questioned.

“A matter that concerns me alone. Don't worry if I am not back by nightfall,” and before she could reply he was gone.

Cherokee bit her lips to conceal a quiver ; turning almost appealingly to Marrion, she urged :

“Won't you please go, too?”

He did not answer.

“Please go, and look after him.”

He was calm almost to coldness, and he replied, tentatively :

“Robert would have asked me if he had wanted me along.”

“Oh, dear friend,” she murmured, brokenly, as she sank into a chair, “how much better it would have been if I had never known loving or wedding.”

Marrion looked through the windows into the bleared, vague, misty world, the familiar landscape was unrecognizable in the clinging fog. He understood, as she did, what had taken Robert from his work. He did not look at her, as he returned:

“I hope he’ll quit this, sometime.”

“Someday,” she repeated, “pain and struggle will give place to death, and then the soft shroud of forgetting will help me bear this grief.”

“But I am looking forward to the change to bless this life,” he tried to impress upon her. “He will get through this great work which he considers the effort of a life, and pretty soon he will leave off the old way, and then his past will be atoned for by a future of tenderness and devotion to you.”

“But, dearest friend,” she broke in, greatly agitated, “help me to live in the present, I am weary of waiting. I hunger for repose. Memories crush me while longing has worn my youth away. I know my one longing is hopeless—hopeless as though I should stretch these hungry arms to clasp the sun above us. I have given up hope at last!” Meeting his troubled look her face showed traces

of tears. She handed him a paper and pointed to a bit of verse.

He read to himself:

“I know a land where the streets are paved
With the things which we meant to achieve;
It is walled with the money we meant to have saved,
And the pleasures for which we grieve—
And kind words unspoken, the promises broken,
And many a coveted boon,
Are stowed away there in that land of somewhere,
The land of “Pretty Soon.”

There are uncut jewels of possible fame
Lying about in the dust,
And many a noble and lofty aim
Covered with mould and dust
And oh, this place, while it seems so near,
Is further away than the moon;
Though our purpose is fair, yet we never get there—
To the land of “Pretty Soon.”

The roads that lead to that mystic land
Are strewn with pitiful wrecks;
And the ships that have sailed for its shining strand
Bear skeletons on their decks.
It is further at noon than it was at dawn,
And further at night than at noon;
Oh let us beware of that land down there—
The land of “Pretty Soon.”

Marrion laid the paper by, and summoning all his powers of self-control :

“I spoke of his reformation just now,” he began, as if reading her thoughts. “Answer me one question; if he never reforms, have you ever thought of changing your life?”

“You mean separation; the world or a convent?” she began, gently, growing calmer as she went on, “I had thought of that, I must out with the truth. I went away once, but a good friend advised me to go back. She told me living for others was a long way towards being happy.” Looking on the floor she got out the remainder of her sentence, “and now I intend to stay.”

As she spoke the words to Marrion there came upon her a terrible sense of emptiness and desolation. Obeying a sudden impulse, she arose to leave.

“I shall go to my room now; I must think awhile alone. I am glad its such a sad sort of a day; if it were bright I couldn't stand it.”

Marrion followed her to the door, raised her hands to his lips, and suddenly breaking away as if unworthy to pay such homage cried :

“I could kneel to you, true, grand woman. Your resolution is full of the gravest, tenderest meaning. You think of him only; his reputation is dearer to

you than your own happiness. This nobility of your character is the very touchstone and measure of your womanliness."

She paused on the threshold a moment, then hurried away.

The whole day Marrion spent in sympathy with her. If he could find but some way to make Robert promise never to touch another drop of drink, he knew he would be safe; for he was one man who never made a promise but to keep.

Of ever securing his promise, he sometimes despaired, but not for the world would he hint it to Cherokee.

As the day wore to a close the wind came in fitful gusts; a pale moon glittered faintly among the ragged clouds that drifted across the sky like sails torn from wrecked ships. Cherokee sat by the window watching for Robert.

In that warm latitude the soft, dewless hours are spent in lightless rooms or on piazzas. The daffodil tints of the higher sky were reddening to a guinea gold. There was no other light except the moon. Marrion sat just outside, smoking; he was allured again and again by a strong sense of Cherokee's beauty of face and pose, enticed by some spiritual vivacity, and hazed by cares.

The moon, still pale and languorous, shone from the lately racked sky on the tree buds, so warm in tone that their color became an old ivory, and the limbs and branches black carvings and trceries.

Faint mists rose in wreaths and floated in gossamer folds about the trunks of the trees, and at times above their forms. The whole scene had a meaning of sad regrets.

Cherokee broke the silence:

“I wonder what keeps Robert so long; it must be nine o'clock.”

“Don't be uneasy, he is doubtless with some congenial companion.” Then, almost before he knew it, Marrion asked:

“Did you know that Robert was dissipated before you married him?”

He felt himself tremble, as if he intruded where she knelt. As intimately as he had known her, yet he never before had dared approach her inner life so nearly.

“Tell me all,” he said. “If ever a heart could open to a friend, now must that door unclose.”

“No. I didn't believe it; I should have never married him if I had known. I made a mistake. A Southern girl should only marry one of her kind; he alone could understand and appreciate her nature.”

It was not prompted by accidental harmony, this answer, she felt he had a right to know all:

“When I first loved Robert, he was a splendid masterman, and so tender of me. He seemed the breath of my body; his heart, not mine, beating within me. I fancy now that his love was only a reflection from the flame that burned in my soul, for if it were not true surely that love would have reformed him.”

“No, he does love you, and you will yet be happy together.”

She was hungry for his assurance, and her “Heaven bless you for your sympathy,” was spoken earnestly.

“But I wish he would come. Suppose he has gotten into that quick-sand in the creek bed.”

“Suppose he has swallowed the gun.”

“Don’t speak so lightly,” she corrected.

Marrion thought as he noted her anxiety: “Blind devotion is the sainthood of woman.”

“Now, here he comes. I hope you are happy,” but a chill gripped his heart as he saw it was a stranger, whose walk indicated haste.

“Ain’t this here whar Mars’ Milburn’s wife stay?”

“Yes, what is it?” asked Marrion.

“What is it?” Cherokee repeated, coming forward, “has anything happened to my husband?”

“I’d bin out possum huntin’. I comed up de road, and I mighty nigh run over sumpin in de paff. I got down and he looked powr’ful like de artist I seed at de station.”

“Marrion; my God, he is dead!”

“Wait and I will find out.” He put his arm around her to support her. The stranger kept on talking:

“I tried to tote him, but he ’peared like two men; he’d weigh mighty nigh three hundred pounds, and den I didn’t know as I oughter move him till de coroner and de jury set on him.”

Marrion could not stop him.

“He ain’t bin dead long, marm.”

“That will do,” interrupted Marrion.

“I will go and see; it may not be Robert; it may be someone else.”

“Let me go with you,” she pleaded.

“I don’t know nothin’ better fur you ter do than stay whar you is,” put in the negro.

So Marrion hurried away to look after his friend. There was no sound in the gloomy wood—which was painful—any kind of noise would have been a relief. The thick foliage baffled the slightest light,

and it was with the greatest difficulty that they groped their way, keeping in the road.

“Stop! here he am!” cried the negro, who had been piloting the way. “I thought he couldn’t o’ bin dead long, fer he ain’t cold yet.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF THE WORLD, UNWORLDLY.

It was true that Robert was dead—dead drunk, and to drink was his purpose in leaving Marrion at home. He had been held in check until he could not—he felt it was impossible—work any longer until he had gotten under the influence of drink.

It was more than a week before he was able to resume his work. Marrion put his best efforts forth to sober him, but all resulted in failure. This annoyed him more than he dared tell Cherokee. He felt that Robert had not the proper appreciation; for here he had given up his work and pleasures for a time, that he might aid in the artist's advancement. It surely seemed a thankless task.

One day, when patience was exhausted, he poured forth his very soul in one long, fervent—swear; took up his hat and started out for a walk.

As he tramped, wondered, swore, he strolled on toward the stream. He always was a dream-haunter of the woods, realizing that communion with nature

strangely ministers to heart wounds and breathes sweetened memories.

Suddenly his steps were arrested by the spectacle of Cherokee lying at full length upon the grass, one arm lay across her eyes, the other was stretched on the ground. She had never looked prettier. He sat down by her and took her hand. A thousand thoughts chased themselves with lightning speed through his brain; meanwhile the pressure of that hand continued; he leaned over, took her arm away, and looked down into her face.

Whether it came to him suddenly as a revelation, or grew upon him like a widening light—that knowledge of a love that wronged his honor—it had come too late. Had he been asleep, or mad, that this should have conquered him unawares.

Where was his experience of human nature—his worldly wisdom—his ever abiding sense of honor—that he should have allowed a love for another man's wife to enter his thoughts and take possession, and that man his dearest friend!

It seemed but yesterday that this woman was to him only as dear as a friend might be, without wrong to his or her own faith. Now he knew she was more—a thousand times dearer than all life lives for—dearer than all save honor, if, indeed, he questioned, that were not already lost.

Yet no, there was no wrong. His love was worship, instinct with reverence, he could not for that very love's sake destroy its object.

"You want me to go away and leave you alone, Cherokee?" he asked.

"No, Marrion, no! I am too much alone, and that makes me hungry, desperately hungry, for companionship," she stammered. "But, tell me, how is Robert?"

"No better; I am almost ashamed to ask you to be brave any more, for I've hoped so long without fulfillment."

She answered: "I ask myself how long this banishment is to last—this exile from joy."

"Everything here has an end; the brighter side may come at last."

"No, it will never come, it is all a mistake; even life itself."

"Oh, don't say that, Cherokee; I am with you. Don't you care for——" Here he stopped, but she understood, and her answer, said in silence, was the sweetest word of all.

"I must speak this once at any cost—Great God! and forgive me, I love her so," he whispered, as he seized her listless form, so unresisting, and wildly kissed her brow, her lips, her hair, her eyelids—sealed her to him by those

caresses that were prompted by love's unreasoning fury.

The whole earth revolved in one vast throb of song, and the wind, entuned, seemed to catch the music in its chase. Nothing under the sun could equal those moments with them.

At first they were so happy; then there came a desire—which comes to those of deep and tender sensibilities when their felicity becomes so acute that it verges upon pain—the desire, the involuntary longing, to die—an abandon of self—a forgetting.

In this moment of delirium he was the first to speak.

“I have known from the first that we were meant for each other.”

She did not answer; she was so thoroughly intoxicated just then, that if he should have dared to give her blows her heart would have arraigned him at its bar, with weeping paid the costs, and swore the blow was kind—she loved him so.

“I say that we were meant for each other,” he repeated. “Love like ours should be the first law of the universe, after love of God.”

“I am thy neighbor's wife,” she answered, slowly.

“I now admit no ties except the one that fate has made between your heart and mine.”

“Think, Marrion, of what you say. Is it a sin for us to love?”

He could not answer at once—all the iron in his strong nature was broken down. His emotions, so long withheld, and now uncontrolled, were more than he could bear.

He looked long into her trusting countenance. He was seeking by a violent effort to master himself; but it was only by the heaving of his breast, and now and then a gasp for breath, that he betrayed the stormy struggle within. Though his nature was full of the softer sympathies he could not call them to the front—he was but man. This was the crucial test.

There is in some affections so much to purify and exalt, that even an erring love, conceived without a cold design, and wrestled against with a noble spirit, leaves the heart more tolerant and tender if it leaves it in time.

“It may be wrong,” he said, at length, “but this is our fate—our fate,” as if waking from some hideous dream.

“We are creatures of destiny, I have fought this love but it would not die. The very loneliness of your existence appeals to me; but for that, I might have conquered.”

“And your tender care and help have often

reconciled me to my lot, and extinguished many bitter feelings in me.”

“You trusted me, Cherokee, and I believe there is a kind of sanctity in your ignorance and trust—there is a soul about you as well as a body. Is it with that soul you have loved me?”

“Yes, Marrion, I love you better than life now.”

“Then our love can surely not be wrong. Depend upon it, that God Almighty, who sums up all the good and evil done by his children, will not judge the world with the same unequal severity as those drones of society. Surely He requires not such sacrifices from us; no, not even the wrathful, avenging Father.”

His tone was one of infinite persuasion.

“God understands what you are to me—youth, beauty, truth, hope and life.”

“You forget your friend, my husband,” she warned.

“No, I do not forget. He is a man for whom I would all but die, but I love you better than anything else.”

“And that is more than he does,” she broke in, sorrowfully.

“Cherokee, be mine in spirit? I plead as an innocent man pleads for justice.”

“Stop!” she cried, “let me speak. You have a



" 'Wait!' cried a firm, but sweet voice." Page 229.

profound and generous soul to hear me. Let me ask you not to tempt me; we have gone already too far."

"Not too far when it is with me that you go."

"Yes, Marrion it is, unless we could go all of life's road together. I love you, that you know, but I come to you now, begging you not to tempt me, but to help to make me strong, and to follow the road of sacrifice and duty. My heart cries out to you, but let me not hear. If you love me, prove it, and leave me." Her voice died in a wail, it was a loving, weak soul's despairing cry.

Marrion stood for a moment immovable, then he took her hand with reverential homage.

"Cherokee, you have raised all womankind in my eyes. I did love you—now I worship you. Your open frankness is so unlike the irresolute frailty, the miserable wiles of your sex. You have touched a chord in my heart that has been mute for years. To me you are a garden of roses, you have bloomed even under blight. Beholding you now, I am enabled to forget that the world is evil."

"Blessed be that influence," she murmured, sweetly.

"Yes, God's blessing upon it," he repeated. And he thought of what pangs her high spirit must have endured ere it had submitted to the avowal it

had made. She had been honest enough to confess that she was weak—that she loved him, but that very confession was as a tower of strength to him.

“Cherokee, my idol, what will you of me?” he asked, in tender manly tones.

“I want you to promise, Marrion that you will always like me; let us be what human nature and worldly forms seldom allow those of opposite sexes to be—friends; having for each other that esteem which would be love if the hearts were unadulterated by clay. Your memory will be my nearest approach to happiness. I shall never be happy unless Robert reforms; then the old love and joy would come again.”

There was on her face an expression, in her voice a tone, so appealing that it inspired him to say:

“I will save him by my life if need be.”

She looked at him with an admiring, grateful gaze:

“Your friendship is even better than love.”

“That is both,” he answered.

“You will promise to go away at once, or I cannot live near you and without you.”

“Yes, Cherokee, I promise,” he said firmly, and continued:

“To-day for a short interval we have belonged to each other. Heart has spoken to heart. To-mor-

row you are only my friend's wife. Not a word, not a thought of yours or mine must destroy his trust. Our past will lie buried as in a deep grave, no tears bedewing it, no flowers marking the spot."

So sorrowfully, even despairingly, were the words uttered that it seemed Cherokee's turn to comfort.

"Think of me as almost happy since I know that you love me so," she said, smiling through her tears.

"Tears from you for me," he cried. "Bless you, bless you; may you think of me as one whose loyalty to another is loyalty to yourself," he murmured. "I must go away and meet you no more. Pass a few busy, taskful years, come and go a few brief seasons of stimulating activity and wholesome intercourse; then I can hold out my untrembling hand to Robert's wife, and forget the lover in the friend; now let us part."

She stepped forward and extended her hand; he kissed it and pressed it warmly, and then the dream was ended. A matter of a moment, true enough, but death itself is but a moment, yet eternity is its successor.

Cherokee took the path to the house; her eyes held a troubled light as they looked back, Marrion was standing where she had left him, in a hopeless attitude. His head drooped low with a slow motion

of despair, which seemed almost tranquil in its acceptance of destiny.

A low, late sunshine crept through the swathing blue, softly bright upon him.

CHAPTER XXV.

TEMPTED.

For a time Marrion Latham stood in a sad reverie ; then he slowly went back to the house, following the path Cherokee had taken.

He entered the house unobserved, and went directly to his room, from which he did not emerge until the clock told him that the hour was eleven. He was going to leave ; upon that point he was decided. The midnight train would take him to the city. He took his grip, and crept out stealthily without a word, for he could not now own what was forcing him to leave. Of course it would seem strange to Robert, but written lines could not clear it up. It would take more than a note to explain such an offense as this would seem ; it could only be made plain in person. It needed the voice, the eye, the spirit breathing through the words to make them effective.

He had decided to wait until the artist returned to New York. As he stepped out on the piazza he noticed that the blinds of the studio were open and the window up.

“I will take a last look,” he thought, as he went up to the window.

“Cherokee, Cherokee,” but his whisper was too deep, she did not hear. There she stood before the painting, her arms wide open as though ready to enfold the image; then she drew back, and her low sobbing was heard—not despair, not sorrow, not even loss flowed in those relieving tears—they came as a balm, allowing the pent-up force of suffering to ooze out.

The very purity of her adoration was pitiful to see. Marrion stood outside and watched her; wrong as it might be to stay he was tempted to bide the result and remain.

Everything around was still; the wind, even, ceased to dip into the lustrous gloom of the laurels. He could scarcely hear the stream below, drawing its long ripples of star-kindled waves from the throat of the forest. Not a human sound interposed one pulse of its beating between these two silent souls.

“I must, I must touch her—just to say good-bye again.”

But through the gentle silence there throbbed a warning. He battled with it; the mad desire grew upon him, the stress, the self-torture was getting beyond control. Reckless inconsideration told him to enter.

The palpitating misery that swayed through every wave of his blood, cried in almost an ecstasy of terror: "Go in, she is yours." He knew he could not resist what love counseled if he remained much longer, and he hung his head for very shame.

When a proud man finds out he is but a child in the midst of his strength, but a fool in his wisdom, it is humiliating to own it even to himself.

While every passion held him enslaved, he felt a vague desire to escape, a yearning, almost insane, to get out from his own self.

"Why should you not have her, when you love her so dearly?" the tempter asked.

But he knew the voice and shrank from it. Then he murmured inwardly:

"Great and good God, I turn to you," and before he knew it, his unaccustomed lips had framed a prayer.

With a feeling of renewed strength he took one last look at her and walked away. He had scarcely time to catch that midnight train. He was leaving

heaven behind, but he was doing what was best for all. There was something in that, and Robert must never know what his poor services had cost him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOST FAITH.

“For your own sake, if not for mine, Robert, do not begin drinking the first thing in the morning,” Cherokee pleaded.

“I must, I must; my nerves are all shattered. I will stop when I have won the laurels of art,” and he poured the fiery poison into the sugared glass.

“Does Marrion know breakfast is waiting?” he asked.

“I suppose not.” Cherokee felt her voice trembling, she was almost certain he had gone; there was a dreariness about the place, an utter loneliness, that made her feel that she would not hear his voice that morning.

Robert touched the bell, and when the servant answered, he bade her:

“Tell Mr. Latham breakfast is ready.”

“Mr. Latham went away in the night,” the

servant answered. "I suppose he won't be back soon, as he took a grip with him."

In sudden temper Robert cried: "You don't mean it, has he gone home?"

"I don't know, sir, he went towards the station about a half hour before the New York train was due."

"That will do, leave us," he ordered the maid.

"Now, Cherokee, tell me why Marrion has left me?"

"Mr. Latham may prefer to make his own excuse," she answered, quietly.

"Never mind that assumed dignity; I know the reason as well as you could tell me. This letter I found on the studio floor gives the villain away," and thrusting it at her, he demanded: "Read it aloud."

She nervously unfolded it and read:

"MY DEAR LATHAM:

I presume you know I too was painting the 'Athlete.' My model is a failure, a disappointment. Come to New York at once, and pose for me at your own price.

Yours, anxiously,

WILLARD FROST."

When she finished the letter she could not find a suitable answer, so she did not answer at all. Robert did not like silence, he liked to have things explained, cleared up.

He looked at his wife with grave severity, and demanded:

“You knew this was what called him away.”

“I did not,” was her truthful and emphatic reply.

“Oh, God!” in a frenzy, “just to think how I trusted him; his word and honor were dear to my very soul; but now—now I hate him, I curse him; if I ever prayed, I might pray that the train would be wrecked and dash him to his eternal, just reward.”

“Robert, Robert!” the gentle voice pleaded, “hold him not guilty without defense; he is still your friend.”

“Hush! tell me nothing. It is a plain case of villainy; he has been bought off; he has robbed me of my future,” and Robert quit the table and went at once to his room. The insanity of drink held festival in his delirious brain.

The next few hours found him in a deplorable condition. The reaction from his fit of inebriety had been a severe shock to his system, not espe-

cially strong at best, and this, together with Marrion's sudden flight, preyed sharply on his mind, and he suffered a sort of nervous prostration.

"My picture! my masterpiece is unfinished! it can never be finished without him!" was the substance of his raving.

Never before had Cherokee seen such woe in his countenance. She knew the painting was almost completed, and that he could finish it from the picture he had of Marrion, taken purposely to aid him, even when the model was there; but to mention anything so as to manage a way out of the pit into which he imagined he had fallen merely infuriated him, and did no good.

"Marrion must come back to me; send for him; tell him I cannot win without him," he cried, scarcely above a whisper, he was so weak. Never before had the one desire of man's life been strained through his face and speech like this.

Cherokee was deeply moved, yet she could not understand how he could charge Marrion with double-dealing and treachery, with conduct so entirely at variance with the whole tenor of his gracious life. How could he think that Willard Frost, that crafty, remorseless villain, could pur-

chase the manhood of Marrion Latham. If Robert had only known how much that friend had suffered and borne for him, he would have worshipped where he now condemned.

“Cherokee,” he called from the bed, “what am I to do?”

“Rest and then go to work; your picture is almost finished; it already shows the touch of a master-hand, and it is perfect so far as you have done. Marrion had other reasons for going away from us; believe me, he will make it all right.”

She was ever gentle and tender toward him, and worked quietly, yet constantly.

The task of reforming a man takes a great deal of time, more than a life has to give, frequently, but she had been strengthened by the promise from Marrion to aid her, though now she must bear it alone.

She looked in the glass, and in the depths of it she found not the face that once smiled at her—ah! that other face, its wild-rose bloom had faded; the lips that used to tremble as if with joy alive are thinner now and they do not tremble; they are firm and somewhat sad. The hair that used to slip from

its confinement, and in golden torrents fall about the wild-rose face, is somber-hued, and stays where it is pinned.

Ah! she knows what youth means to a woman, and that is denied her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CUP OF WRATH AND TREMBLING.

With the first mail that Marrion Latham received after reaching New York was a letter which bore the postmark of the small railway station in Kentucky from which he had lately departed so hastily. He opened it first, for it was the most important to him. The letter ran:

“MR. LATHAM:

I have trusted you above all other men, yet you have proven to be my most hurtful enemy. I was surprised that you would sell my friendship, my future, and, above all, your own manhood to Willard Frost.

From this time on I am done with you—we are strangers. Enclosed find check, as I prefer not being in your debt for services rendered.

ROBERT MILBURN.”

Marrion laid the letter down with a moan; but the cruel injustice of it aroused no resentment—he was only stunned by it. After awhile, he felt tired

and sick, so he lay down across the foot of his bed and finally went to sleep. In his sleep nature had her way—was no longer held in check by his will, and so, when his weary brain, his sad, unresting heart cried out they could no longer endure, she came and gave them rest.

Two hours afterward found him somewhat refreshed, but he was sorry to have awakened; he should have liked to sleep—that was all. That most vexing question kept repeating itself to him. “Why are the best motives of our lives turned into wolves, that come back, ravenous, to feed upon our helpless and tortured selves?”

Willard Frost's letter had made so slight an impression upon him that, until this reminder, he had quite forgotten it; had carelessly dropped it down, never thinking of it again until now.

It looked hard, that he had come away to save that home, and then, to have the head of that home confront him with a pen picture of a scoundrel placarded “Marrion Latham.”

It was an unexpected experiment, and an astounding shock. With hands clasped behind him Marrion restlessly paced the floor, trying to determine what was the best thing for him to do.

He could board the next train and go back; but no, Cherokee had his promise that he would stay

away. Besides, she had borne and sacrificed enough for Robert.

He could write; but how could he express it on cold paper; he could wait a few days and see him in person, for he knew Robert expected to return when the bloom of the year was passed. That would be soon, for it was now time for the woods to be full of ghosts who gather to make lament, while winds sob in minor key, and trees are bowed in silent woe, and leaves, like tears, fall fast.

This was best; so he decided upon it to wait and see him in person.

His new drama lay on the desk before him; it was in this one Cherokee figured. What better way to forget the slow, creeping time, than to go to work; he had often said he wished he were poor, for the poor have small time for grieving.

He did go to work in earnest; each night found him brain-weary after a hard day's arduous task; it was the best thing he could have done. The very first morning he saw an announcement of Milburn's return to the city he dropped him a line:

“MY DEAR MILBURN:

I have an explanation—an apology to make—then let us be on the old footing; for without you I am

a lonely man. Appoint a place for an immediate interview and let me assure you that Frost had nothing to do with my leaving you.

I return check.

Yours very truly,

MARRION LATHAM."

He dispatched this message, and paced the floor in a fever of anxiety until the answer came. Quickly he snatched the envelope, as a starving man breaks a crust of bread.

This is what the letter said:

"My time is now entirely occupied.

Respectfully,

ROBERT MILBURN."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DROP OF POISON.

Frost was succeeding in bringing Robert Milburn into open disrepute. That he was, will appear from his statement of the case to a few friends who had accompanied him into the bar room of ——— hotel.

"I was saying, gentlemen, that it is such a deuced pity to see Milburn waste his talents, but the fact is, these self-destructive excesses must result in a total wreck. Am I not right?"

The man appealed to nodded approval.

"That's what you are."

"I say when a man gets so that he can walk up to a bar and take a drink alone, its about time to put a bridle on him."

"That's a fact," assented a third; "and that isn't all of it."

"No," put in Frost, "I saw him driving up and down Fifty-eighth Street with the Morris woman the other day, in the early afternoon. I just told him what I thought about it."

"What did he say?"

“Oh, he flared up, and said it was his own affair.”

“Well, I always thought Milburn a pretty square kind of a fellow,” said a quiet man who stood leaning against a gilded column. “In that deal with ‘——— Syndicate’—you recollect it, Frost—he could have beaten the life out of you, but he stood to you when I know he was offered double commission to come off.”

“Ah! nobody is saying anything against his honesty,” returned Willard, sharply, “he’s square enough, but it is his infernal recklessness. Now, yesterday, I sauntered into his office to remonstrate. I said, ‘Robert, old boy, you are getting yourself out of everybody’s good books; why don’t you brace up? The first thing you know, you will be dropped like a hot nail.’ I asked him why he couldn’t be a little more modest about it, for instance, I suggested, ‘when the spirit moves you to take Morris out for an airing, why wont a moonlight night and a by-road answer the purpose as well as Fifty-eighth Street and the middle of the afternoon.’”

“And what did he say to that?”

“He held out his cigar case to me saying, ‘You are wasting your time, I don’t care to be respectably wicked, and I choose to go to the devil in my own way.’”

“Look here!” interrupted the quiet man, “I fancy I know Milburn better than most people, and he has a clean life behind him; moreover, he thinks you are the only man on earth. I can’t understand how he can deliberately throw himself away, as you say he is doing. There is a very strong motive of some kind. He is not a man to take to dissipation for its own sake.”

Frost’s eye twinkled as he turned abruptly and fronted the speaker.

“Then you think he has a provocation?”

“He must have; I’ve observed him pretty closely, and there is an underlying streak of good metal in his character that will crop out at times. Say, Frost, have you tried to help him?”

“Always.” An oppressive little silence followed, and Frost frowned as he tugged away at his mustache. “But I can do little with him of late.”

“It is all very bad—very bad,” said the quiet man.

“Though if he did a world of wrong, injuring every human creature that came between him and his pleasure, he should not be forsaken by you—he sticks to you.”

Every line in the clear whiteness of Frost’s face was cruelly, craftily, and closely compressed, while he stood looking at the man whose words were the

fine point of a sword with which, in delicate *finesse*, he ran him through the body.

Frost bent his head in his most courtly fashion.

“Milburn may not be all at fault; you know he has a pretty wife!” There was a secrecy in his smiling face, and he conveyed an air of mystery to those words that struck the other forcibly. At the same time the thin, straight lips, and the markings in the nose, curved with a sarcasm that looked handsomely diabolic.

“Come, what will you have gentlemen?”

CHAPTER XXIX.

ROBERT'S TRIUMPH.

"Excellent claret, Latham, have a glass with me," said the artist, Willard Frost.

"Thanks, not any; I have ordered a meal—been out rowing and it makes a fellow deucedly hungry."

It was by the merest accident that Marrion Latham and Willard Frost had taken seats at the same table, in one of New York's restaurants.

To the right of them, some distance away, there was a decorated table, covers laid for twelve. Pretty soon the party came in and took their seats.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Latham, "I wonder what's up. There's Robert Emmet Cooper, Fred Ryder, D. Kohler, and who is the one at the head of the table? Well, upon my word, it is Milburn."

"What does all this mean?" inquired Frost.

"That dinner is given to Mr. Milburn," said the waiter, "he is one of the acknowledged artists now."

"What! you don't tell me his 'Athlete' has been accepted by the Commissioners of the Art Palace?"

"That, sir, is what the judges decided."

“Strange I had not heard the good news, but I am certainly proud of his success,” exclaimed Marrion.

“Well, I am not. I despise him, the accursed Milburn,” Frost hissed between his teeth. “He crossed me in every path; my luck quails before his whenever we encounter. I say luck, for he has no genius.”

“There are a number of people mistaken then, for he is rapidly gaining reputation.” This was harrowing to the vanity of the other.

“Yes, and it will do him more good than he deserves, but he had a big advantage in this.”

“Not advantage, Frost, more than that which hard work and skill bestows.”

“Umph! You need not defend him, for he hates you, Latham.”

“That doesn’t keep me from rejoicing with him.”

“Well, tell me, when did the drop in the temperature of your relations occur?”

“About two months ago we had a slight misunderstanding.”

“About his wife, I presume?”

“About none of your business, if you will pardon brevity,” Marrion answered, curtly.

“You need not mind a little thing like that. I am in the same boat.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I am in love with her, too; I admire her as cordially as I hate him.” He drained the fifth glass of his genuine Medoc, and went on:

“Did you ever see such a ravishing form; I’ll swear she is divine.”

Marrion appeared not to hear him; he turned his head away as if the other were not speaking. He heard the wit and gaiety of his club friends. Meanwhile, everybody’s old acquaintance, the devil, had been spending a time with Frost, by special invitation. He could only view the other’s triumph; and there he sat, helpless, consumed with impotent rage; a look of ungovernable fury distorted his features, already flushed with madness and wine. His upper lip curled at the corners, and his eyes blazed like those of an enraged tiger, as he muttered:

“Robert Milburn, you shall pay dearly for this victory.” Then he turned to Marrion and said:

“I wonder if he would feel so elated if he knew how much his wife thought of me?”

The other turned sharply and faced him:

“Scoundrel! dare to utter a word against her, and I’ll crush the life out of your body.”

Frost gurgled a fiendish laugh :

“I know you are jealous, but do not be hasty ; I can prove what I say.”

“Then, sir, you will have to do it, and if you have lied, look sharp, for a day of reckoning will surely come.”

“She is at my studio every Friday at three o'clock. You know which window looks in upon my private apartments ; watch that, and you will see her pass. Remember the time.”

“That will do,” returned Marrion, coldly, as he arose to leave.

At that moment his attention was attracted toward the banquet scene. Milburn had been called upon for a speech. As a general thing he was a man of a few words, but when he was inspired there was no more eloquent talker than he. He made an individual mention of those who had substantially aided in this distinction he had attained.

Marrion listened, hoping that he would kindly speak his name, but what a tumult within stirred him to pathetic, unspoken appeal, as the speech ended without the slightest reference to his model.

As the enthusiastic friends thronged about him, Marrion could not help showing that he rejoiced with them.

His unexpected appearance in their midst created a decided sensation. He extended his hand warmly to Robert, and said most cordially:

“Let me congratulate you, too.”

With a look of intense loathing the artist waved him away, and folding his arms said coldly:

“Excuse me, sir.”

Some one of the party whispered:

“Don’t mind that, Latham; Milburn has imbibed a little too freely.”

CHAPTER XXX.

SHADOWING HER.

It had been some months since Cherokee and Marrion had met. But he still loved and was guarding her reputation. The little bit of treachery, villainy, or whatever Frost might have meant, he proposed to see through.

It was an awful day, that Friday, rain had been falling since early morning. But nestling his beardless chin into the broad collar of his storm coat, he walked the opposite side of the street from the studio of Willard Frost.

In breathless amazement, he saw a woman pass by the very window. She walked back and forth a time or two, and then she and Frost stood together. The gown was violet, with gold trimmings; he had seen Cherokee wear a dress like that; but he felt there must be some mistake, or everyone is of dual existence. By this one woman he measured the goodness of the world; if there was no truth in her, then it followed with him that there was no truth in the world.

When the woman, heavily veiled and warmly wrapped, came down the step and turned down the street, he followed her. All that had passed was like a dim bewildering vision. All that he saw in the streets of the city—the faces he beheld—all was like a monstrous nightmare. It did not seem that anything was real.

He still shadowed the woman who went directly to the elevated train, and when they came to the station where he knew Milburn got off, he anxiously watched the woman.

She got up, and, without looking to right or left, hurried out of the coach. It had stopped raining, but she raised her umbrella and went on.

Marrion walked behind her until there was no one near, then he stepped up:

“I must speak to you,” he said.

She turned upon him an unmerciful stare.

“How dare you, sir?”

“Forgive me, but I must understand it all,” he exclaimed, excitedly.

“But what right have you, Mr. Latham, to shadow me, or question?”

“To save Robert Milburn’s home—that’s what. I should think you, who owe so much to his friendship, would not dare to do this.” He caught her by the hand:

“Come with me where we can talk it over alone, or you will never regret it but once, and that once will be always.”

She consented reluctantly, and they walked off together.

So complicated are the webs of fate, that this step, though hastily taken, gained a secret of the most vital moment to him and to Robert Milburn.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GONE.

It had blown hard in the night, but the wind had dropped at dawning, and now the rising sun tinted the cruel fringe of storm wrack as it dwindled into the west.

A low, gray sky, eaten to a jagged edge as by a fire torch, hung over the harbor.

Eastward, this sky line was broken by the spout of foam when two waves dashed each other into spray. A heavy surf beat upon the shore. Marrion Latham stood watching the small boats swoop up and down the emerald valley, dipping away nor'ward under easy sail. He loved the water, and when anything annoyed him, he had often found relief in its lullaby. This was one time its surging sighs had not soothed him.

He must see Robert, for his home was in peril. He turned from the water front. Slowly and deliberately he walked, every step was an effort. He could not forget that this man, for whom he felt so much concern, had refused to take his hand, had refused him a chance for personal justification.

All this he thought of, and while love and wounded pride were both struggling for mastery, he reached the door where he had once been a welcomed and an honored guest.

“Is Mr. Milburn in?” he asked of the maid who answered the bell.

“No, sir, he left this morning for Boston; will you leave a message.”

“Oh! no. I shall wire him, if you will give me his address.”

He tried so hard to speak lightly, but lamentably failed in the attempt. Without being conscious of it he had spoken in almost an imploring tone.

So Robert was out of his reach; what should Marrion do now? He could not think; he had gone through so much excitement lately that his brain felt in a confused tangle, he was unable to calculate coolly; one thing he knew, that his mental agony was beyond endurance. In thought, word, and deed, he had been true to Robert, but that the other might never know until the history of man is carried from time to eternity, where none can erase or alter it.

“Who was the gentleman?” Mrs. Milburn asked, when the servant returned.

“A friend of yours, but he wanted to see your husband. It was Mr. Latham.”

“Say, rather, an acquaintance of mine,” was the reply.

Cherokee felt that she had no such thing as a friend. She who had been petted and admired saw the change now; the cordial hand held back, the friendly, confidential glance replaced by frowns of almost fierce suspicion and reproach. She observed a gradual but marked difference in her friends' demeanor toward her. Her greetings were received coldly, though sometimes with scrupulous politeness. Groups began to melt insensibly away at her approach, or her advent was a signal for dead silence.

The young women were frigid; the old ones were more so, and systematically cut her dead, and were often heard to say: “They had always thought there was something very queer about this woman.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

STORMING THE LION'S DEN.

It happened that the very day after Robert's return, he had accepted, for the first time in some months, one of the many invitations which Willard Frost had extended. He had usually declared himself in his notes "Already engaged," or "Sorry illness makes me forego the pleasure, etc."

Designing Frost, therefore, continued his invitations until Milburn, from that fatality which seemingly regulates and controls us, accepted the proffered invitation. Frost's apartments were gorgeous. He had made money as well as married it.

"Gentlemen," he said to his three guests, "let me show you the first success I had," and he pointed to a baby face on the wall.

"That study I sold for two thousand dollars to a man who had lost a child about that age, and he had no picture of it; this he fancied looked very much like her."

"It is a marvelous face—so beautiful. Where did you get your model?" Robert asked.

“It is my own child.”

“What! I did not know you had ever been married until——” Robert paused in awkward confusion.

“Until I made my recent ‘fiasco,’ ” laughed Frost. “Well, whether I have or not, the child’s mother died at its birth—that was lucky.”

He saw how the others looked at him when he made this heartless speech, so he added:

“You remember those old stony hills of New Hampshire? Well, I was reared there, and perhaps that accounts for so much flint and grit in my make up.”

“But mine host,” Robert began, “where is the other rare treat you promised—your latest portrait, that wears a hectic flush and nothing more?”

The others, who were listening to the colloquy burst into ripples of merriment.

“Ah, so I did promise,” and he seized his glass, and emptied it at a gulp.

A gust of cold mist, mingled with fine snow, puffed into the brilliant rooms, and stirred the stifling air that was saturated with exhalations of spirits and tobacco smoke.

“And you really would like to see my creation—
‘A Nude Daughter of Our Land.’ ”

“Nothing would delight us more,” they declared. He summoned the servant and ordered him to draw the curtain aside.

The eager crowd caught his words at once.

“Yes! yes! yes! draw the curtain.”

Robert watched eagerly, while the other guests shouted in his ear.

“Let us see! brave man, let us see!”

As they watched the canvas the drapery fell to one side.

“My wife! Great God!”

Robert felt the horror stricken tremor in his own exclamation. There played on Willard Frost’s face a satanic smile, while a momentary exultation thrilled him.

“She kindly posed for this, my greatest effort,” returned Frost, still smiling.

Robert controlled every muscle in his countenance; no fire broke from his steadfast, scornful eyes; but there was a kingly authority in the aspect—the almost stately crest and power in the swell of the stern voice—which awed the lookers on.

With that locked and rigid countenance, with arms folded, he stood confronting the other artist, who advanced toward him with menacing brow.

“Willard Frost, this is a lie! and I demand you

to prove it. You villain! you dastard! you coward! Fall on your knees, you cur, and ask God to forgive you, lest you are suddenly called to face your black account."

Frost strove to be scornful, but his lips trembled, and his voice died in hollow murmurs in his breast.

"Answer me, I demand proof!" cried Robert, looking upon him with a crushing and intense disdain.

"I know, Milburn, you will hate me; but acknowledge, we are at last even," said the other.

"No! I do not believe it! By the eternal powers, my wife would not stoop so low as this model indicates. I must have proof."

"Then, sir, you shall!" and Frost's eyes flashed a lightning glance of triumph.

"Gentlemen, I do not like to bring you into this little unpleasantness, but what do you know of this?"

"We know that Mrs. Milburn has often been to the studio, and we, moreover, have seen her when you were at work on the picture. But the man surely knows his own wife; this is a speaking likeness."

"Besides, here's a note where she asked that the matter be kept a dead secret."

Robert looked at the paper, it was her hand-

writing; bearing no date, unfortunately, or he would have known that this was written when she was a girl, about an entirely different picture.

“Is that her hand, or forgery?”

This question, uttered triumphantly, and regarded by all three as a climax, fell flat.

He met their merciless, inquisitorial gaze, now riveted on him, unflinchingly; while they fidgeted, cleared their throats, and interchanged significant looks, he stood motionless; only an unwonted pallor, and tiny bead-like drops gathering to his forehead, betokened the intensity of the struggle within.

Looking again at the note, he handed it back to one, saying, in a voice deliciously pure:

“Then I am Christ, if she is Magdalene. She is forgiven.”

The companions were taken back, they had expected a more complete victory for their host.

Presently, as if his nature had nursed this crushing, profound humiliation until it almost burst forth in fury, he madly rushed toward the picture.

“Whether she did or did not pose for it, I shall rip the infernal thing from center to circumference.”

An indescribable uproar arose, as he opened his knife and approached the picture. Frost’s clinched fist rose in the air, and he shouted angrily:

“Do it and die!”

“I am no coward; I am not afraid of your threats,” he returned coldly.

“But it is madness!” the other roared, “I am surrounded by friends; you have none here.”

“By heavens he has!” said a voice behind them.

“Marrion Latham!” came from every tongue.

“Yes, and the most unwelcome guest you ever entertained. This is all a base, cowardly lie, and I came to tell you,” he hissed to the others, as he caught Robert by the hand.

“My friend,” cried Robert, “forgive me the injustice I have done you; I could kneel and beg it of you.”

“I am not warrior, priest or king—only brother,” he said earnestly.

“You contemptible cur; dare you say Cherokee Milburn was not my model and my —”

“Yes, I do dare; even the first thing you ever led her into was a deception, and the baby face that swings above you there on the wall is the same face you hid away when misfortune overtook her—to die in the slums—and that one was your own child.”

“But I say, emphatically, that this is a picture of Mrs. Milburn—the other has nothing to do with this,” cried the enraged artist.

“And I say, with the same emphasis, it is a

d—— lie; the face was made from Mrs. Milburn's picture, and the form—you paid another five hundred dollars to sit for it.

“And pray, who is this individual?” questioned Frost, carelessly.

“Yes, who is she?” cried his companions.

The tumult became so great that an ordinary tone could not be heard at all.

“Who is she? Who is she?”

“Men, have patience, I am in no hurry,” said Marrion, as he leveled a revolver at the party.

“Now, Robert, old boy, let the good work go on.”

“Bless you, Latham, by your help I will,” and he plunged the knife into the canvas.

Frost uttered a tremendous oath, and shouted:

“I'll kill you both for that!”

“Now, to complete the scene we should have the real model here—would that please you?” said Marrion, aggravatingly.

“Yes, produce her if you can.”

He walked to the door and opened it; no one spoke; all seemed riveted to the spot.

Who should walk in but Mrs. Milburn's maid, Annie Zerner.

“You bought her, Frost, but she sells you.” Then turning to the woman, Marrion asked:

“Did you pose for this man’s picture?”

“Yes, sir, and——”

A fierce glance from the artist, Willard Frost, kept her from ending the sentence.

“D—— you! I’ll finish you.”

“Wait!” cried a firm, but sweet voice. Willard Frost stepped back in dismay. The doorway framed the form and beautiful, indignant face of Cherokee Milburn.

She had seen her maid, dressed in her clothes, join Marrion in the street and had followed them. She could not doubt Marrion Latham’s honor, and her woman’s instinct—that almost unerring guide, which God has bestowed upon the sex—told her to follow.

One glance at the assembled party, and another at the empty frame and the canvas that lay beside it, and she comprehended the situation.

“I know you, Willard Frost,” she said, with a calmness that surprised herself as well as all present.

“I trust you have a good opinion of me,” sneered the baffled scoundrel.

“I have doubted you,” she went on, not heeding the interruption, “for two years, but I never thought you capable of such as this.” She paused and pointed to the canvas upon the floor.

“Under a false pretense you first deceived me; you borrowed all the money I had that you might make me easy prey to your designs,” she continued, her voice gathering fulness, and swelling with indignation.

“Worst of all, with a wickedness that devils might admire and imitate, you sought my husband’s ruin, by tempting him to drink. You succeeded; but that your success fell short of your expectation he and I have this devoted friend to thank,” she turned and laid her hand upon Marrion’s.

“You! always you!” shrieked Frost, “you have baffled me for the last time.”

There was a flash—a loud report—and Marrion Latham, clutching at his breast, sank heavily to the floor. Without waiting to note the full results of his terrible work, Willard Frost rushed out into the night.

“Oh! my God! my God! save him!” burst from Cherokee’s white, groaning lips, as she raised her eyes and cried in fierce despair.

“God save you and your home, is all I ask,” he gasped.

Robert, too, knelt by his side, crying: “How could the foul traitor deal such a merciless blow? Friend, brother, live to see the result of your work. You are my savior,” cried Robert.

“Then death is unutterably sweet,” dropped from Marrion’s lips. He gazed imploringly at Cherokee; his power of utterance was gone; he could give no answering pressure to the fond hands, yet his last words had filtered like a single drop of sweet, through all the sea of woe. While the dear ones bent above, they felt that in that stroke fierce fate had spent her last shaft. There was no drop of worm-wood left in this bitter, bitter cup.

CONCLUSION.

The wounded man was removed to Robert's home. The attendant physician looked grave; he was dealing with a tremendous enemy that assaulted with sapping and draining of strength, with poisoning of the blood and brain. But he was young and fresh in his wrestle with evil in disease; he had the latest words of science; he knew how to work, so he called up all his powers, and neither slumbered nor slept.

He left the room for only brief intervals, and allowed no one in there except the servant. Occasionally the patient slept, and then he rested, too. A whistle from a rushing train far out in the night, or carriages rolling home from late pleasures, were welcome sounds to break the stillness, though how foreign to Robert and Cherokee they seemed. Full of solicitude, full of anxiety, they came to the door at all hours to ask of the patient's condition. Time and time again they were turned away without a comforting answer.

At last, one day, the physician told them he would live and be himself in health again. Sweetly fell these words, like dew on dying flowers—their hearts' throbbing chords were softly soothed.

* * * * *

They were sitting together in their own room. Robert's face had greatly changed.

“Cherokee,” he began, “it isn't long ago that I promised, before God, to love and cherish you always. I have learned that that didn't mean just to-day, or a year from to-day. It meant this: that we must make the fulfillment of our sacred promise to each other the supreme effort of our lives, so long as we both live. I know I have erred, but I promised Marrion on that terrible night that I would be a man. It is two years, to-day, since he risked his own life to save you and me. Tell me, have I kept the faith?”

He held out his hand in a half pleading gesture; she put her's on his shoulders, and throwing her head back with the exuberant happiness of a child, said, with enthusiasm:

“You have! you have! and I do—do love you.” She glanced over his shoulder into the mirror.

Was the bright face she saw there her very own?
What had become of its sallowness, its lines of
care, its yearning melancholy?

A wave of golden consciousness sweetly swept
her face. In the fulness of contentment, long with-
held, Cherokee's glad youth had come back to
reward her husband.

THE END.





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