EVANS AUGUSTA JANE

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
RUSSELL AUBREY

The town-clock was on the last stroke of twelve, the solitary candle measured but two inches from its socket, and as the summer wind rushed through the half-closed shutters, the melted tallow dripped slowly into the brightly-burnished brazen candlestick. The flickering light fell upon the pages of a ledger, and flashed fitfully in the face of the accountant, as he bent over his work. Sixteen years growth had given him unusual height and remarkable breadth of chest, and it was difficult to realize that the stature of manhood had been attained by a mere boy in years. A grey suit (evidently home-made), of rather coarse texture, bespoke poverty; and, owing to the oppressive heat of the atmosphere, the coat was thrown partially off. He wore no vest, and the loosely-tied black ribbon suffered the snowy white collar to fall away from the throat and expose its well-turned outline. The head was large, but faultlessly proportioned, and the thick black hair, cut short and clinging to the temples, added to its massiveness. The lofty forehead, white and smooth, the

somewhat heavy brows matching the hue of the hair, the straight, finely-formed nose with its delicate but clearly defined nostril, the full firm lips unshaded by moustache, combined to render the face one of uncommon beauty. Yet, as he sat absorbed by his figures, there was nothing prepossessing or winning in his appearance, for though you could not carp at the moulding of his features, you involuntarily shrank from the prematurely grave, nay, austere expression which seemed habitual to them. He looked just what he was, youthful in years, but old in trials and labours, and to one who analysed his countenance, the conviction was inevitable that his will was gigantic, his ambition unbounded, his intellect wonderfully acute and powerful.

"Russell, do you know it is midnight?"

He frowned, and answered without looking up —

"Yes."

"How much longer will you sit up?"

"Till I finish my work."

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

She stood still, but silent.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"A mere headache, nothing more. Mr. Clark was here to-day; he is very impatient about the rent. I told him we were doing all we could, and thought that by September we should be able to pay the whole." He knew she watched him, and answered with a forced smile. "Yes, he came to the store this morning. I told him we had been very unfortunate this year, that sickness had

forced us to incur more expense than usual. However, I drew fifty dollars, and paid him all I could. True, I anticipated my dues, but Mr. Watson gave me permission. So for the present you need not worry about rent."

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

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

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

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

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

"I fear 'it dawns in clouds, and heralds only storms.' For myself I care not, but for you, Russell – my pride, my only hope, my brave boy? it is for you that I suffer. I have been thinking to-night that this is a doomed place for you, and that if we could only save money enough to go to California, you might take the position

you merit; for there none would know of the blight which fell upon you; none could look on your brow and dream it seemed sullied. Here you have such bitter prejudice to combat; such gross injustice heaped upon you."

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

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

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

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

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

God."

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

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

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

"You know it all then?"

"Yes, mother."

"I shall not murmur; I have become resigned at last; though for many weeks I have wrestled for strength, for patience. It was so exceedingly bitter to know that the time drew near when I should see you no more; to feel that I should stretch out my hands to you, and lean on you, and yet look no longer on the dear face of my child, my boy, my all. But my prayers were heard; the sting has passed away, and I am resigned. I am glad that we have spoken of it; now my mind is calmer, and I can sleep. Good night, my son."

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

Mrs. Aubrey was the only daughter of wealthy and ambitious parents, who refused to sanction her marriage with the object of her choice; and threatened to disinherit her if she persisted in her obstinate course. Mr. Aubrey was poor, but honest, highly cultivated and, in every sense of that much abused word, a

gentleman. His poverty was not to be forgiven, however, and when the daughter left her father's roof, and wedded the man whom her parents detested, she was banished for ever from a home of affluence, and found that she had indeed forfeited her fortune. For this she was prepared, and bore it bravely; but ere long severer trials came upon her. Unfortunately, her husband's temper was fierce and ungovernable; and pecuniary embarrassments rarely have the effect of sweetening such. He removed to an inland town, and embarked in mercantile pursuits; but misfortune followed him, and reverses came thick and fast. One miserable day, when from early morning everything had gone wrong, an importunate creditor, of wealth and great influence in the community, chafed at Mr. Aubrey's tardiness in repaying some trifling sum, proceeded to taunt and insult him most unwisely. Stung to madness, the wretched man resented the insults; a struggle ensued, and at its close Mr. Aubrey stood over the corpse of the creditor. There was no mode of escape, and the arm of the law consigned him to prison. During the tedious weeks that elapsed before the trial his devoted wife strove to cheer and encourage him. Russell was about eleven years of age, and, boy though he was, realized most fully the horrors of his parent's situation. The days of his trial came at last; but the accused had surrendered himself to the demon Rage, had taken the life of a fellow creature; what could legal skill accomplish? The affair produced great and continued excitement; the murdered man had been exceedingly popular, and the sympathies of the citizens

were enlisted in behalf of his family. Although clearly a case of manslaughter only, to the astonishment of the counsel on both sides, the cry of "blood for blood," went out from that crowded court-room, and in defiance of precedent, Mr. Aubrey was unjustly sentenced to be hanged. When the verdict was known, Russell placed his insensible mother on a couch from which it seemed probable she would never rise. But there is an astonishing amount of endurance in even a feeble woman's frame, and after a time she went about her house once more, doing her duty to her child and learning to "suffer and grow strong." Fate had ordained, however, that Russell's father should not die upon the gallows; and soon after the verdict was pronounced, when all Mrs. Aubrey's efforts to procure a pardon had proved unavailing, the proud and desperate man, in the solitude of his cell, with no eye but Jehovah's to witness the awful deed, took his own life with the aid of a lancet. Such was the legacy of shame which Russell inherited; was it any marvel that at sixteen that boy had lived ages of sorrow? Mrs. Aubrey found her husband's financial affairs so involved that she relinquished the hope of retaining the little she possessed, and retired to a small cottage on the outskirts of the town, where she endeavoured to support herself and the two dependent on her by taking in sewing. Electra Grey was the orphan child of Mr. Aubrey's only sister, who, dying in poverty, bequeathed the infant to her brother. He had loved her as well as his own Russell, and his wife, who cradled her in her arms and taught her to walk by clinging to her finger, would

almost as soon have parted with her son as the little Electra. For five years the widow had toiled by midnight lamps to feed these two; now oppressed nature rebelled, the long over-taxed eyes refused to perform their office; filmy cataracts stole over them, veiling their sadness and their unshed tears – blindness was creeping on. At his father's death Russell was forced to quit school, and with some difficulty he succeeded in obtaining a situation in a large dry-goods store, where his labours were onerous in the extreme, and his wages a mere pittance. Though Russell's employer, Mr. Watson, shrank from committing a gross wrong, and prided himself on his scrupulous honesty, his narrow mind and penurious habits strangled every generous impulse, and, without being absolutely cruel or unprincipled, he contrived to gall the boy's proud spirit and render his position one of almost purgatorial severity. His eldest son was just Russell's age, had been sent to various schools from his infancy, was indolent, self-indulgent, and thoroughly dissipated. Having been a second time expelled from school for most disgraceful misdemeanours, he lounged away his time about the store, or passed it still more disreputably with reckless companions.

The daily contrast presented by Cecil and Russell irritated the father, and hence his settled dislike of the latter. The faithful discharge of duty on the part of the clerk afforded no plausible occasion for invective; he felt that he was narrowly watched, and resolved to give no ground for fault-finding; yet during the long summer days, when the intense heat prevented customers

from thronging the store, and there was nothing to be done, when Russell, knowing that the books were written up and the counters free from goods, took his Latin grammar and improved every leisure half-hour, he was not ignorant of the fact that an angry scowl darkened his employer's visage, and understood why he was constantly interrupted to perform most unnecessary labours. What the day denied him he reclaimed from night, and succeeded in acquiring a tolerable knowledge of Greek, besides reading several Latin books. Finding that his small salary was inadequate, now that his mother's failing sight prevented her from accomplishing the usual amount of sewing, he solicited and obtained permission to keep an additional set of books for the grocer who furnished his family with provisions, though by this arrangement few hours remained for necessary sleep. The protracted illness and death of an aged and faithful servant, together with Electra's tedious sickness, bringing the extra expense of medical aid, had prevented the prompt payment of rent due for the three-roomed cottage, and Russell was compelled to ask for a portion of his salary in advance. His mother little dreamed of the struggle which took place in his heart ere he could force himself to make the request, and he carefully concealed from her the fact that at the moment of receiving the money, he laid in Mr. Watson's hands, by way of pawn, the only article of any value which he possessed – the watch his father had always worn, and which the coroner took from the vest pocket of the dead, dabbled with blood. The gold

chain had been sold long before, and the son wore it attached to a simple black ribbon. His employer received the watch, locked it in the iron safe, and Russell fastened a small weight to the ribbon, and kept it around his neck that his mother might not suspect the truth. It chanced that Cecil stood near at the time; he saw the watch deposited in the safe, whistled a tune, fingered his own gold repeater, and walked away. Such was Russell Aubrey's history; such his situation at the beginning of his seventeenth year.

CHAPTER II
IRENE'S FRIENDSHIP

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

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

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

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

Irene Huntingdon stood on the marble steps of her palatial home, and talked with the maiden aunt who governed her father's household. The girl was about fourteen, tall for her age, straight, finely-formed, slender. The broad straw hat shaded but by no means concealed her features, and as she looked up at her aunt the sunshine fell upon a face of extraordinary beauty, such as is

rarely seen, save in the idealized heads of the old masters. Her eyes were strangely, marvellously beautiful; they were larger than usual, and of that rare shade of purplish blue which borders the white velvet petals of a clematis. When the eyes were uplifted, as on this occasion, long, curling lashes of the bronze hue of her hair rested against her brow. Save the scarlet lines which marked her lips, her face was of that clear colourlessness which can be likened only to the purest ivory. Though there was an utter absence of the rosy hue of health, the transparency of the complexion seemed characteristic of her type, and precluded all thought of disease. Miss Margaret muttered something inaudible in reply to her last remark, and Irene walked on to school. Her father's residence was about a mile from the town, but the winding road rendered the walk somewhat longer; and on one side of this road stood the small house occupied by Mrs. Aubrey. As Irene approached it she saw Electra Grey coming from the opposite direction, and at the cottage gate they met. Both paused: Irene held out her hand cordially —

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

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

"Why?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Russell Aubrey, if you please."

The merchant stared, and she added —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

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

"What is the tuition for her?"

"Five dollars a month."

"Is that all?"

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

"Russell, has anything happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"What is troubling you so?"

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

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

He met her gaze steadily, and for an instant his face

brightened; then she said abruptly —

"Your mother's eyes are worse."

"Yes, much worse."

"Have you consulted Dr. Arnold about them?"

"He says he can do nothing for her."

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

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

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

"I shall not ask him."

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

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

"Still it is worth making."

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

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

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

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

"October or November would be better."

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

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

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

he answered —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not till long after you are asleep."

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

"Irene! what is the matter, child?"

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

"Well, Queen, what is it?"

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

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

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

"What would you do with it, Queen?"

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

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

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

"Mrs. Aubrey; she – "

"What!"

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

"Who gave you permission to visit that house?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

No answer.

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

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

She put her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out some painful vision; and he saw the slight form shudder. In perfect silence she took her books and went up to her room. Mr. Huntingdon reseated himself as the door closed behind her, and the lamplight showed a sinister smile writhing over his dark features. He sat there, staring out into the starry night, and seeing by the shimmer of the setting moon only the graceful form and lovely face of Amy Aubrey, as she had appeared to him in other days. Could he forget the hour when she wrenched her cold fingers from his clasp, and, in defiance of her father's wishes, vowed she would never be his wife? No; revenge was sweet, very sweet; his heart had swelled with exultation when the verdict of death upon the gallows was pronounced upon the husband of her choice; and now, her poverty, her humiliation, her blindness gave him deep, unutterable joy. The history of the past was a sealed volume to his daughter, but she was now for the first time conscious that her father regarded the widow and her son with unconquerable hatred; and with strange, foreboding dread she looked into the future, knowing that forgiveness was no part of his nature; that insult or injury was never forgotten.

CHAPTER III
THE MISSING WATCH

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

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

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

"Doctor, are you busy this morning?"

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

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

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

"Those cataracts can be removed, however."

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

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

"I rather think so."

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

"Decidedly too poor."

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

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

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

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

"Do you want the money now?"

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

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

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

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

"Hold out your hand; fifty, one hundred, a hundred and fifty,

two hundred. There, will that do?"

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

"Not until you are ready to pay me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Who is it, Electra?"

"Miss Irene, aunt."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, if I could command the means."

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

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

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

paper a ten-dollar bill slipped out.

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

"Your friend Irene."

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

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

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

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

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

"Who has injured you?"

"A meek-looking man who passes for a Christian, who turns pale at the sound of a violin, who exhorts to missionary labours, and talks often about widows and orphans. Such a man, knowing the circumstances that surround me, my poverty, my mother's affliction, on bare and most unwarrantable suspicion turns me out of my situation as clerk, and endeavours to brand my name with infamy. To-day I stand disgraced in the eyes of the community,

thanks to the vile slanders of that pillar of the church, Jacob Watson. I could bear it myself, but my mother! my noble, patient, suffering mother! I must go in, and add a yet heavier burden to those already crushing out her life. Pleasant tidings, these I bring her; that her son is disgraced, branded as a rogue!"

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

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

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

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

"What will you do, Russell?"

"I don't know yet."

"Oh! if I could only help you."

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

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

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

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

"Electra, I certainly hear Russell coming."

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

"How is my mother?"

"Russell, what brings you home so early?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

blue eye said very plainly, "This is a busy time with me; despatch your errand at once."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That is all, sir."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

decipher if I make you my copyist."

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

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

CHAPTER IV
ELECTRA'S DISCOVERY

From early childhood Irene had experienced a sensation of loneliness. Doubtless the loss of her mother enhanced this feeling, but the peculiarity of her mental organization would have necessitated it even under happier auspices. Miss Margaret considered her "a strange little thing," and rarely interfered with her plans in any respect, while her father seemed to take it for granted that she required no looking after. He knew that her beauty was extraordinary; he was proud of the fact; and having provided her with a good music master, and sent her to the best school in the county, he left her to employ her leisure as inclination prompted. Occasionally her will conflicted with his, and more than once he found it impossible to make her yield assent to his wishes. To the outward observances of obedience and respect she submitted, but whenever these differences occurred, he felt that in the end she was unconquered. Inconsistent as it may appear, though fretted for the time by her firmness, he loved her the more for her "wilfulness," as he termed it; and despotic and exacting though he certainly was in many respects, he stood somewhat in awe of his pure-hearted, calm-eyed child. His ward and nephew, Hugh Seymour, had resided with him for several years, and it was well known that

Mr. Huntingdon had pledged his daughter's hand to his sister's son. Irene had never been officially apprised of her destiny, but surmised very accurately the true state of the case. Between the two cousins there existed not the slightest congeniality of taste or disposition; not a sympathetic link save the tie of relationship. On her part there was a moderate share of cousinly affection; on his, as much love and tenderness as his selfish nature was capable of feeling. They rarely quarrelled as most children do, for when (as frequently happened) he flew into a rage and tried to tyrannize, she scorned to retort in any way and generally locked him out of the library. What she thought of her father's intentions concerning herself, no one knew; she never alluded to the subject, and if in a frolicsome mood Hugh broached it, she invariably cut the discussion short. When he went to college in a distant state, she felt infinitely relieved, and during his vacations secluded herself as much as possible. Yet the girl's heart was warm and clinging; she loved her father devotedly, and loved most intensely Electra Grey, whom she had first met at school. They were nearly the same age, classmates, and firm friends. As totally different in character as appearance was Electra Grey. Rather smaller and much thinner than Irene, with shining, purplish black hair, large, sad, searching black eyes, from which there was no escape, a pale olive complexion, and full crimson lips that rarely smiled. Electra was a dreamer, richly gifted; dissatisfied because she could never attain that unreal world which her busy brain kept constantly before her.

Electra's love of drawing had early displayed itself; first, in strange, weird figures on her slate, then in her copy-book, on every slip of paper which she could lay her hands upon; and, finally, for want of more suitable material, she scrawled all over the walls of the little bedroom, to the great horror of her aunt, who spread a coat of whitewash over the child's frescos, and begged her to be guilty of no such conduct in future, as Mr. Clark might, with great justice, sue for damages. In utter humiliation, Electra retreated to the garden, and here, after a shower had left the sandy walks white and smooth, she would sharpen a bit of pine, and draw figures and faces of all conceivable and inconceivable shapes. Chancing to find her thus engaged one Sunday afternoon, Russell supplied her with a package of drawing-paper, and pencils. So long as these lasted she was perfectly happy, but unluckily their straitened circumstances admitted of no such expenditure, and before many weeks she was again without materials. She would not tell Russell that she had exhausted his package, and passed sleepless nights trying to devise some method by which she could aid herself. It was positive torture for her to sit in school and see the drawing-master go round, giving lessons on this side and that, skipping over her every time, because her aunt could not afford the extra three dollars. Amid all these yearnings and aspirations she turned constantly to Russell, with a worshipping love that knew no bounds. She loved her meek affectionate aunt as well as most natures love their mothers, and did all in her power to lighten her

labours, but her affection for Russell bordered on adoration. In a character so exacting and passionate as hers there is necessarily much of jealousy, and thus it came to pass that, on the day of Irene's visit to the cottage, the horrible suspicion took possession of her that he loved Irene better than herself. True, she was very young, but childish hearts feel as keenly as those of matured years; and Electra endured more agony during that day than in all her past life. Had Irene been other than she was, in every respect, she would probably have hated her cordially; as matters stood, she buried the suspicion deep in her own heart, and kept as much out of everybody's way as possible. Days and weeks passed very wearily; she busied herself with her text-books, and when the lessons had been recited, drew all over the margins – here a hand, there an entire arm, now and then a face, sad-eyed as Fate.

Mrs. Aubrey's eyes became so blurred that finally she could not leave the house without having some one to guide her, and, as cold weather had now arrived, preparations were made for her journey. Mr. Hill, who was going to New Orleans, kindly offered to take charge of her, and the day of departure was fixed. Electra packed the little trunk, saw it deposited on the top of the stage in the dawn of an October morning, saw her aunt comfortably seated beside Mr. Hill, and in another moment all had vanished. In the afternoon of that day, on returning from school, Electra went to the bureau, and, unlocking a drawer, took out a small paper box. It contained a miniature of her father, set in a handsome gold frame. She knew it had been her mother's

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

"What is this worth?"

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

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

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

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

"We try to be."

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

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

"Come in!" thundered the lawyer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Where?"

"At Mr. Brown's jewellery store."

"Thank God!"

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

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

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

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

"But how did you happen there, Electra?"

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

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

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

"How can you identify it, Aubrey?"

He immediately gave the number, and name of the manufacturer, and described the interior tracery, not omitting the quantity of jewels. Mr. Campbell turned to the proprietor (the same gentleman with whom Electra had conversed), and briefly recapitulated the circumstances which had occurred in connection with the watch. Mr. Brown listened attentively, then requested Russell to point out the particular one that resembled his. He did so, and on examination, the number, date, name, and all the marks corresponded so exactly that no doubt remained on the jeweller's mind.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No – I am going to sell this frame."

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

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

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

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

"My business is to clear my character which you have slandered, and to fix the disgrace you intended for me on your

own son. I bring you the proofs of his, not my villainy."

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

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

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

"Have you applied to the witnesses referred to?"

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

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

"No."

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER V
IRENE IS SENT AWAY

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

One afternoon Irene tapped lightly at the cottage-door, and entered the kitchen. Mrs. Aubrey sat in a low chair close to the fireplace, engaged in knitting; her smooth, neat calico dress and spotless linen collar told that careful hands tended her, and the soft auburn hair brushed over her temples showed broad bands

of grey as the evening sun shone on it. She turned her brown, sightless eyes toward the door, and asked in a low voice —

"Who is it?"

"It is only me, Mrs. Aubrey."

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

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

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

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

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

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

passed in looking over them, Irene addressed the quiet little figure.

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

"No; who is he?"

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

"With great pleasure."

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

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

"For what?" asked her aunt.

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

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

"Stop, Andrew! If you don't choose to ride with Electra, Aunt

Margaret, you may go on alone, for either she shall ride or I will walk with her."

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

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

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

Electra looked for an instant into his large, clear grey eyes as he took her drawings and said he would be glad to assist her, and knew that henceforth the tangled path would be smoothed and widened. She stood at the back of his chair during the hour's sitting, and with peculiar interest watched the strokes of

his brush as the portrait grew under his practised hand. When Irene rose, the orphan moved away and began to scrutinize the numerous pictures scattered about the room. A great joy filled her heart and illumined her face, and she waited for the words of encouragement that she felt assured would be spoken. The artist looked over her sketches slowly, carefully, and his eye went back to her brilliant countenance as if to read there answers to ciphers which perplexed him. But yet more baffling cryptography met him in the deep, flashing, appealing eyes, on the crimson, quivering lips, on the low, full brow, with its widely separated black arches. Evidently the face possessed far more attraction than the drawings, and he made her sit down beside him, and passed his hand over her head and temples, as a professed phrenologist might preparatory to rendering a chart.

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

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

determined to realize it."

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

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

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

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

The ride home was very silent. Miss Margaret sat stiff and icy, looking quite insulted, while her niece was too much engrossed by other reflections to notice her. The latter spent the remainder of the morning in writing to Hugh and correcting her French exercises, and when summoned to dinner she entered the room expecting a storm. A glance sufficed to show her that Miss Margaret had not yet spoken to her father, though it was evident from her countenance that she was about to make what she considered an important revelation. The meal passed, however,

without any allusion to the subject, and, knowing what she had to expect, Irene immediately withdrew to the library to give her aunt an opportunity of unburdening her mind. The struggle must come some time, and she longed to have it over as soon as possible. She threw up the sash, seated herself on the broad cedar window-sill, and began to work out a sum in Algebra. Nearly a half-hour passed; the slamming of the dining-room door was like the first line of foam, curling and whitening the sea when the tempest sweeps forward; her father stamped into the library, and the storm broke over her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My father, that is no reason."

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

are grown and learn common sense. Now get out of my sight!"

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

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

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

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

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

and arched iron gate vanished from her sight, she sank back in one corner, and, covering her face with her hands, smothered a groan and fought desperately with her voiceless anguish.

CHAPTER VI
MASTER AND PUPIL

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

Electra knew that his stay had been prolonged beyond his original intention, and she dreaded the hour when she should be deprived of his aid and advice. Though their acquaintance had been so short, a strangely strong feeling had grown up in her heart toward him; a feeling of clinging tenderness, blended with earnest and undying gratitude. She knew that he understood her character and appreciated her struggles, and it soothed her fierce, proud heart, in some degree to receive from him those tokens of constant remembrance which she so yearned to have from

Russell. She felt, too, that she was not regarded as a stranger by the artist; she could see his sad eyes brighten at her entrance, and detect the tremor in his hand and voice when he spoke of going home. His health had improved, and the heat of summer had come; why did he linger? His evenings were often spent at the cottage, and even Mrs. Aubrey learned to smile at the sound of his step.

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

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

"Are you in earnest this time?"

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

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

"Suppose you had never seen me?"

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

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

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

He passed his hand over his short shining hair, and mused for a moment as if laying conflicting emotions in the balance. She heard his deep, laboured breathing, and saw the working of the

muscles in his pale face; when he spoke his voice was husky —

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

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

"Electra, will you come?"

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

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

He stooped and touched her forehead with his lips.

"My dear Electra, you are right to remain with her, but when she needs you no more I shall expect you to come to me in New York. Meantime, I shall write to you frequently, and supply you

with such books and materials as you require. My pupil, I long to have you in my own home. Remember, no matter what happens, you have promised yourself to me."

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

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

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

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

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

One morning when Mr. Campbell, the pastor, had spent some time in the sick-room praying with the sufferer and administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Electra followed him to the door, leaving Russell with his mother. The gentle pastor took her hand kindly, and looked at her with filling eyes.

"You think my aunt is worse?"

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

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

"If I could look upon your face once more, my son, it would not be hard to die. Let me see you in heaven, my dear, dear boy." These were the last words, and soon after a stupor fell upon her. Hour after hour passed; Mrs. Campbell came and sat beside the bed, and the three remained silent, now and then lifting bowed

heads to look at the sleeper. The autumn day died slowly as the widow, and when the clock dirged out the sunset hour Russell rose, and, putting back the window curtains, stooped and laid his face close to his mother's. No pulsation stirred the folds over the heart, or the soft bands of hair on the blue-veined temples; the still mouth had breathed its last sigh, and the meek brown eyes had opened in eternity.

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

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

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

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

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

It was the last wail she ever suffered to escape her in his presence. He raised his head and put his hand on her forehead, but the trembling lips refused their office, and as she looked up at him tears rolled slowly down and fell on her cheek. She would have given worlds to mingle her tears with his, but no

moisture came to her burning eyes; and there these two, soon to separate, passed the remaining hours of that long wretched night of watching. The stormy day lifted her pale, mournful face at last, and with it came the dreary patter and sobbing of autumn rain, making it doubly harrowing to commit the precious form to its long, last resting-place. Electra stood up beside her cousin and folded her arms together.

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

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

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

hazards. Drop the subject, if you please."

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

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

The kind-hearted pastor and his wife urged the orphans to remove to their house for a few days at least, until the future could be mapped; but they preferred to meet and battle at once with the spectre which they knew stood waiting in the desolate cottage. At midnight a heavy sleep fell on Russell, who had thrown himself upon his mother's couch; and, softly spreading a shawl over him, Electra sat down by the dying fire on the kitchen hearth, and looked her future in the face. A few days sufficed to prepare for her journey; and a gentleman from New York, who had met her cousin in Mr. Campbell's office, consented to take charge of her, and commit her to Mr. Clifton's hands. The scanty furniture was sent to an auction-room, and a piece of board nailed to the gatepost announced that the cottage was for rent. Russell decided to take his meals at a boarding-house, and occupy a small room over the office, which Mr. Campbell had placed at his disposal. On the same day, the cousins bade adieu to the only spot they had called "home" for many years; and as Russell locked the door and joined Electra, his melancholy face expressed, far better

than words could have done, the pain it cost him to quit the house where his idolized mother had lived, suffered and died. Mr. Colton was waiting for Electra at the hotel, whither the stage had been driven for passengers; and as she drew near and saw her trunk among others piled on top, she stopped and grasped Russell's hand between both hers. A livid paleness settled on her face, while her wild black eyes fastened on his features. She might never see him again; he was far dearer to her than her life; how could she bear to leave him, to put hundreds of miles between that face and her own? An icy hand clutched her heart as she gazed into his deep, sad, beautiful eyes. His feeling for her was a steady, serene affection, such as brothers have for dear young sisters, and to give her up now filled him with genuine, earnest sorrow.

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

He bent down to kiss her, and the strained, tortured look that greeted him he never forgot. She put her arms around his neck, and clung to him like a shivering weed driven by rough winds against a stone wall. He removed her clasping arms, and led her to Mr. Colton; but as the latter offered to assist her into the stage, she drew back, that Russell might perform that office. While he

almost lifted her to a seat, her fingers refused to release his, and he was forced to disengage them. Other passengers entered, and the door was closed. Russell stood near the window, and said gently, pitying her suffering —

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII
NEW FRIENDS

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

strove to rear their children as Christian parents should. Louisa's attachment was very warm and lasting, and ere long she insisted that her friend should visit her. Weary of the school, the latter gladly availed herself of the invitation, and one Friday afternoon she accompanied Louisa home. The mansion was almost palatial, and as Irene entered the splendidly-furnished parlours her own Southern home rose vividly before her.

"Mother, this is Miss Huntingdon."

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

"Come upstairs and put away your bonnet."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, I will join you at once."

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

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

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

He smiled, and she walked on.

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

"When he was a boy he said he intended to preach, and father

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Have you no brother?"

"I am an only child."

"You would like a brother, however?"

"Yes, sir, above all things."

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

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

means cheering. Harvey assisted her into the carriage.

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

The books were not forgotten; they arrived the ensuing week, and his selection satisfied her that he perfectly understood what kind of aid she required. At the close of the next month, instead of accompanying Louisa home, Irene was suffering with severe cold, and too much indisposed to quit the house. This was a grievous disappointment, but she bore it bravely, and went on with her studies. What a dreary isolation in the midst of numbers of her own age! It was a thraldom that galled her, and more than once she implored her father's permission to return home. His replies were positive denials, and after a time she ceased to expect release, until the prescribed course should be ended. Thus another month dragged itself away. On Friday morning Louisa was absent. Irene felt anxious and distressed. Perhaps she was ill; something must have happened. As the day pupils were dismissed she started back to her own room, heart-sick because of this second disappointment. A few minutes after a servant knocked at the door and informed her that a gentleman wished to see her in the parlour.

CHAPTER VIII
A DISCOVERY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Some portentous cloud seems lowering over your future.

What is it? You ought to be a gleeful girl, full of happy hopes."

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

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

"Shut their eyes to what?"

"Various coming troubles, Mr. Young."

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

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

"You are not a stranger, sir."

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

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

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

During the remainder of this visit she saw him no more. Louisa recovered rapidly, and when she asked for her brother on Sabbath evening, Mrs. Young said he was to preach twice that day. Monday morning arrived, and Irene returned to school with a heavy heart fearing that she had wounded him; but a few days after, Louisa brought her a book and brief note of kind words. One Saturday morning she sat quite alone in her small room; the week had been specially painful, and, wearied in soul, the girl

laid her head down on her folded arms, and thought of her home in the far South. A loud rap startled her from this painful reverie, and ere she could utter the stereotyped "come in," Louisa sprang to her side.

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

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

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

gliding up to her she exclaimed —

"Electra! Electra Grey!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Soon after they reached home, Louisa was called into the parlour to see a young friend, and as Mrs. Young was absent,

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

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

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

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

She looked at him, and said with some difficulty —

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

"Thank God you are not killed."

He kissed her, then turned away and despatched a servant for a physician. He summoned Louisa, and inquired fruitlessly for his mother; no one knew whither she had gone; it would not do to wait for her. He stood by the sofa and prepared the necessary bandages, while his sister could only cry over and

caress the sufferer. When the physician came the white dimpled arm was bared; and he discovered that the bone was broken. The setting was extremely painful, but she lay with closed eyes and firmly compressed lips, uttering no sound, giving no token of the torture, save in the wrinkling of her forehead. They bound the arm tightly, and then the doctor said the ankle was badly strained and swollen, but there was, luckily, no fracture. He gave minute directions to the minister and withdrew, praising the patient's remarkable fortitude. Louisa would talk, and her brother sent her off to prepare a room for her friend.

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

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

He smoothed the folds of her hair from her temples, and for the first time played with the curls he had so often before been tempted to touch. She looked so slight, so childish, with her head nestled against the pillow, that he forgot she was almost sixteen, forgot everything but the beauty of her pale face, and bent over her with an expression of the tenderest love. She was suffering too much to notice his countenance, and only felt that he was very kind and gentle. Mrs. Young came in very soon, and heard with the deepest solicitude of what had occurred. Irene again

requested to be taken to the school, fearing that she would cause too much trouble during her long confinement to the house. But Mrs. Young stopped her arguments with kisses, and would listen to no such arrangements; she would trust to no one but herself to nurse "the bruised Southern lily." Having seen that all was in readiness, she insisted on carrying her guest to the room adjoining Louisa's, and opening into her own. Mr. Young had gone to Boston the day before, and, turning to her son, she said —

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

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

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

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

rarely left their guest; and after Mr. Young's return he treated her with all the affectionate consideration of a parent. Several days after the occurrence of the accident Irene turned toward the minister, who stood talking to his mother.

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

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

"Electra Grey. Did you notice her face?"

"Yes; but why do you ask?"

"Because I think she resembles your mother."

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

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

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

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

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

forward and paused irresolute.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Oh! child! call me aunt! I am your father's sister. We called him by his middle name, Robert, and for eighteen years have heard nothing of him. Sit down here, and let me tell you the circumstances. Your father was the youngest of three children, and in his youth gave us great distress by his wildness; he ran away from college and went to sea. After an absence of three years he returned, almost a wreck of his former self. My mother had died during his long voyage to the South Sea Islands, and

father, who believed him to have been the remote cause of her death (for her health failed soon after he left), upbraided him most harshly and unwisely. His reproaches drove poor Robert to desperation, and without giving us any clue, he left home as suddenly as before. Whither he went we never knew. Father was so incensed that he entirely disinherited him; but at his death, when the estate was divided, my brother William and I decided that we would take only what we considered our proportion, and we set apart one-third for Robert. We advertised for several years, and could hear nothing of him; and at the end of the fifth year, William divided that remaining third. Oh, my dear child! I am so glad to find you out. But where have you been all this time? Where did Robert die?"

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

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

She folded her arms around the graceful young form and sobbed aloud, while Irene found it difficult to repress her own tears of sympathy and joy that her friend had found such

relatives. Of the three, Electra was calmest. Though glad to meet with her father's family, she knew better than they that this circumstance could make little alteration in her life, and therefore, when Mrs. Young had left the room to acquaint her husband and son with the discovery she had made, Electra sat down beside her friend's sofa just as she would have done two hours before.

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

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

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

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

"Well, I can tell you. Before Aunt Amy's marriage your father loved her, and to please her parents she accepted him. She was miserable, because she was very much attached to my uncle, and asked Mr. Huntingdon to release her from the engagement. He declined, and finding that her parents sided with him she left

home and married against their wishes. They adopted a distant relative and never gave her a cent. Your father never forgave her. He had great influence with the governor, and she went to him and entreated him to aid her in procuring a pardon for her husband. He repulsed her cruelly, and used his influence against my uncle. She afterwards saw a letter which he wrote to the governor, urging him to withhold a pardon. Now you have the key to his hatred; now you understand why he wrote you nothing concerning us. Not even Aunt Amy's coffin could shut in his hate. Irene, I must go home now, for they will wonder what has become of me. I will see you again soon."

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

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

"It was not Electra that harmed me."

"Then you admit that you have been harmed?"

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

He opened the *Rambler*, of which she was particularly fond, and began to read. For a while she listened, and in her interest

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I always told you that I should never marry. I shall be too

constantly occupied to sit down and feel lonely. Now, mother, I must finish my letters, if you please, for they should go by the earliest mail."

CHAPTER IX
AN ORPHAN'S PROTECTORS

The artist stood at the window watching for his pupil's return; it was the late afternoon hour, which they were wont to spend in reading, and her absence annoyed him. As he rested carelessly against the window, his graceful form was displayed to great advantage, and the long brown hair dropped about a classical face of almost feminine beauty. The delicacy of his features was enhanced by the extreme pallor of his complexion, and it was apparent that close application to his profession had made sad inroads on a constitution never very robust. A certain listlessness of manner, a sort of lazy-grace seemed characteristic; but when his pupil came in and laid aside her bonnet, the expression of *ennui*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.