

FERN FANNY

RUTH HALL: A
DOMESTIC TALE OF THE
PRESENT TIME

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Fanny Fern

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PREFACE

TO THE READER

I present you with my first continuous story. I do not dignify it by the name of “A novel.” I am aware that it is entirely at variance with all set rules for novel-writing. There is no intricate plot; there are no startling developments, no hair-breadth escapes. I have compressed into one volume what I might have expanded into two or three. I have avoided long introductions and descriptions, and have entered unceremoniously and unannounced, into people’s houses, without stopping to ring the bell. Whether you will fancy this primitive mode of calling, whether you will like the company to which it introduces you, or – whether you will like the book at all, I cannot tell. Still, I cherish the hope that, somewhere in the length and breadth of the land, it may fan into a flame, in some tried heart, the fading embers of hope, well-nigh extinguished by wintry fortune and summer friends.

FANNY FERN.

CHAPTER I

The old church clock rang solemnly out on the midnight air. Ruth started. For hours she had sat there, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and gazing through the open space between the rows of brick walls, upon the sparkling waters of the bay, glancing and quivering 'neath the moon-beams. The city's busy hum had long since died away; myriad restless eyes had closed in peaceful slumber; Ruth could not sleep. This was the last time she would sit at that little window. The morrow would find her in a home of her own. On the morrow Ruth would be a bride.

Ruth was not sighing because she was about to leave her father's roof, (for her childhood had been anything but happy,) but she was vainly trying to look into a future, which God has mercifully veiled from curious eyes. Had that craving heart of hers at length found its ark of refuge? Would clouds or sunshine, joy or sorrow, tears or smiles, predominate in her future? Who could tell? The silent stars returned her no answer. Would a harsh word ever fall from lips which now breathed only love? Would the step whose lightest footfall now made her heart leap, ever sound in her ear like a death-knell? As time, with its ceaseless changes, rolled on, would love flee affrighted from the bent form, and silver locks, and faltering footstep? Was there no talisman to keep him?

"Strange questions," were they, "for a young girl!" Ah, but Ruth could remember when she was no taller than a rosebush, how cravingly her little heart cried out for love! How a careless word, powerless to wound one less sensitive, would send her, weeping, to that little room for hours; and, young as she was, life's pains seemed already more to her than life's pleasures. Would it *always* be so? Would she find more thorns than roses in her *future* pathway?

Then, Ruth remembered how she used to wish she were beautiful, – not that she might be admired, but that she might be loved. But Ruth was "very plain," – so her brother Hyacinth told her, and "awkward," too; she had heard that ever since she could remember; and the recollection of it dyed her cheek with blushes, whenever a stranger made his appearance in the home circle.

So, Ruth was fonder of being alone by herself; and then, they called her "odd," and "queer," and wondered if she would "ever make anything;" and Ruth used to wonder, too; and sometimes she asked herself why a sweet strain of music, or a fine passage in a poem, made her heart thrill, and her whole frame quiver with emotion?

The world smiled on her brother Hyacinth. He was handsome, and gifted. He could win fame, and what was better, love. Ruth wished he would love her a little. She often used to steal into his room and "right" his papers, when the stupid housemaid had displaced them; and often she would prepare him a tempting little lunch, and carry it to his room, on his return from his morning walk; but Hyacinth would only say, "Oh, it is you, Ruth, is it? I thought it was Bridget;" and go on reading his newspaper.

Ruth's mother was dead. Ruth did not remember a great deal about her – only that she always looked uneasy about the time her father was expected home; and when his step was heard in the hall, she would say in a whisper, to Hyacinth and herself, "Hush! hush! your father is coming;" and then Hyacinth would immediately stop whistling, or humming, and Ruth would run up into her little room, for fear she should, in some unexpected way, get into disgrace.

Ruth, also, remembered when her father came home and found company to tea, how he frowned and complained of headache, although he always ate as heartily as any of the company; and how after tea he would stretch himself out upon the sofa and say, "I think I'll take a nap;" and then, he would close his eyes, and if the company commenced talking, he would start up and say to Ruth, who was sitting very still in the corner, "*Ruth*, don't make such a noise;" and when Ruth's mother would whisper gently in his ear, "Wouldn't it be better, dear, if you laid down up stairs? it is quite comfortable and quiet there," her father would say, aloud, "Oh yes, oh yes, you want to get rid of me, do you?" And then her mother would say, turning to the company, "How very fond Mr. Ellet

is of a joke!” But Ruth remembered that her mother often blushed when she said so, and that her laugh did not sound natural.

After her mother’s death, Ruth was sent to boarding-school, where she shared a room with four strange girls, who laid awake all night, telling the most extraordinary stories, and ridiculing Ruth for being such an old maid that she could not see “where the laugh came in.” Equally astonishing to the unsophisticated Ruth, was the demureness with which they would bend over their books when the pale, meek-eyed widow, employed as duenna, went the rounds after tea, to see if each inmate was preparing the next day’s lessons, and the coolness with which they would jump up, on her departure, put on their bonnets and shawls, and slip out at the side-street door to meet expectant lovers; and when the pale widow went the rounds again at nine o’clock, she would find them demurely seated, just where she left them, apparently busily conning their lessons! Ruth wondered if *all* girls were as mischievous, and if fathers and mothers ever stopped to think what companions their daughters would have for room-mates and bed-fellows, when they sent them away from home. As to the Principal, Madame Moreau, she contented herself with sweeping her flounces, once a day, through the recitation rooms; so it was not a difficult matter, in so large an establishment, to pass muster with the sub-teachers at recitations.

Composition day was the general bugbear. Ruth’s madcap room-mates were struck with the most unqualified amazement and admiration at the facility with which “the old maid” executed this frightful task. They soon learned to put her services in requisition; first, to help them out of this slough of despond; next, to save them the necessity of wading in at all, by writing their compositions for them.

In the all-absorbing love affairs which were constantly going on between the young ladies of Madame Moreau’s school and their respective admirers, Ruth took no interest; and on the occasion of the unexpected reception of a bouquet, from a smitten swain, accompanied by a copy of amatory verses, Ruth crimsoned to her temples and burst into tears, that any one could be found so heartless as to burlesque the “awkward” Ruth. Simple child! She was unconscious that, in the freedom of that atmosphere where a “prophet out of his own country is honored,” her lithe form had rounded into symmetry and grace, her slow step had become light and elastic, her eye bright, her smile winning, and her voice soft and melodious. Other bouquets, other notes, and glances of involuntary admiration from passers-by, at length opened her eyes to the fact, that she was “plain, awkward Ruth” no longer. Eureka! She had arrived at the first epoch in a young girl’s life, – she had found out her power! Her manners became assured and self-possessed. *She*, Ruth, could inspire love! Life became dear to her. There was something worth living for – something to look forward to. She had a motive – an aim; she should *some* day make somebody’s heart glad, – somebody’s hearth-stone bright; somebody should be proud of her; and oh, how she *could* love that somebody! History, astronomy, mathematics, the languages, were all pastime now. Life wore a new aspect; the skies were bluer, the earth greener, the flowers more fragrant; – her twin-soul existed somewhere.

When Ruth had been a year at school, her elegant brother Hyacinth came to see her. Ruth dashed down her books, and bounded down three stairs at a time, to meet him; for she loved him, poor child, just as well as if he were worth loving. Hyacinth drew languidly back a dozen paces, and holding up his hands, drawled out imploringly, “kiss me if you insist on it, Ruth, but for heaven’s sake, don’t tumble my dickey.” He also remarked, that her shoes were too large for her feet, and that her little French apron was “slightly askew;” and told her, whatever else she omitted, to be sure to learn “to waltz.” He was then introduced to Madame Moreau, who remarked to Madame Chicchi, her Italian teacher, what a very *distingué* looking person he was; after which he yawned several times, then touched his hat gracefully, praised “the very superior air of the establishment,” brushed an imperceptible atom of dust from his beaver, kissed the tips of his fingers to his demonstrative sister, and tiptoed Terpsichoreally over the academic threshold.

In addition to this, Ruth’s father wrote occasionally when a term-bill became due, or when his tradesmen’s bills came in, on the first of January; on which occasion an annual fit of poverty seized

him, an almshouse loomed up in perspective, he reduced the wages of his cook two shillings, and advised Ruth either to get married or teach school.

Three years had passed under Madame Moreau's roof; Ruth's schoolmates wondering the while why she took so much pains to bother her head with those stupid books, when she was every day growing prettier, and all the world knew that it was quite unnecessary for a pretty woman to be clever. When Ruth once more crossed the paternal threshold, Hyacinth levelled his eye-glass at her, and exclaimed, "Pon honor, Ruth, you've positively had a narrow escape from being handsome." Whether old Mr. Ellet was satisfied with her physical and mental progress, Ruth had no means of knowing.

And now, as we have said before, it is the night before Ruth's bridal; and there she sits, though the old church bell has long since chimed the midnight hour, gazing at the moon, as she cuts a shining path through the waters; and trembling, while she questions the dim, uncertain future. Tears, Ruth? Have phantom shapes of terror glided before those gentle prophet eyes? Has death's dark wing even now fanned those girlish temples?

CHAPTER II

It was so odd in Ruth to have no one but the family at the wedding. It was just one of her queer freaks! Where was the use of her white satin dress and orange wreath? what the use of her looking handsomer than she ever did before, when there was nobody there to see her?

“Nobody to see her?” Mark that manly form at her side; see his dark eye glisten, and his chiselled lip quiver, as he bends an earnest gaze on her who realizes all his boyhood dreams. Mistaken ones! it is not admiration which that young beating heart craves; it is love.

“A very fine-looking, presentable fellow,” said Hyacinth, as the carriage rolled away with his new brother-in-law. “Really, love is a great beautifier. Ruth looked quite handsome to-night. Lord bless me! how immensely tiresome it must be to sit opposite the same face three times a day, three hundred and sixty-five days in a year! I should weary of Venus herself. I’m glad my handsome brother-in-law is in such good circumstances. Duns *are* a bore. I must keep on the right side of him. Tom, was that tailor here again yesterday? Did you tell him I was out of town? Right, Tom.”

CHAPTER III

“Well, I *hope* Harry will be happy,” said Ruth’s mother-in-law, old Mrs. Hall, as she untied her cap-strings, and seated herself in the newly-furnished parlor, to await the coming of the bride and bridegroom. “I can’t say, though, that I see the need of his being married. I always mended his socks. He has sixteen bran new shirts, eight linen and eight cotton. I made them myself out of the Hamilton long-cloth. Hamilton long-cloth is good cotton, too; strong, firm, and wears well. Eight cotton and eight linen shirts! Can anybody tell what he got married for? *I* don’t know. If he tired of his boarding-house, of course he could always come home. As to Ruth, I don’t know anything about her. Of course she is perfect in *his* eyes. I remember the time when he used to think *me* perfect. I suppose I shall be laid on the shelf now. Well, what beauty he can find in that pale, golden hair, and those blue-gray eyes, I don’t know. I can’t say I fancy the family either. Proud as Lucifer, all of ’em. Nothing to be proud of, either. The father next to nothing when he began life. The son, a conceited jackanapes, who divides his time between writing rhymes and inventing new ties for his cravat. Well, well, we shall see; but I doubt if this bride is anything but a well-dressed doll. I’ve been peeping into her bureau drawers to-day. What is the use of all those ruffles on her under-clothes, I’d like to know? Who’s going to wash and iron them? *Presents* to her! Well, why don’t people make *sensible* presents, – a dozen of dish towels, some crash rollers, a ball of wick-yarn, or the like of that?”

“O-o-oh d-e-a-r! there’s the carriage! Now, for one month to come, to say the least, I shall be made perfectly sick with their billing and cooing. I shouldn’t be surprised if Harry didn’t speak to me oftener than once a day. Had he married a practical woman I wouldn’t have cared – somebody who looked as if God made her for something; but that little yellow-haired simpleton – umph!”

Poor Ruth, in happy ignorance of the state of her new mother-in-law’s feelings, moved about her apartments in a sort of blissful dream. How odd it seemed, this new freedom, this being one’s own mistress. How odd to see that shaving-brush and those razors lying on *her* toilet table! then that saucy looking smoking-cap, those slippers and that dressing-gown, those fancy neck-ties, too, and vests and coats, in unrebuked proximity to her muslins, laces, silks and de laines!

Ruth liked it.

CHAPTER IV

“Good morning, Ruth; *Mrs. Hall* I suppose I *should* call you, only that I can’t get used to being shoved one side quite so suddenly,” said the old lady, with a faint attempt at a laugh.

“Oh, pray don’t say *Mrs. Hall* to *me*” said Ruth, handing her a chair; “call me any name that best pleases you; I shall be quite satisfied.”

“I suppose you feel quite lonesome when Harry is away, attending to business, and as if you hardly knew what to do with yourself; don’t you?”

“Oh, no,” said Ruth, with a glad smile, “not at all, I was just thinking whether I was not glad to have him gone a little while, so that I could sit down and think how much I love him.”

The old lady moved uneasily in her chair. “I suppose you understand all about housekeeping, Ruth?”

Ruth blushed. “No,” said she, “I have but just returned from boarding-school. I asked Harry to wait till I had learned house-keeping matters, but he was not willing.”

The old lady untied her cap-strings, and patted the floor restlessly with her foot.

“It is a great pity you were not brought up properly,” said she. “I learned all that a girl should learn, before I married. Harry has his fortune yet to make, you know. Young people, now-a-days, seem to think that money comes in showers, whenever it is wanted; that’s a mistake; a penny at a time – that’s the way we got ours; that’s the way Harry and you will have to get yours. Harry has been brought up sensibly. He has been taught economy; he is, like me, naturally of a very generous turn; he will occasionally offer you pin-money. In those cases, it will be best for you to pass it over to me to keep; of course you can always have it again, by telling me how you wish to spend it. I would advise you, too, to lay by all your handsome clothes. As to the silk stockings you were married in, of course you will never be so extravagant as to wear them again. I never had a pair of silk stockings in my life; they have a very silly, frivolous look. Do you know how to iron, Ruth?”

“Yes,” said Ruth; “I have sometimes clear-starched my own muslins and laces.”

“Glad to hear it; did you ever seat a pair of pantaloons?”

“No,” said Ruth, repressing a laugh, and yet half inclined to cry; “you forget that I am just home from boarding-school.”

“Can you make bread? When I say *bread* I *mean* bread – old fashioned, yeast riz bread; none of your sal-soda, salæratuſ, sal-volatile poisonous mixtures, that must be eaten as quick as baked, lest it should dry up; *yeast* bread – do you know how to make it?”

“No,” said Ruth, with a growing sense of her utter good-for-nothingness; “people in the city always buy baker’s bread; my father did.”

“Your father! land’s sake, child, you mustn’t quote your father now you’re married; you haven’t any father.”

I never had, thought Ruth.

“To be sure; what does the Bible say? ‘Forsaking father and mother, cleave to your wife,’ (or husband, which amounts to the same thing, I take it;) and speaking of that, I hope you won’t be always running home, or running anywhere in fact. Wives should be keepers at home. Ruth,” continued the old lady after a short pause, “do you know I should like your looks better, if you didn’t curl your hair?”

“I don’t curl it,” said Ruth, “it curls naturally.”

“That’s a pity,” said the old lady, “you should avoid everything that looks frivolous; you must try and pomatum it down. And Ruth, if you should feel the need of exercise, don’t gad in the streets. Remember there is nothing like a broom and a dust-pan to make the blood circulate.”

“You keep a rag bag, I suppose,” said the old lady; “many’s the glass dish I’ve peddled away my scissors-clippings for. ‘Waste not, want not.’ I’ve got that framed somewhere. I’ll hunt it up, and put it on your wall. It won’t do you any harm to read it now and then.”

“I hope,” continued the old lady, “that you don’t read novels and such trash. I have a very select little library, when you feel inclined to read, consisting of a treatise on ‘The Complaints of Women,’ an excellent sermon on Predestination, by our old minister, Dr. Diggs, and Seven Reasons why John Rogers, the martyr, must have had *ten* children instead of *nine* (as is *generally* supposed); any time that you stand in need of *rational* reading come to me;” and the old lady, smoothing a wrinkle in her black silk apron, took a dignified leave.

CHAPTER V

Poor Ruth! her sky so soon overcast! As the door closed on the prim, retreating figure of her mother-in-law, she burst into tears. But she was too sensible a girl to weep long. She wiped her eyes, and began to consider what was to be done. It would never do to complain to Harry – dear Harry. He would have to take sides; oh no, that would never do; she could never complain to him of his *own* mother. But why did he bring them together? knowing, as he must have known, how little likely they were to assimilate. This thought she smothered quickly, but not before it had given birth to a sigh, close upon the heels of which love framed this apology: It was so long since Harry had lived under the same roof with his mother he had probably forgotten her eccentricities; and then she was so dotingly fond of him, that probably no points of collision ever came up between the two.

In the course of an hour, what with cold bathing and philosophy, Ruth's eyes and equanimity were placed beyond the suspicion even of a newly-made husband, and when she held up her lips to him so temptingly, on his return, he little dreamed of the self-conquest she had so tearfully achieved for his sake.

CHAPTER VI

Harry's father began life on a farm in Vermont. Between handling ploughs, hoes, and harrows, he had managed to pick up sufficient knowledge to establish himself as a country doctor; well contented to ride six miles on horseback of a stormy night, to extract a tooth for some distracted wretch, for twenty-five cents. Naturally loquacious, and equally fond of administering jalap and gossip, he soon became a great favorite with the "women folks," which every aspiring Esculapius, who reads this, knows to be half the battle. They soon began to trust him, not only in drawing teeth, but in cases involving the increase of the village census. Several successes in this line, which he took no pains to conceal, put him behind a gig of his own, and enabled his practice to overtake his fame as far as the next village.

Like many other persons, who revolve all their life in a peck measure, the doctor's views of the world in general, and its denizens in particular, were somewhat circumscribed. Added to this, he was as persevering as a fly in the dog-days, and as immovable as the old rusty weather-cock on the village meeting-house, which for twenty years had never been blown about by any whisking wind of doctrine. "When he opened his mouth, no dog must bark;" and any dissent from his opinion, however circumspectly worded, he considered a personal insult. As his wife entertained the same liberal views, occasional conjugal collisions, on this narrow track, were the consequence; the interest of which was intensified by each reminding the other of their Calvinistic church obligations to keep the peace. They had, however, one common ground of undisputed territory – their "*Son Harry*," who was as infallible as the Pope, and (until he got married) never did a foolish thing since he was born. On this last point, their "*Son Harry*" did not exactly agree with them, as he considered it decidedly the most delightful negotiation he had ever made, and one which he could not even think of without a sudden acceleration of pulse.

Time wore on, the young couple occupying their own suite of apartments, while the old people kept house. The doctor, who had saved enough to lay his saddle-bags with his medical books on the shelf, busied himself, after he had been to market in the morning, in speculating on what Ruth was about, or in peeping over the balustrade, to see who called when the bell rang; or, in counting the wood-pile, to see how many sticks the cook had taken to make the pot boil for dinner. The second girl (a supernumerary of the bridal week) had long since been dismissed; and the doctor and his wife spent their evenings with the cook, to save the expense of burning an extra lamp. Consequently, Betty soon began to consider herself one of the family, and surprised Ruth one day by modestly requesting the loan of her bridal veil "to wear to a little party;" not to speak of sundry naps to which she treated herself in Ruth's absence, in her damask rocking chair, which was redolent, for some time after, of a strong odor of dish-water.

Still, Ruth kept her wise little mouth shut; moving, amid these discordant elements, as if she were deaf, dumb, and blind.

Oh, love! that thy silken reins could so curb the spirit and bridle the tongue, that thy uplifted finger of warning could calm that bounding pulse, still that throbbing heart, and send those rebellious tears, unnoticed, back to their source.

Ah! could we lay bare the secret history of many a wife's heart, what martyrs would be found, over whose uncomplaining lips the grave sets its unbroken seal of silence.

But was Harry blind and deaf? Had the bridegroom of a few months grown careless and unobservant? Was he, to whom every hair of that sunny head was dear, blind to the inward struggles, marked only by fits of feverish gaiety? Did he never see the sudden *ruse* to hide the tell-tale blush, or starting tear? Did it escape his notice, that Ruth would start, like a guilty thing, if a sudden impulse of tenderness betrayed her into laying her hand upon his forehead, or leaning her head upon his shoulder, or throwing her arms about his neck, when the jealous mother was by? Did not his soul bend the

silent knee of homage to that youthful self-control that could repress its own warm emotions, and stifle its own sorrows, lest *he* should know a heart-pang?

Yes; Ruth read it in the magnetic glance of the loving eye as it lingeringly rested on her, and in the low, thrilling tone of the whispered, “God bless you, my wife;” and many an hour, when alone in his counting room, was Harry, forgetful of business, revolving plans for a separate home for himself and Ruth.

This was rendered every day more necessary, by the increased encroachments of the old people, who insisted that no visitors should remain in the house after the old-fashioned hour of nine; at which time the fire should be taken apart, the chairs set up, the lights extinguished, and a solemn silence brood until the next morning’s cock-crowing. It was also suggested to the young couple, that the wear and tear of the front entry carpet might be saved by their entering the house by the back gate, instead of the front door.

Meals were very solemn occasions; the old people frowning, at such times, on all attempts at conversation, save when the doctor narrated the market prices he paid for each article of food upon the table. And so time wore on. The old couple, like two scathed trees, dry, harsh, and uninviting, presenting only rough surfaces to the clinging ivy, which fain would clothe with brightest verdure their leafless branches.

CHAPTER VII

Hark! to that tiny wail! Ruth knows that most blessed of all hours. Ruth is a *mother*! Joy to thee, Ruth! Another outlet for thy womanly heart; a mirror, in which thy smiles and tears shall be reflected back; a fair page, on which thou, God-commissioned, mayst write what thou wilt; a heart that will throb back to thine, love for love.

But Ruth thinks not of all this now, as she lies pale and motionless upon the pillow, while Harry's grateful tears bedew his first-born's face. She cannot even welcome the little stranger. Harry thought her dear to him before; but now, as she lies there, so like death's counterpart, a whole life of devotion would seem too little to prove his appreciation of all her sacrifices.

The advent of the little stranger was viewed through very different spectacles by different members of the family. The doctor regarded it as a little automaton, for pleasant Æsculapian experiments in his idle hours; the old lady viewed it as another barrier between herself and Harry, and another tie to cement his already too strong attachment for Ruth; and Betty groaned, when she thought of the puny interloper, in connection with washing and ironing days; and had already made up her mind that the first time its nurse used her new saucepan to make gruel, she would strike for higher wages.

Poor, little, unconscious "Daisy," with thy velvet cheek nestled up to as velvet a bosom, sleep on; thou art too near heaven to know a taint of earth.

CHAPTER VIII

Ruth's nurse, Mrs. Jiff, was fat, elephantine, and unctuous. Nursing agreed with her. She had "tasted" too many bowls of wine-whey on the stairs, tipped up too many bottles of porter in the closet, slid down too many slippery oysters before handing them to "her lady," not to do credit to her pantry devotions. Mrs. Jiff wore an uncommonly stiff gingham gown, which sounded, every time she moved, like the rustle of a footfall among the withered leaves of autumn. Her shoes were new, thick, and creaky, and she had a wheezy, dilapidated-bellowsy way of breathing, consequent upon the consumption of the above-mentioned port and oysters, which was intensely crucifying to a sick ear.

Mrs. Jiff always "forgot to bring" her own comb and hair brush. She had a way, too, of opening drawers and closets "by mistake," thereby throwing her helpless victim into a state of profuse perspiration. Then she would go to sleep between the andirons, with the new baby on the edge of her knee, in alarming proximity to the coals; would take a pinch of snuff over the bowl of gruel in the corner, and knock down the shovel, poker, and tongs, every time she went near the fire; whispering – sh – sh – sh – at the top of her lungs, as she glanced in the direction of the bed, as if its demented occupant were the guilty cause of the accident.

Mrs. Jiff had not nursed five-and-twenty years for nothing. She particularly affected taking care of young mothers, with their first babies; knowing very well that her chain shortened, with every after addition to maternal experience: she considered herself, therefore, quite lucky in being called upon to superintend little Daisy's advent.

It *did* occasionally cross Ruth's mind as she lay, almost fainting with exhaustion, on the pillow, while the ravenous little Daisy cried, "give, give," whether it took Mrs. Jiff two hours to make *one* cup of tea, and brown *one* slice of toast; Mrs. Jiff solacing herself, meanwhile, over an omelette in the kitchen, with Betty, and pouring into her ready ears whole histories of "gen'lemen as wasn't gen'lemen, whose ladies she nursed," and how "nobody but herself knew how late they *did* come home when their wives were sick, though, to be sure, she'd scorn to tell of it!" Sometimes, also, Ruth innocently wondered if it was necessary for the nurse to occupy the same bed with "her lady;" particularly when her circumference was as Behemoth-ish, and her nose as musical as Mrs. Jiff's; and whether there would be any impropriety in her asking her to take the babe and keep it quiet *part* of the night, that she might occasionally get a nap. Sometimes, too, she considered the feasibility of requesting Mrs. Jiff not to select the time when she (Ruth) was sipping her chocolate, to comb out her "false front," and polish up her artificial teeth; and sometimes she marvelled why, when Mrs. Jiff paid such endless visits to the kitchen, she was always as fixed as the North Star, whenever dear Harry came in to her chamber to have a conjugal chat with her.

CHAPTER IX

“How do you do this morning, Ruth?” said the old lady, lowering herself gradually into a softly-cushioned arm chair. “How your sickness *has* altered you! You look like a ghost? I shouldn’t wonder if you lost all your hair; it is no uncommon thing in sickness; or your teeth either. How’s the baby? She don’t favor our side of the house at all. She is quite a plain child, in fact. Has she any symptoms, yet, of a sore mouth? I hope not, because she will communicate it to your breast, and then you’ll have a time of it. I knew a poor, feeble thing once, who died of it. Of course, you intend, when Mrs. Jiff leaves, to take care of the baby yourself; a nursery girl would be very expensive.”

“I believe Harry has already engaged one,” said Ruth.

“I don’t think he has,” said the old lady, sitting up very straight, “because it was only this morning that the doctor and I figured up the expense it would be to you, and we unanimously came to the conclusion to tell Harry that you’d better take care of the child yourself. I always took care of my babies. You oughtn’t to have mentioned a nursery girl, at all, to Harry.”

“He proposed it himself,” replied Ruth; “he said I was too feeble to have the care of the child.”

“Pooh! pshaw! stuff! no such thing. You are well enough, or will be, before long. Now, there’s a girl’s board to begin with. Servant girls eat like boa-constrictors. Then, there’s the soap and oil she’ll waste; – oh, the thing isn’t to be thought of; it is perfectly ruinous. If you hadn’t made a fool of Harry, he never could have dreamed of it. You ought to have sense enough to check him, when he would go into such extravagances for you, but some people *haven’t* any sense. Where would all the sugar, and starch, and soap, go to, I’d like to know, if we were to have a second girl in the house? How long would the wood-pile, or pitch-kindlings, or our new copper-boiler last? And who is to keep the back gate bolted, with such a chit flying in and out?”

“Will you please hand me that camphor bottle?” said Ruth, laying her hand upon her throbbing forehead.

“How’s my little snow-drop to-day?” said Harry, entering Ruth’s room as his mother swept out; “what ails your eyes, Ruth?” said her husband, removing the little hands which hid them.

“A sudden pain,” said Ruth, laughing gaily; “it has gone now; the camphor was too strong.”

Good Ruth! brave Ruth! Was Harry deceived? Something ails *his* eyes, now; but Ruth has too much tact to notice it.

Oh Love! thou skilful teacher! learned beyond all the wisdom of the schools.

CHAPTER X

“You will be happy here, dear Ruth,” said Harry; “you will be your own mistress.”

Ruth danced about, from room to room, with the careless glee of a happy child, quite forgetful that she was a wife and a mother; quite unable to repress the flow of spirits consequent upon her new-found freedom.

Ruth’s new house was about five miles from the city. The approach to it was through a lovely winding lane, a little off the main road, skirted on either side by a thick grove of linden and elms, where the wild grape-vine leaped, clinging from branch to branch, festooning its ample clusters in prodigal profusion of fruitage, and forming a dense shade, impervious to the most garish noon-day heat; while beneath, the wild brier-rose unfolded its perfumed leaves in the hedges, till the bees and humming-birds went reeling away, with their honeyed treasures.

You can scarce see the house, for the drooping elms, half a century old, whose long branches, at every wind-gust, swept across the velvet lawn. The house is very old, but Ruth says, “All the better for that.” Little patches of moss tuft the sloping roof, and swallows and martens twitter round the old chimney. It has nice old-fashioned beams, running across the ceiling, which threaten to bump Harry’s curly head. The doorways, too, are low, with honeysuckle, red and white, wreathed around the porches; and back of the house there is a high hill (which Ruth says must be terraced off for a garden), surmounted by a gray rock, crowned by a tumble-down old summer-house, where you have as fine a prospect of hill and valley, rock and river, as ever a sunset flooded with rainbow tints.

It was blessed to see the love-light in Ruth’s gentle eyes; to see the rose chase the lily from her cheek; to see the old spring come back to her step; to follow her from room to room, while she draped the pretty white curtains, and beautified, unconsciously, everything her fingers touched.

She could give an order without having it countermanded; she could kiss little Daisy, without being called “silly;” she could pull out her comb, and let her curls flow about her face, without being considered “frivolous;” and, better than all, she could fly into her husband’s arms, when he came home, and kiss him, without feeling that she had broken any penal statute. Yes; she was free as the golden orioles, whose hanging nests swayed to and fro amid the glossy green leaves beneath her window.

But not as thoughtless.

Ruth had a strong, earnest nature; she could not look upon this wealth of sea, sky, leaf, bud, and blossom; she could not listen to the little birds, nor inhale the perfumed breath of morning, without a filling eye and brimming heart, to the bounteous Giver. Should she revel in all this loveliness, – should her heart be filled to its fullest capacity for earthly happiness, and no grateful incense go up from its altar to Heaven?

And the babe? Its wondering eyes had already begun to seek its mother’s; its little lip to quiver at a harsh or discordant sound. An unpracticed hand must sweep that harp of a thousand strings; trembling fingers must inscribe, indelibly, on that blank page, characters to be read by the light of eternity: the maternal eye must never sleep at its post, lest the enemy rifle the casket of its gems. And so, by her child’s cradle, Ruth first learned to pray. The weight her slender shoulders could not bear, she rolled at the foot of the cross; and, with the baptism of holy tears, mother and child were consecrated.

CHAPTER XI

Time flew on; seasons came and went; and still peace brooded, like a dove, under the roof of Harry and Ruth. Each bright summer morning, Ruth and the little Daisy, (who already partook of her mother's love for nature,) rambled, hand in hand, through the woods and fields, with a wholesome disregard of those city bug-bears, sun, dew, bogs, fences, briers, and cattle. Wherever a flower opened its blue eye in the rock cleft; wherever the little stream ran, babbling and sparkling, through the emerald meadow; where the golden moss piled up its velvet cushion in the cool woods; where the pretty clematis threw the graceful arms of youth 'round the gnarled trunk of decay; where the bearded grain, swaying to and fro, tempted to its death the reaper; where the red and white clover dotted the meadow grass; or where, in the damp marsh, the whip-poor-will moaned, and the crimson lobelia nodded its regal crown; or where the valley smiled in its beauty 'neath the lofty hills, nestling 'mid its foliage the snow-white cottages; or where the cattle dozed under the broad, green branches, or bent to the glassy lake to drink; or where, on the breezy hill-tops, the voices of childhood came up, sweet and clear, as the far-off hymning of angels, – there, Ruth and her soul's child loved to linger.

It was beautiful, yet fearful, to mark the kindling eye of the child; to see the delicate flush come and go on her marble cheek, and to feel the silent pressure of her little hand, when this alone could tell the rapture she had no words to express.

Ah, Ruth! gaze not so dotingly on those earnest eyes. Know'st thou not,

The rose that sweetest doth awake,
Will soonest go to rest?

CHAPTER XII

“Well,” said the doctor, taking his spectacles from his nose, and folding them up carefully in their leathern case; “I hope you’ll be easy, Mis. Hall, now that we’ve toted out here, bag and baggage, to please you, when I supposed I was settled for the rest of my life.”

“*Fathers* can’t be expected to have as much natural affection, or to be as self-sacrificing as *mothers*,” said the old lady. “Of course, it was some trouble to move out here; but, for Harry’s sake, I was willing to do it. What does Ruth know about house-keeping, I’d like to know? A pretty muss she’ll make of it, if *I’m* not around to oversee things.”

“It strikes me,” retorted the doctor, “that you won’t get any thanks for it – from *one* side of the house, at least. Ruth never *says* anything when you vex her, but there’s a look in her eye which – well, Mis. Hall, it tells the whole story.”

“I’ve seen it,” said the old lady, while her very cap-strings fluttered with indignation, “and it has provoked me a thousand times more than if she had thrown a brick-bat at my head. That girl is no fool, doctor. She knows very well what she is about: but diamond cut diamond, *I* say. Doctor, doctor, there are the hens in the garden. I want that garden kept nice. I suppose Ruth thinks that nobody can have flowers but herself. Wait till my china-asters and sweet peas come up. I’m going over to-day to take a peep round her house; I wonder what it looks like? Stuck full of gimcracks, of all sorts, I’ll warrant. Well, I shan’t furnish my best parlor till I see what she has got. I’ve laid by a little money, and –”

“Better give it to the missionaries, Mis. Hall,” growled the doctor; “I tell you Ruth don’t care a pin what you have in your parlor.”

“Don’t you believe it,” said the old lady.

“Well, anyhow,” muttered the doctor, “you can’t get the upper hand of *her* in that line; i. e., if she has a mind that you shall not. Harry is doing a very good business; and you know very well, it is no use to try to blind your eyes to it, that if she wanted Queen Victoria’s sceptre, he’d manage to get it for her.”

“That’s more than I can say of *you*,” exclaimed the old lady, fanning herself violently; “for all that I used to mend your old saddle-bags, and once made, with my own hands, a pair of leather small-clothes to ride horseback in. Forty years, doctor, I’ve spent in your service. I don’t look much as I did when you married me. I was said then to have ‘woman’s seven beauties,’ including the ‘dimple in the chin,’ which I see still remains;” and the old lady pointed to a slight indentation in her wrinkled face. “I might have had him that was Squire Smith, or Pete Packer, or Jim Jessup. There wasn’t one of ’em who had not rather do the chores on *our* farm, than on any other in the village.”

“Pooh, pooh,” said the doctor, “don’t be an old fool; that was because your father kept good cider.”

Mrs. Hall’s cap-strings were seen flying the next minute through the sitting-room door; and the doctor was heard to mutter, as she banged the door behind her, “*that* tells the whole story!”

CHAPTER XIII

“A summer house, hey!” said the old lady, as with stealthy, cat-like steps, she crossed a small piece of woods, between her house and Ruth’s; “a summer house! that’s the way the money goes, is it? What have we here? a book;” (picking up a volume which lay half hidden in the moss at her feet;) “poetry, I declare! the most frivolous of all reading; all pencil marked; – and here’s something in Ruth’s own hand-writing —*that’s* poetry, too: worse and worse.”

“Well, we’ll see how the *kitchen* of this poetess looks. I will go into the house the back way, and take them by surprise; that’s the way to find people out. None of your company faces for me.” And the old lady peered curiously through her spectacles, on either side, as she passed along towards the kitchen door, and exclaimed, as her eye fell on the shining row, “*six* milkpans! – wonder if they *buy* their milk, or keep a cow. If they buy it, it must cost them something; if they keep a cow, I’ve no question the milk is half wasted.”

The old lady passed her skinny forefinger across one of the pans, examining her finger very minutely after the operation; and then applied the tip of her nose to the interior of it. There was no fault to be found with that milkpan, if it was Ruth’s; so, scrutinizing two or three dish towels, which were hanging on a line to dry, she stepped cautiously up to the kitchen door. A tidy, respectable-looking black woman met her on the threshold; her woolly locks bound with a gay-striped bandanna, and her ebony face shining with irresistible good humor.

“Is Ruth in?” said the old lady.

“Who, Missis?” said Dinah.

“Ruth.”

“Missis Hall lives *here*,” answered Dinah, with a puzzled look.

“Exactly,” said the old lady; “she is my son’s wife.”

“Oh! I beg your pardon, Missis,” said Dinah, curtsying respectfully. “I never heard her name called Ruth afore: massa calls her ‘bird,’ and ‘sunbeam.’”

The old lady frowned.

“Is she at home?” she repeated, with stately dignity.

“No,” said Dinah, “Missis is gone rambling off in the woods with little Daisy. She’s powerful fond of flowers, and things. She climbs fences like a squir’l! it makes this chil’ laf’ to see the ol’ farmers stare at her.”

“You must have a great deal to do, here;” said the old lady, frowning; “Ruth isn’t much of a hand at house-work.”

“Plenty to do, Missis, and willin’ hands to do it. Dinah don’t care how hard she works, if she don’t work to the tune of a lash; and Missis Hall goes singing about the house so that it makes time fly.”

“She don’t ever *help* you any, does she?” said the persevering old lady.

“Lor’ bless you! yes, Missis. She comes right in and makes a pie for Massa Harry, or cooks a steak jess’ as easy as she pulls off a flower; and when Dinah’s cooking anything new, she asks more questions how it’s done than this chil’ kin answer.”

“You have a great deal of company, I suppose; that must make you extra trouble, I should think; people riding out from the city to supper, when you are all through and cleared away: don’t it tire you?”

“No; Missis Hall takes it easy. She laf’s merry, and says to the company, ‘you get *tea* enough in the city, so I shan’t give you any; we had tea long ago; but here’s some fresh milk, and some raspberries and cake; and if you can’t eat *that*, you ought to go hungry.’”

“She irons Harry’s shirts, I suppose?” said the old lady.

“She? s’pose dis chil’ let her? when she’s so careful, too, of ol’ Dinah’s bones?”

“Well,” said the old lady, foiled at all points, “I’ll walk over the house a bit, I guess; I won’t trouble you to wait on me, Dinah;” and the old lady started on her exploring tour.

CHAPTER XIV

“This is the parlor, hey?” soliloquized old Mrs. Hall, as she seated herself on the sofa. “A few dollars laid out here, I guess.”

Not so fast, my dear madam. Examine closely. Those long, white curtains, looped up so prettily from the open windows, are plain, cheap muslin; but no artist could have disposed their folds more gracefully. The chairs and sofas, also, Ruth covered with her own nimble fingers: the room has the fragrance of a green-house, to be sure; but if you examine the flowers, which are scattered so profusely round, you will find they are *wild* flowers, which Ruth, basket in hand, climbs many a stone fence every morning to gather; and not a country boy in the village knows their hiding-places as well as she. See how skilfully they are arranged! with what an eye to the blending of colors! How dainty is that little tulip-shaped vase, with those half opened wild-rose buds! see that little gilt saucer, containing only a few tiny green leaves; yet, mark their exquisite shape and finish. And there are some wood anemonies; some white, with a faint blush of pink at the petals; and others blue as little Daisy’s eyes; and see that velvet moss, with its gold-star blossoms!

“Must take a deal of time to gather and fix ’em,” muttered the old lady.

Yes, my dear madam; but, better pay the shoe-maker’s than the doctor’s bill; better seek health in hunting live flowers, than ruin it by manufacturing those German worsted abortions.

You should see your son Harry, as he ushers a visitor in through the low door-way, and stands back to mark the surprised delight with which he gazes upon Ruth’s little fairy room. You should see how Harry’s eyes glisten, as they pass from one flower vase to another, saying, “Who but Ruth would ever have spied out *that* tiny little blossom?”

And little Daisy has caught the flower mania, too; and every day she must have *her* vase in the collection; now withdrawing a rose and replacing it with a violet, and then stepping a pace or two back and looking at it with her little head on one side, as knowingly as an artist looks at the finishing touches to a favorite picture.

But, my dear old lady, we beg pardon; we are keeping you too long from that china closet, which you are so anxious to inspect; hoping to find a flaw, either in crockery or cake. Not a bit! You may draw those prying fingers across the shelves till you are tired, and not a particle of dust will adhere to them. Neither cups, saucers, tumblers, nor plates, stick to your hands; the sugar-bowl is covered; the cake, in that tin pail, is fresh and light; the preserves, in those glass jars, tied down with brandy papers, are clear as amber; and the silver might serve for a looking-glass, in which you could read your own vexation.

Never mind! A great many people keep the *first* floor spick and span; mayhap you’ll find something wrong *up* stairs. Walk in; ’tis the “best chamber.” A gilt arrow is fastened to the wall, and pretty white lace curtains are thrown (tent fashion) over it; there is a snow-white quilt and a pair of plump, tempting pillows; the furniture and carpet are of a light cream color; and there is a vase of honeysuckle on the little light-stand. Nothing could be more faultless, you see.

Now, step into the nursery; the floor is strewn with play-things; thank God, there’s a child in the house! There is a broken doll; a torn picture-book; a little wreath of oak leaves; a dandelion chain; some willow tassels; a few acorns; a little red shoe, full of parti-colored pebbles; the wing of a little blue-bird; two little, speckled eggs, on a tuft of moss; and a little orphan chicken, nestling in a basket of cotton wool, in the corner. Then, there is a work-basket of Ruth’s with a little dress of Daisy’s, partly finished, and a dicky of Harry’s, with the needle still sticking in it, which the little gypsey wife intends finishing when she comes back from her wood ramble.

The old lady begins to think she must give it up; when, luckily, her eye falls on a crouching “Venus,” in the corner. Saints and angels! why, she has never been to the dress-makers! There’s a

text, now! What a pity there is no appreciative audience to see the glow of indignation with which those half averted eyes regard the undraped goddess!

“Oh, Harry! is this the end of all my teachings? Well, it is all *Ruth's* doings —*all* Ruth's doings. Harry is to be pitied, not blamed;” and the old lady takes up, at length, her *triumphant* march for home.

CHAPTER XV

“Hallo! what are you doing there?” exclaimed the doctor, looking over the fence at a laborer, at work in one of Harry’s fields.

“Ploughing this bit o’ ground, sir. Mr. Hall told me to be sure and get it finished before he came home from the city this afternoon.”

“Nonsense!” replied the doctor, “I was born sometime before my son Harry; put up your plough, and lay that bit of stone wall yonder; that needs to be done first.”

“I’m thinking Masther Hall won’t be afther liking it if I do, sir,” said Pat; “I had my orders for the day’s work before masther went to the city, sir, this morning.”

“Pooh, pooh,” said the old man, unchaining the horse from the plough, and turning him loose in the pasture; “young folks *think* old folks are fools; old folks *know* young folks to be so.”

Pat eyed the doctor, scratched his head, and began slowly to lay the stone wall.

“What’s *that* fellow doing over yonder?” said the doctor to Pat.

“Planting corn, yer honor.”

“Corn? ha! ha! city farming! Good. Corn? That’s just the spot for potatoes. H-a-l-l-o there! Don’t plant any more corn in that spot, John; it never’ll come to anything – never.”

“But, Mr. Hall?” said John, hesitatingly, leaning on his hoe-handle.

“Harry? Oh, never mind him. He has seen more ledgers than corn. Corn? Ha! that’s good. You can go cart that load of gravel up the hill. What a fortunate thing for Harry, that I am here to oversee things. This amateur farming is pretty play enough; but the way it sinks the money is more curious than profitable. I wonder, now, if that tree is grafted right. I’ll take off the ligatures and see. That hedge won’t grow, I’m certain; the down-east cedars thrive the best for hedges. I may as well pull these up, and tell Harry to get some of the other kind;” and the doctor pulled them up by the roots, and threw them over the fence.

CHAPTER XVI

“Time for papa to come,” said little Daisy, seating herself on the low door-step; “the sun has crept way round to the big apple-tree;” and Daisy shook back her hair, and settling her little elbows on her knees, sat with her chin in her palms, dreamily watching the shifting clouds. A butterfly alights on a blade of grass near her: Daisy springs up, her long hair floating like a veil about her shoulders, and her tiny feet scarce bending the clover blossoms, and tiptoes carefully along in pursuit.

He’s gone, Daisy, but never mind; like many other coveted treasures, he would lose his brilliancy if caught. Daisy has found something else; she closes her hand over it, and returns to her old watch-post on the door-step. She seats herself again, and loosing her tiny hold, out creeps a great, bushy, yellow caterpillar. Daisy places him carefully on the back of her little, blue-veined hand, and he commences his travels up the polished arm, to the little round shoulder. When he reaches the lace sleeve, Daisy’s laugh rings out like a robin’s carol; then she puts him back, to retravel the same smooth road again.

“Oh, Daisy! Daisy!” said Ruth, stepping up behind her, “what an *ugly* playfellow; put him down, do darling; I cannot bear to see him on your arm.”

“Why —*God* made him,” said little Daisy, with sweet, upturned eyes of wonder.

“True, darling,” said Ruth, in a hushed whisper, kissing the child’s brow, with a strange feeling of awe. “Keep him, Daisy, dear, if you like.”

CHAPTER XVII

“Please, sir, I’ll be afther leaving the night,” said John, scraping out his hind foot, as Harry drew rein on Romeo, and halted under a large apple-tree.

“Leave?” exclaimed Harry, patting Romeo’s neck; “you seemed a contented fellow enough when I left for the city this morning. Don’t your wages suit? What’s in the wind now? out with it, man.”

John scratched his head, kicked away a pebble with the toe of his brogan, looked up, and looked down, and finally said, (lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, as he glanced in the direction of the doctor’s cottage;) “It’s the ould gintleman, sir, savin’ yer presence. It is not *two* masthers Pat would be afther having;” and Pat narrated the affair of the plough.

Harry bit his lip, and struck Romeo a little quick cut with his riding-whip. Harry was one of the most dutiful of sons, and never treated his father with disrespect; he had chosen a separate home, that he might be master of it; and this old annoyance in a new shape was very provoking. “Pat,” said he at length, “there is only one master here; when *I* give you an order, you are to stick to it, till you get a different one from me. D’ye understand?”

“By the Holy Mother, I’ll do it,” said Pat, delightedly resuming his hoe with fresh vigor.

CHAPTER XVIII

“That’s the fourth gig that has been tied to Harry’s fence, since dinner,” said the old lady. “I hope Harry’s business will continue to prosper. Company, company, company. And there’s Ruth, as I live, romping round that meadow, without a bit of a bonnet. Now she’s climbing a cherry-tree. A *married woman* climbing a cherry-tree! Doctor, do you hear that?”

“Shoot ’em down,” said the doctor, abstractedly, without lifting his eyes from the Almanac.

“Shoot *who* down?” said the old lady, shaking him by the shoulder. “I said that romp of a Ruth was up in a cherry-tree.”

“Oh, I thought you were talking of those thievish robins stealing the cherries,” said the doctor; “as to Ruth I’ve given her up long ago; *she* never will settle down to anything. Yesterday, as I was taking a walk over Harry’s farm to see if things were not all going to the dogs, I saw her down in the meadow yonder, with her shoes and stockings off, wading through a little brook to get at some flowers, which grew on the other side. Half an hour after she came loitering up the road, with her bonnet hanging on the back of her neck, and her apron crammed full of grasses, and herbs, and branches, and all sorts of green trash. Just then the minister came along. I was glad of it. Good enough for her, thinks I to myself; she’ll blush for once. Well, what do you think she did, Mis. Hall?”

“*What?*” said the old lady, in a sepulchral whisper, dropping her knitting-needles and drawing her rocking-chair within kissing distance of the doctor.

“Why, she burst out a-laughing, perched herself on top of a stone wall, took a great big leaf to fan herself, and then invited the minister to sit down ’long side of her, *jest* as easy as if her hair wasn’t all flying round her face like a wild Arab’s.”

“I give up now,” said the old lady, dropping her hands in an attitude of the extremest dejection; “there’s no hope of her after that; and what is worse, it is no use talking to Harry; she’s got him so bewitched that he imagines everything she does is right. How she did it, passes me. I’m sure she has no beauty. I’ve no patience to see Harry twisting those yellow curls of hers round his fingers, and calling them ‘threads of gold;’ threads of fiddlesticks! She’d look a deal more proper like, if she’d wear her hair smooth behind her ears, as I do.”

“But your hair is false,” said the literal doctor.

“Doctor,” said the old lady, snapping her eyes, “I never can argue with you but you are sure to get off the track, sooner or later; there is no need of your telling all, you know. Suppose I was always alluding to your wig, how would you like it?”

CHAPTER XIX

Winter had set in. The snow in soft, white piles, barred up the cottage door, and hung shelving over the barn-roof and fences; while every tiny twig and branch bent heavily, with its soft fleecy burthen. "Papa" was to go to the city that morning in a sleigh. Daisy had already heard the bells tinkling at the barn-door, as Pat necklaced Romeo, who stood pawing and snorting, as if it were fine fun to plough five miles of unbroken road into the city. Daisy had turned Papa's over-coat sleeves inside out, and warmed them thoroughly at the fire; she had tied on his moccasins, and had thrown his fur collar round his neck; and now she stood holding his warm cap and furred gloves, while he and mamma were saying their usual good-bye.

"Take care of that cough, Daisy," said Harry; "don't come to the door, darling, to breathe in this keen air. Kiss your hand to papa, from the window;" and Harry scratched the frost away with his finger nails from the window-pane, that Daisy might see him start.

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed the child, as Pat tossed the bright, scarlet-lined buffalo robe into the sleigh, and tucked the corners snugly over his master's feet, and Romeo, inspirited by the merry tinkle of the bells and the keen frosty air, stood on his hind legs and playfully held up his fore feet; "Oh, how pretty!" Harry turned his head as he gathered the reins in his hand; his cap was crowded down so snugly over his forehead, and his fur collar turned up so closely about his chin, that only a glimpse of his dark eye and fine Roman nose was visible. One wave of the hand, and the light, feathery snow flew, on either side, from under Romeo's flying heels – and Papa was out of sight.

CHAPTER XX

“Why in the world, Ruth, are you wandering about there, like a ghost, in the moonlight?” said Harry, rubbing open his sleepy eyes.

“Hist, Harry! listen to Daisy’s breathing; it sounds as if it came through a brazen tube. She must be ill.”

“Little wife, don’t torment yourself. She has only a bad cold, which, of course, appears worse at night. Her breathing is irregular, because her head is too low. Give her this pillow: there; now she’s comfortable. What a frightened little puss you are! Your hand trembles as if you had the palsy; now go to sleep; it must be near two o’clock; you’ll be sick yourself to-morrow:” and Harry, wearied out with an annoying day of business, was soon fast asleep.

Only the eye of God watches like a mother’s. Ruth could not sleep. She was soon again at Daisy’s side, with her fingers upon her wrist, and her eye fixed upon the child’s face; marking every contortion of feature, noting every change of posture.

“What is it, darling?” asked her mother, as Daisy grasped her throat with both hands.

“It hurts,” said the child.

Ruth glanced at Harry. He was so weary, it were a pity to wake him needlessly. Perhaps her fears were groundless, and she was over-anxious; and then, perhaps, Daisy really needed *immediate* medical aid.

Ruth’s fears preponderated.

“Dear Harry,” said she, laying her hand softly on his forehead, “do call up Pat, and send for the doctor.”

“Certainly, if you think best,” said Harry, springing up; “but it is a cold night for the old man to come out; and really, Ruth, Daisy has only a stuffed cold.”

“*Please* let Pat go,” said Ruth, pleadingly; “I shall feel happier, Harry.”

It was a venturous undertaking to rouse Pat suddenly, as his bump of destructiveness generally woke first; and a fight seemed always with him a necessary preliminary to a better understanding of things.

“Hold! hold!” said Harry, seizing his brawny, belligerent fists; “not quite so fast man; open your eyes, and see who I am.”

“Did I sthrike yer honor?” said Pat; “I hope yer’ll forgive me; but you see, I was jist born with my fists doubled up.”

“All right,” said his master, laughing; “but get on your clothes as soon as possible; harness Romeo, and bring the old gentleman up here. Mrs. Hall feels very uneasy about Daisy, and wants him to prescribe for her.”

“I’ll bring him back in a flash,” said Pat; “but what’ll I do if he won’t come?”

“Who’s there? what do you want? Speak quick, if you’ve anything to say, for I’m catching the rheumatiz’ in my head;” said the doctor, as he poked his bald poll out the cottage window, into the frosty night air. “Who are you? and what on earth do you want?”

“It’s me,” said Pat.

“Who’s me?” said the Doctor.

“Botheration,” growled Pat; “don’t the ould owl know the voice of me? – It’s Pat Donahue; the childer is sick, and Misthress Ruth wants you to come wid me, and give her something to betther her.”

“Pooh! pooh! is that all you woke me up for? The child was well enough this noon, except a slight cold. Ruth is full of notions. Go home and take that bottle, and tell her to give Daisy half a teaspoonful once in two hours; and I’ll come over in the morning. She’s always a-fussing with that child, and thinking, if she sneezes, that she is going to die. It’s a wonder if I don’t die myself, routed out of a warm bed, without my wig, this time of night. There – there – go along, and mind you shut

the gate after you. Ten to one he'll leave it open," soliloquized the doctor, slamming down the window with a jerk. "I hate an Irishman as I do a rattlesnake. An Irishman is an incomplete biped – a human tower of Babel; he was finished up to a certain point, and there he was left.

"Mis. Hall! Mis. Hall! if you've no objection, I should like you to stop snoring. I should like to sleep, if the village of Glenville will let me. Dear, dear, what a thing it is to be a doctor!"

CHAPTER XXI

“If de las’ day *has* come, dis chil’ ought to know it,” said Dinah, springing to her feet and peering out, as she scratched away the frost from the window; “has de debbel broke loose? or only de horse? Any way, ’tis about de same ting;” and she glanced in the direction of the barn. “Massy sakes! dere’s Pat stealing off in de night wid Romeo; no he aint neider – he’s putting him up in de barn. Where you s’pose he’s been dis time o’ night? *Courting* p’r’aps! Well, dis chil’ dunno. And dere’s a bright light shining on de snow, from Massa Harry’s window. Dinah can’t sleep till she knows what’s to pay, dat’s a fac’;” and tying a handkerchief over her woolly head, and throwing on a shawl, she tramped down stairs. “Massy sakes!” said she, stopping on the landing, as Daisy’s shrill cough fell on her ear; “Massy! jes’ hear dat!” and opening the chamber-door, Dinah stood staring at the child, with distended eye-balls, then looking from Harry to Ruth, as if she thought them both under the influence of night-mare. “For de *Lord’s* sake, Massa Harry, send for de doctor,” said Dinah, clasping her hands.

“We have,” said Harry, trying to coax Daisy to swallow another spoonful of the medicine, “and he said he’d be here in the morning.”

“*She won’t*,” said Dinah, in a low, hoarse whisper to Harry, as she pointed to Daisy. “Don’t you *know*, Massa, it’s de croup! de croup; de *wu’st* way, Massa! *Oh Lor’!*”

Harry was harnessing Romeo in an instant, and on his way to the doctor’s cottage. In vain he knocked, and rang, and thumped. The old man, comfortably tucked up between the blankets, was far away in the land of dreams.

“What is to be done?” said Harry; “I must tie Romeo to the post and climb in at the kitchen-window.”

“Father! father!” said he, shaking the old gentleman by the shoulders, “Daisy is worse, and I want you to go right home with me.”

“Don’t believe it,” said the old man; “you are only frightened; it’s an awful cold night to go out.”

“I know it,” said Harry; “but I brought two buffaloes; hurry, father. Daisy is *very* sick.”

The old doctor groaned; took his wig from the bed post, and put it on his head; tied a woollen muffler, with distressing deliberation, over his unbelieving ears, and, returning four times to tell “Mis. Hall to be sure and bolt the front door after him,” climbed into the sleigh. “I shall be glad if I don’t get a sick spell myself,” said the doctor, “coming out this freezing night. Ruth has frightened you to death, I s’pose. Ten to one when I get up there, nothing will ail the child. Come, come, don’t drive so fast; my bones are old, and I don’t believe in these gay horses of yours, who never make any use of their fore-legs, except to hold them up in the air. Whoa, I say – Romeo, whoa!”

“Get out de way, Pat!” said Dinah; “your Paddy fingers are all thumbs. Here, put some more water in dat kettle dere; now stir dat mustard paste; now run quick wid dat goose-grease up to Missus, and tell her to rub de chil’s troat wid it; ’t aint no use, though. Oh, Lor’! dis nigger knew she wouldn’t live, ever since she said dat ’bout de caterpillar. De Lord wants de chil’, dat’s a fac’; she nebber played enough to suit Dinah.”

CHAPTER XXII

Stamping the snow from his feet, the doctor slowly untied his woollen muffler, took off his hat, settled his wig, hung his overcoat on a nail in the entry, drew from his pocket a huge red handkerchief, and announcing his arrival by a blast, loud enough to arouse the seven sleepers, followed Harry up stairs to the sick chamber.

The strong fire-light fell upon Ruth's white figure, as she sat, pale and motionless, in the corner, with Daisy on her lap, whose laborious breathing could be distinctly heard in the next room. A dark circle had settled round the child's mouth and eyes, and its little hands hung helplessly at its side. Dinah was kneeling at the hearth, stirring a fresh mustard paste, with an air which seemed to say, "it is no use, but I must keep on doing something."

The doctor advanced, drew his spectacles from their leathern case, perched them astride the end of his nose, and gazed steadily at Daisy without speaking.

"*Help her,*" said Ruth, imploringly.

"Nothing to be done," said the doctor, in an unmoved tone, staring at Daisy.

"Why didn't you come afore, den?" said Dinah, springing to her feet and confronting the doctor. "Don't you see you've murdered *two* of 'em?" and she pointed to Ruth, whose head had dropped upon her breast.

"I tell you, Harry, it's no use to call another doctor," said his father, shaking off his grasp; "the child is struck with death; let her drop off quietly; what's the sense of tormenting her?"

Harry shuddered, and drew his father again to Daisy's side.

"*Help her,*" said Ruth; "don't talk; try *something*."

"Well, I can put on these leeches, if you insist," said the old man, uncorking a bottle; "but I tell you, it is only tormenting the dying."

Dinah cut open the child's night dress, and bared the fair, round chest, to which the leeches clung eagerly; Daisy, meanwhile, remaining motionless, and seemingly quite insensible to the disagreeable pricking sensation they caused.

"The other doctor is below," whispered Pat, thrusting his head in at the door.

"Bring him up," said the old gentleman.

An expression of pain passed over the young man's features as his eye fell upon the child. As yet, he had not become so professionally hardened, as to be able to look unmoved upon the group before him, whose imploring eyes asked vainly of him the help no mortal hand could give.

A few questions he asked to avoid being questioned himself; a few remedies he tried, to appease the mother's heart, whose mournful eyes were on him like a spell.

"Water," said Daisy, faintly, as she languidly opened her eyes.

"God be thanked," said Ruth, overcome by the sound of that blessed little voice, which she never expected to hear again, "God be thanked."

The young doctor returned no answering smile, as Ruth and Harry grasped his hand; but he walked to the little window and looked out upon the gray dawn, with a heavy sigh, as the first faint streak of light ushered in the new-born day.

Still the fire-light flashed and flickered – now upon the old doctor, who had fallen asleep in his arm chair; now upon Ruth's bowed head; now upon Daisy, who lay motionless in her mother's lap, (the deadly paleness of her countenance rendered still more fearful by the dark blood-stains on her night dress;) then upon Harry, who, kneeling at Daisy's side, and stifling his own strong heart, gazed alternately at mother and child; then upon Dinah, who, with folded arms, stood like some grim sentinel, in the shadow of the farther corner; the little mantle clock, meanwhile, ticking, ticking on – numbering the passing moments with startling distinctness.

Oh, in such an hour, when wave after wave of anguish dashes over us, where are the infidel's boasted doubts, as the tortured heart cries out, instinctively, "save, Lord; or we perish!"

Slowly the night waned, and the stars paled. Up the gray east the golden sun slowly glided. One beam penetrated the little window, hovering like a halo over Daisy's sunny head. A quick, convulsive start, and with one wild cry (as the little throat filled to suffocation), the fair white arms were tossed aloft, then dropped powerless upon the bed of Death!

CHAPTER XXIII

“There can be no sorrow greater than this sorrow,” sobbed Ruth, as the heavy sod fell on Daisy’s little breast.

In after years, when bitterer cups had been drained to the dregs, Ruth remembered these, her murmuring words. Ah! mourning mother! He who seeth the end from the beginning, even in this blow “remembered mercy.”

“Your daughter-in-law is quite crushed by her affliction, I hear,” said a neighbor to old Mrs. Hall.

“Yes, Mrs. Jones, I think she is,” said the old lady complacently. “It has taken right hold of her.”

“It died of croup, I believe,” said Mrs. Jones.

“Well, they *say* so,” said the old lady. “It is *my* opinion the child’s death was owing to the thriftlessness of the mother. I don’t mourn for it, because I believe the poor thing is better off.”

“You surprise me,” said Mrs. Jones. “I always had the impression that young Mrs. Hall was a pattern mother.”

“People differ,” said the old lady, raising her eyebrows, compressing her lips, and looking mysteriously at the ceiling, as if she *could* tell a tale, were she not too charitable.

“Well, the amount of it is,” said the garrulous old doctor, emerging from the corner; “the amount of it is, that the mother always thought she knew better than anybody else how to manage that child. Now, you know, Mis. Jones, I’m a physician, and *ought* to know something about the laws that govern the human body, but you’ll be astonished to hear that she frequently acted directly contrary to my advice, and this is the result; that tells the whole story. However, as Mis. Hall says, the child is better off; and as to Ruth, why the Lord generally sends afflictions where they are *needed*,” and the doctor returned to his corner.

“It looks very lonely at the Glen since they moved away,” remarked Mrs. Jones. “I suppose they don’t think of coming back.”

“How?” replied the doctor, re-appearing from his corner.

“I suppose your son and his wife have no idea of returning to the Glen,” said Mrs. Jones.

“No – no. Ruth is one of the uneasy kind; it’s coming and going – coming and going with her. She fancied everything in doors and out reminded her of Daisy, and kept wandering round, trying to be rid of herself. Now that proves she didn’t make a sanctifying use of her trouble. It’s no use trying to dodge what the Lord sends. We’ve just got to stand and take it; if we don’t, he’ll be sending something else. Them’s my sentiments, and I consider ’em scriptural. I shouldn’t be surprised if *Harry* was taken away from her; – a poor, miserable thing she’d be to take care of herself, if he was. She couldn’t earn the salt to her porridge. Thriftless, Mis. Jones, thriftless – come of a bad stock – can’t expect good fruit off a wild apple tree, at least, not without grace is grafted on; that tells the whole story.”

“Well; my heart aches for her,” said the kind Mrs. Jones. “Mrs. Hall is very delicately organized, – one of those persons capable of compressing the happiness or misery of a lifetime into a few moments.”

“Stuff,” said the doctor, “stuff; don’t believe it. *I’m* an example to the contrary. I’ve been through everything, and just look at me;” and the doctor advanced a pace or two to give Mrs. Jones a better view of his full-blown peony face, and aldermanic proportions; “don’t believe it, Mis. Jones; stuff! Fashion to be sentimental; nerves a modern invention. Ridiculous!”

“But,” said the persistent Mrs. Jones, “don’t you think, doctor, that – ”

“Don’t think anything *about* it,” said the doctor. “Don’t want to *hear* anything about it. Have no patience with any woman who’d let a husband sell a farm at such a sacrifice as *Harry’s* was sold, merely because there was a remote chance she would become insane if she staid there. Now, I’ve enough to do – plenty to do, but, still, I was willing to superintend that farm a little, as my doing so

was such a help to Harry. Well, well; they'll both go to the dogs, that's the amount of it. A rolling stone gathers no moss. Harry was good for something before he married Ruth; had a mind of his own. Ruth aint the wife for him."

"He did not appear to think so," replied the obstinate Mrs. Jones. "Everybody in the village says, 'what a happy couple they are.'"

"*O-o-h-* my!" hissed the old lady, "did you *ever*, doctor? Of course, Mrs. Jones, you don't suppose Harry would be such a fool as to tell people how miserable he was; but *mothers*, Mrs. Jones, *mothers* are keen-sighted; can't throw dust in a *mother's* eyes."

"*Nor in mine*," retorted the independent Mrs. Jones, with a mock courtesy to the old lady, as she walked out the door, muttering as she went down the road, "Sally Jones will tell her the truth if nobody else will."

"Mis. Hall," said the doctor, drawing himself up so straight as to snap off his waist-band button, "this is the last time that woman ever crosses *my* threshold. I shall tell Deacon Smith that I consider her a proper subject for church discipline; she's what the bible calls 'a busy body in other men's matters;' a character which both you and I despise and abominate, Mis. Hall."

CHAPTER XXIV

The *first-born*! Oh, other tiny feet may trip lightly at the hearth-stone; other rosy faces may greet us round the board; with tender love we soothe their childish pains and share their childish sports; but “Benjamin is not,” is written in the secret chamber of many a bereaved mother’s heart, where never more the echo of a childish voice may ring out such liquid music as death hath hushed.

Spring had garlanded the earth with flowers, and Autumn had withered them with his frosty breath. Many a Summer’s sun, and many a Winter’s snow, had rested on Daisy’s grave, since the date of our last chapter.

At the window of a large hotel in one of those seaport towns, the resort alike of the invalid and pleasure-seeker, sat Ruth; the fresh sea-breeze lifting her hair from temples thinner and paler than of yore, but stamped with a holier beauty. From the window might be seen the blue waters of the bay leaping to the bright sunlight; while many a vessel outward and inward bound, spread its sails, like some joyous white-winged sea bird. But Ruth was not thinking of the sapphire sky, though it were passing fair; nor of the blue sea, decked with its snowy sails; for in her lap lay a little half-worn shoe, with the impress of a tiny foot, upon which her tears were falling fast.

A little half-worn shoe! And yet no magician could conjure up such blissful visions; no artist could trace such vivid pictures; no harp of sweetest sounds could so fill the ear with music.

Eight years since the little Daisy withered! And yet, to the mother’s eye, she still blossomed fair as Paradise. The soft, golden hair still waved over the blue-veined temples; the sweet, earnest eyes still beamed with their loving light; the little fragile hand was still outstretched for maternal guidance, and in the wood and by the stream they still lingered. Still, the little hymn was chanted at dawn, the little prayer lisped at dew-fall; still, that gentle breathing mingled with the happy mother’s star-lit dreams.

A little, bright-eyed creature, crept to Ruth’s side, and lifting a long, wavy, golden ringlet from a box on the table near her, laid it beside her own brown curls.

“Daisy’s in heaven,” said little Katy, musingly. “Why do you cry, mamma? Don’t you like to have God keep her for you?”

A tear was the only answer.

“*I should like to die, and have you love my curls as you do Daisy’s, mother.*”

Ruth started, and looked at the child; the rosy flush had faded away from little Katy’s cheek, and a tear stole slowly from beneath her long lashes.

Taking her upon her lap, she severed one tress of her brown hair, and laid it beside little Daisy’s golden ringlet.

A bright, glad smile lit up little Katy’s face, and she was just throwing her arms about her mother’s neck, to express her thanks, when, stopping suddenly, she drew from her dimpled foot one little shoe, and laid it in her mother’s palm.

’Mid smiles and tears Ruth complied with the mute request; and the little sister shoes lay with the twin ringlets, lovingly side by side.

Blessed childhood! the pupil and yet the teacher; half infant, half sage, and whole angel! what a desert were earth without thee!

CHAPTER XXV

Hotel life is about the same in every latitude. At Beach Cliff there was the usual number of vapid, fashionable mothers; dressy, brainless daughters; half-fledged wine-bibbing sons; impudent, whisker-dyed roués; bachelors, anxious to give their bashfulness an airing; bronchial clergymen, in search of health and a text; waning virgins, languishing by candle-light; gouty uncles, dyspeptic aunts, whist-playing old ladies, flirting nursery maids and neglected children.

Then there were “hops” in the hall, and sails upon the lake; there were nine-pin alleys, and a gymnasium; there were bathing parties, and horse-back parties; there were billiard rooms, and smoking rooms; reading rooms, flirtation rooms, – room for everything but – thought.

There could be little or nothing in such an artificial atmosphere congenial with a nature like Ruth’s. In all this motley crowd there was but one person who interested her, a Mrs. Leon, upon whose queenly figure all eyes were bent as she passed; and who received the homage paid her, with an indifference which (whether real or assumed) became her passing well. Her husband was a tall, prim, proper-looking person, who dyed his hair and whiskers every Saturday, was extremely punctilious in all points of etiquette, very particular in his stated inquiries as to his wife’s and his horse’s health, very fastidious in regard to the brand of his wine, and the quality of his venison; maintaining, under all circumstances, the same rigidity of feature, the same immobility of the cold, stony, gray eye, the same studied, stereotyped, conventionalism of manner.

Ruth, although shunning society, found herself drawn to Mrs. Leon by an unaccountable magnetism. Little Katy, too, with that unerring instinct with which childhood selects from the crowd an unselfish and loving nature, had already made rapid advances toward acquaintance. What road to a mother’s heart so direct, as through the heart of her children? With Katy for a “medium,” the two ladies soon found themselves in frequent conversation. Ruth had always shrunk from female friendship. It might be that her boarding-school experience had something to do in effecting this wholesale disgust of the commodity. Be that as it may, she had never found any woman who had not misunderstood and misinterpreted her. For the common female employments and recreations, she had an unqualified disgust. Satin patchwork, the manufacture of German worsted animals, bead-netting, crochet-stitching, long discussions with milliners, dress-makers, and modistes, long forenoons spent in shopping, or leaving bits of paste-board, party-giving, party-going, prinking and coquetting, all these were her aversion. Equally with herself, Mrs. Leon seemed to despise these air bubbles. Ruth was sure that, under that faultless, marble exterior, a glowing, living, loving heart lay slumbering; waiting only the enchanter’s touch to wake it into life. The more she looked into those dark eyes, the deeper seemed their depths. Ruth longed, she scarce knew why, to make her life happy. Oh, if she *had* a soul!

Ruth thought of *Mr.* Leon and shuddered.

Mrs. Leon was often subject to severe and prostrating attacks of nervous headache. On these occasions, Ruth’s magnetic touch seemed to woo coy slumber, like a spell; and the fair sufferer would lie peacefully for hours, while Ruth’s fingers strayed over her temples, or her musical voice, like David’s harp, exorcised the demon Pain.

“You are better now,” said Ruth, as Mrs. Leon slowly opened her eyes, and looked about her; “you have had such a nice sleep, I think you will be able to join us at the tea table to-night. I will brush these long dishevelled locks, and robe these dainty limbs; though, to my eye, you look lovelier just as you are. You are very beautiful, Mary. I heard a couple of young ladies discussing you, in the drawing-room, the other evening, envying your beauty and your jewels, and the magnificence of your wardrobe.”

“Did they envy me my *husband*?” asked Mary, in a slow, measured tone.

“That would have been useless,” said Ruth, averting her eyes; “but they said he denied you nothing in the way of dress, equipage, or ornament.”

“Yes,” said Mary; “I have all those pretty toys to satisfy my heart-cravings; they, equally with myself, are necessary appendages to Mr. Leon’s establishment. Oh, Ruth!” and the tears streamed through her jewelled fingers – “love me – pity me; you who are so blessed. I too *could* love; that is the drop of poison in my cup. When *your* daughters stand at the altar, Ruth, never compel them to say words to which the heart yields no response. The chain is none the less galling, because its links are golden. God bless you, Ruth; ’tis long since I have shed such tears. You have touched the rock; forget that the waters have gushed forth.”

CHAPTER XXVI

October had come! coy and chill in the morning, warm and winning at noon, veiling her coat of many colors in a fleecy mist at evening, yet lovely still in all her changeful moods. The gay butterflies of fashion had already spread their shrivelled wings for the warmer atmosphere of the city. Harry and Ruth still lingered; – there was beauty for them in the hill-side’s rainbow dyes, in the crimson barberry clusters, drooping from the wayside hedges; in the wild grape-vine that threw off its frost-bitten leaves, to tempt the rustic’s hand with its purple clusters; in the piles of apples, that lay gathered in parti-colored heaps beneath the orchard trees; in the yellow ears of Indian corn, that lay scattered on the seedy floor of the breezy barn; in the festoons of dried apples, and mammoth squashes, and pumpkins, that lay ripening round the thrifty farmers’ doors; and in the circling leaves, that came eddying down in brilliant showers on the Indian summer’s soft but treacherous breath.

“You are ill, Harry,” said Ruth, laying her hand upon his forehead.

“Slightly so,” replied Harry languidly; “a pain in my head, and – ”

A strong ague chill prevented Harry from finishing the sentence.

Ruth, who had never witnessed an attack of this kind, grew pale as his teeth chattered, and his powerful frame shook violently from head to foot.

“Have you suffered much in this way?” asked the physician who was summoned.

“I had the fever and ague very badly, some years since, at the west,” said Harry. “It is an unpleasant visitor, doctor; you must rid me of it as soon as you can, for the sake of my little wife, who, though she can endure pain herself like a martyr, is an arrant little coward whenever it attacks me. Don’t look so sober, Ruth, I shall be better to-morrow. I can not afford time to be sick long, for I have a world of business on hand. I had an important appointment this very day, which it is a thousand pities to postpone; but never mind, I shall certainly be better to-morrow.”

But Harry was not “better to-morrow;” nor the next day; nor the next; the doctor pronouncing his case to be one of decided typhus fever.

Very reluctantly the active man postponed his half-formed plans, and business speculations, and allowed himself to be placed on the sick list. With a sigh of impatience, he saw his hat, and coat, and boots, put out of sight; and watched the different phials, as they came in from the apothecary; and counted the stroke of the clock, as it told the tedious hours; and marvelled at the patience with which (he now recollected) Ruth bore a long bed-ridden eight-weeks’ martyrdom, without a groan or complaint. But soon, other thoughts and images mixed confusedly in his brain, like the shifting colors of a kaleidoscope. He was floating – drifting – sinking – soaring, by turns; – the hot blood coursed through his veins like molten lava; his eye glared deliriously, and the hand, never raised but in blessing, fell, with fevered strength, upon the unresisting form of the loving wife.

“You must have a nurse,” said the doctor to Ruth; “it is dangerous for you to watch with your husband alone. He might injure you seriously, in one of these paroxysms.”

“But Harry has an unconquerable dislike to a hired nurse,” said Ruth; “his reason may return at any moment, and the sight of one will trouble him. I am not afraid,” replied Ruth, between a tear and a smile.

“But you will wear yourself out; you must remember that you owe a duty to your children.”

“My *husband* has the *first* claim,” said Ruth, resuming her place by the bed-side; and during the long hours of day and night, regardless of the lapse of time – regardless of hunger, thirst or weariness, she glided noiselessly about the room, arranged the pillows, mixed the healing draught, or watched with a silent prayer at the sufferer’s bed-side; while Harry lay tossing from side to side, his white teeth glittering through his unshorn beard, raving constantly of her prolonged absence, and imploring her in heart-rending tones to come to his side, and “bring Daisy from the Glen.”

Many a friendly voice whispered at the door, “How is he?” The Irish waiters crossed themselves and stept softly through the hall, as they went on their hasty errands; and many a consultation was held among warm-hearted gentlemen friends, (who had made Harry’s acquaintance at the hotel, during the pleasant summer,) to decide which should first prove their friendship by watching with him.

Ruth declined all these offers to fill her place. “I will never leave him,” she said; “his reason may return, and his eye seek vainly for me. No – no; I thank you all. Watch *with* me, if you will, but do not ask me to leave him.”

In the still midnight, when the lids of the kind but weary watchers drooped heavily with slumber, rang mournfully in Ruth’s ear the sad-plaint of Gethsemane’s Lord, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” and pressing her lips to the hot and fevered hand before her, she murmured, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

CHAPTER XXVII

“Have you got the carpet-bag, doctor? and the little brown bundle? and the russet-trunk? and the umberil? and the demi-john, and the red band-box, with my best cap in it? one – two – three – four; yes – that’s all right. Now, mind those thievish porters. Goodness, how they charge here for carriage hire! I never knew, before, how much money it took to journey. Oh dear! I wonder if Harry *is* worse? There now, doctor, you’ve put your foot right straight through that band-box. Now, where, for the land’s sake, are my spectacles? ’Tisn’t possible you’ve left them behind? I put them in the case, as you stood there in the chayna closet, drinking your brandy and water, and asked you to put them in your side-pocket, because my bag was full of orange-peels, scissors, camphor, peppermint-drops, and seed-cakes. I wouldn’t have left ’em for any money. Such a sight of trouble as it was to get them focussed right to my eyes. How *could* you, doctor, be so blundering? I declare it is enough to provoke a saint.”

“If that’s the case, there’s no immediate call for *you* to get vexed,” said the doctor, tartly.

“Is that the house?” asked the old lady, her curiosity getting the better of her indignation; “what a big hotel! I wonder if Harry *is* worse? Mercy me, I’m all of a quiver. I wonder if they will take us right into the drawing-room? I wonder if there’s many ladies in it – my bonnet is awfully jammed: beside, I’m so powdered with dust, that I look as if I had had an ash barrel sifted over me. Doctor! doctor! don’t go on so far ahead. It looks awk’ard, as if I had no protector.”

“How’s Harry?” said the doctor, to a white-jacketted waiter, who stood gossiping on the piazza steps with a comrade.

“Funny old chap!” said the waiter, without noticing the doctor’s query; “I say, Bill, look how his hair is cut!”

“Taint hair,” said Tom, “it is a wig.”

“Bless my eyes! so it is; and a red one, too! Bad symptoms; red wigs are the cheapest; no extra fees to be got out of *that* customer, for blacking boots and bringing hot beafsteaks. Besides, just look at his baggage; you can always judge of a traveler, Bill, by his trunks; it never fails. Now, *I* like to see a trunk thickly studded with brass nails, and covered with a linen overall; then I know, if it is a lady’s, that there’s diamond rings inside, and plenty of cash; if ’tis a gentleman’s, that he knows how to order sherry-cobblers in the forenoon, and a bottle of old wine or two with his dinner; and how to fee the poor fellow who brings it, too, who lives on a small salary, with large expectations.”

“How’s Harry?” thundered the doctor again, (after waiting what he considered a reasonable time for an answer,) “or if *you* are too lazy to tell, you whiskered jackanapes, go call your employer.”

The word “employer” recalled the rambling waiter to his senses, and great was his consternation on finding that “the old chap with the red wig” was the father of young Mr. Hall, who was beloved by everything in the establishment, down to old Neptune the house-dog.

“I told you so,” said the doctor, turning to his wife; “Harry’s no better – consultation this morning – very little hope of him; – so much for *my* not being here to prescribe for him. Ruth shouldered a great responsibility when she brought him away out of reach of *my* practice. You go into that room, there, Mis. Hall, No. 20, with your traps and things, and take off your bonnet and keep quiet, while I go up and see him.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

“Humph!” said the doctor, “humph!” as Ruth drew aside the curtain, and the light fell full upon Harry’s face. “Humph! it is all up with *him*; he’s in the last stage of the complaint; won’t live two days;” and stepping to the table, the doctor uncorked the different phials, applied them to the end of his nose, examined the labels, and then returned to the bed-side, where Ruth stood bending over Harry, so pallid, so tearless, that one involuntarily prayed that death, when he aimed his dart, might strike down both together.

“Humph!” said the doctor again! “when did he have his reason last?”

“A few moments, day before yesterday,” said Ruth, without removing her eyes from Harry.

“Well; he has been *murdered*, – yes murdered, just as much as if you had seen the knife put to his throat. That tells the whole story, and I don’t care who knows it. I have been looking at those phials, – wrong course of treatment altogether for typhoid fever; fatal mistake. His death will lie heavy at *somebody’s* door,” and he glanced at Ruth.

“Hush! he is coming to himself,” said Ruth, whose eyes had never once moved from her husband.

“Then I must tell him that his hours are numbered,” said the doctor, thrusting his hands in his pockets, and pompously walking round the bed.

“No, no,” whispered Ruth, grasping his arm with both hands; “you will kill him. The doctor said it might destroy the last chance for his life. *Don’t* tell him. You know he is not afraid *to die*; but oh, spare him the parting with me! it will be so hard; he loves me, father.”

“Pshaw!” said the doctor, shaking her off; “he ought to settle up his affairs while he can. I don’t know how he wants things fixed. Harry! Harry!” said he, touching his shoulder, “I’ve come to see you; do you know me?”

“Father!” said Harry, languidly, “yes, I’m – I’m sick. I shall be better soon; don’t worry about me. Where’s my wife? where’s Ruth?”

“You’ll *never* be better, Harry,” said the doctor, bluntly, stepping between him and Ruth; “you may not live the day out. If you have got anything to say, you’d better say it now, before your mind wanders. You are a dead man, Harry; and you know that when I say *that*, I know what I’m talking about.”

The sick man gazed at the speaker, as if he were in a dream; then slowly, and with a great effort, raising his head, he looked about the room for Ruth. She was kneeling at the bedside, with her face buried in her hands. Harry reached out his emaciated hand, and placed it upon her bowed head.

“Ruth? wife?”

Her arm was about his neck in an instant – her lips to his; but her eyes were tearless, and her whole frame shook convulsively.

“Oh, how *can* I leave you? who will care for you? Oh God, in mercy spare me to her;” and Harry fell back on his pillow.

The shock was too sudden; reason again wandered; he heard the shrill whistle of the cars, recalling him to the city’s whirl of business; he had stocks to negotiate; he had notes to pay; he had dividends due. Then the scene changed; – he could not be carried on a hearse through the street, surrounded by a gaping crowd. Ruth must go alone with him, by night; – why *must* he die at all? He would take anything. Where was the doctor? Why did they waste time in talking? Why not do something more for him? How cruel of Ruth to let him lie there and die?

“We will try this new remedy,” said one of the consulting physicians to Harry’s father; “it is the only thing that remains to be done, and I confess I have no faith in its efficacy in this case.”

“He rallies again!” said Ruth, clasping her hands.

“The children!” said Harry; “bring me the children.”

“Presently,” said the new physician; “try and swallow this first;” and he raised his head tenderly.

They were brought him. Little Nettie came first, – her dimpled arms and rosy face in strange contrast to the pallid lips she bent, in childish glee, to kiss. Then little Katy, shrinking with a strange awe from the dear papa she loved so much, and sobbing, she scarce knew why, at his whispered words, “Be kind to your mother, Katy.”

Again Harry’s eyes sought Ruth. She was there, but a film – a mist had come between them; he could not see her, though he felt her warm breath.

And now, that powerful frame collected all its remaining energies for the last dread contest with death. So fearful – so terrible was the struggle, that friends stood by, with suppressed breath and averted eyes, while Ruth alone, with a fearful calmness, hour after hour, wiped the death damp from his brow, and the oozing foam from his pallid lips.

“He is gone,” said the old doctor, laying Harry’s hand down upon the coverlid.

“No; he breathes again.”

“Ah; that’s his last!”

“Take her away,” said the doctor, as Ruth fell heavily across her husband’s body; and the unresisting form of the insensible wife was borne into the next room.

Strange hands closed Harry’s eyes, parted his damp locks, straightened his manly limbs, and folded the marble hands over as noble a heart as ever lay cold and still beneath a shroud.

CHAPTER XXIX

“It is really quite dreadful to see her in this way,” said Hyacinth, as they chafed Ruth’s hands and bathed her temples; “it is really quite dreadful. Somebody ought to tell her, when she comes to, that her hair is parted unevenly and needs brushing sadly. Harry’s finely-chiseled features look quite beautiful in repose. It is a pity the barber should have been allowed to shave off his beard after death; it looked quite oriental and picturesque. But the sight of Ruth, in this way, is really dreadful; it quite unnerves me. I shall look ten years older by to-morrow. I must go down and take a turn or two on the piazza.” And Hyacinth paced up and down, thinking – not of the bereaved sister, who lay mercifully insensible to her loss, nor yet of the young girl whose heart was to throb trustfully at the altar, by his side, on the morrow, – but of her broad lands and full coffers, with which he intended to keep at bay the haunting creditors, who were impertinent enough to spoil his daily digestion by asking for their just dues.

One o’clock! The effect of the sleeping potion administered to Ruth had passed away. Slowly she unclosed her eyes and gazed about her. The weary nurse, forgetful of her charge, had sunk into heavy slumber.

Where was Harry?

Ruth presses her hands to her temples. Oh God! the consciousness that *would* come! the frantic out-reaching of the arms to clasp – a vain shadow!

Where had they lain him?

She crossed the hall to Harry’s sick room; the key was in the lock; she turned it with trembling fingers. Oh God! the dreadful stillness of that outlined form! the calm majesty of that marble brow, on which the moonbeams fell as sweetly as if that peaceful sleep was but to restore him to her widowed arms. That half filled glass, from which his dying lips had turned away; – those useless phials; – that watch —*his* watch – moving – and *he* so still! – the utter helplessness of human aid; – the dreadful might of Omnipotence!

“Harry!”

Oh, when was he ever deaf before to the music of that voice? Oh, how could Ruth (God forgive her!) look upon those dumb lips and say, “Thy will be done!”

“Horrible!” muttered Hyacinth, as the undertaker passed him on the stairs with Harry’s coffin. “These business details are very shocking to a sensitive person. I beg your pardon; did you address me?” said he, to a gentleman who raised his hat as he passed.

“I wished to do so, though an entire stranger to you,” said the gentleman, with a sympathizing glance, which was quite thrown away on Hyacinth. “I have had the pleasure of living under the same roof, this summer, with your afflicted sister and her noble husband, and have become warmly attached to both. In common with several warm friends of your brother-in-law, I am pained to learn that, owing to the failure of parties for whom he had become responsible, there will be little or nothing for the widow and her children, when his affairs are settled. It is our wish to make up a purse, and request her acceptance of it, through you, as a slight token of the estimation in which we held her husband’s many virtues. I understand you are to leave before the funeral, which must be my apology for intruding upon you at so unseasonable an hour.”

With the courtliest of bows, in the blandest of tones, Hyacinth assured, while he thanked Mr. Kendall, that himself, his father, and, indeed, all the members of the family, were abundantly able, and most solicitous, to supply every want, and anticipate every wish of Ruth and her children; and that it was quite impossible she should ever suffer for anything, or be obliged in any way, at any future time, to exert herself for her own, or their support; all of which good news for Ruth highly gratified Mr. Kendall, who grasped the velvet palm of Hyacinth, and dashed away a grateful tear, that the promise to the widow and fatherless was remembered in heaven.

CHAPTER XXX

“They are very attentive to us here,” remarked the doctor, as one after another of Harry’s personal friends paid their respects, for his sake, to the old couple at No. 20. “Very attentive, and yet, Mis. Hall, I only practiced physic in this town six months, five years ago. It is really astonishing how long a good physician will be remembered,” and the doctor crossed his legs comfortably, and tapped on his snuff-box.

“Ruth’s brother, Hyacinth, leaves before the funeral, doctor,” said the old lady. “I suppose you see through *that*. He intends to be off and out of the way, before the time comes to decide where Ruth shall put her head, after Harry is buried; and there’s her father, just like him; he has been as uneasy as an eel in a frying-pan, ever since he came, and this morning *he* went off, without asking a question about Harry’s affairs. I suppose he thinks it is *our* business, and he owning bank stock. I tell you, doctor, that Ruth may go a-begging, for all the help she’ll get from *her* folks.”

“Or from me, either,” said the doctor, thrusting his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest, and striding across the room. “She has been a spoiled baby long enough; she will find earning her living a different thing from sitting with her hands folded, with Harry chained to her feet.”

“What did you do with that bottle of old wine, Mis. Hall, which I told you to bring out of Harry’s room? He never drank but one glass of it, after that gentleman sent it to him, and we might as well have it as to let those lazy waiters drink it up. There were two or three bunches of grapes, too, he didn’t eat; you had better take them, too, while you are about it.”

“Well, it don’t seem, after all, as if Harry was dead,” said the doctor, musingly; “but the Lord’s will be done. Here comes your dress-maker, Mis. Hall.”

“Good afternoon, ma’am, good afternoon, sir,” said Miss Skinlin, with a doleful whine, drawing down the corners of her mouth and eyes to suit the occasion. “Sad affliction you’ve met with. As our minister says, ‘man is like the herb of the field; blooming to-day, withered to-morrow.’ Life is short: will you have your dress gathered or biased, ma’am?”

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