

ARTHUR

TIMOTHY SHAY

AFTER THE STORM

Timothy Arthur
After the Storm

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T. S. Arthur

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CHAPTER I

THE WAR OF THE ELEMENTS

NO June day ever opened with a fairer promise. Not a single cloud flecked the sky, and the sun coursed onward through the azure sea until past meridian, without throwing to the earth a single shadow. Then, low in the west, appeared something obscure and hazy, blending the hill-tops with the horizon; an hour later, and three or four small fleecy islands were seen, clearly outlined in the airy ocean, and slowly ascending—avant-couriers of a coming storm. Following these were mountain peaks, snow-capped and craggy, with desolate valleys between. Then, over all this arctic panorama, fell a sudden shadow. The white tops of the cloudy hills lost their clear, gleaming outlines and their slumbrous stillness. The atmosphere was in motion, and a white scud began to drive across the heavy, dark masses of clouds that lay far back against the sky in mountain-like repose.

How grandly now began the onward march of the tempest, which had already invaded the sun's domain and shrouded his face in the smoke of approaching battle. Dark and heavy it lay along more than half the visible horizon, while its crown invaded the zenith.

As yet, all was silence and portentous gloom. Nature seemed to pause and hold her breath in dread anticipation. Then came a muffled, jarring sound, as of far distant artillery, which died away into an oppressive stillness. Suddenly from zenith to horizon the cloud was cut by a fiery stroke, an instant visible. Following this, a heavy thunder-peal shook the solid earth, and rattled in booming echoes along the hillsides and amid the cloudy caverns above.

At last the storm came down on the wind's strong pinions, swooping fiercely to the earth, like an eagle to its prey. For one wild hour it raged as if the angel of destruction were abroad.

At the window of a house standing picturesquely among the Hudson Highlands, and looking down upon the river, stood a maiden and her lover, gazing upon this wild war among the elements. Fear had pressed her closely to his side, and he had drawn an arm around her in assurance of safety.

Suddenly the maiden clasped her hands over her face, cried out and shuddered. The lightning had shivered a tree upon which her gaze was fixed, rending it as she could have rent a willow wand.

"God is in the storm," said the lover, bending to her ear. He spoke reverently and in a voice that had in it no tremor of fear.

The maiden withdrew her hands from before her shut eyes, and looking up into his face, answered in a voice which she strove to make steady:

"Thank you, Hartley, for the words. Yes, God is present in the storm, as in the sunshine."

"Look!" exclaimed the young man, suddenly, pointing to the river. A boat had just come in sight. It contained a man and a woman. The former was striving with a pair of oars to keep the boat right in the eye of the wind; but while the maiden and her lover still gazed at them, a wild gust swept down upon the water and drove their frail bark under. There was no hope in their case; the floods had swallowed them, and would not give up their living prey.

A moment afterward, and an elm, whose great arms had for nearly a century spread themselves out in the sunshine tranquilly or battled with the storms, fell crashing against the house, shaking it to the very foundations.

The maiden drew back from the window, overcome with terror. These shocks were too much for her nerves. But her lover restrained her, saying, with a covert chiding in his voice,

"Stay, Irene! There is a wild delight in all this, and are you not brave enough to share it with me?"

But she struggled to release herself from his arm, replying with a shade of impatience—
"Let me go, Hartley! Let me go!"

The flexed arm was instantly relaxed, and the maiden was free. She went back, hastily, from the window, and, sitting down on a sofa, buried her face in her hands. The young man did not follow her, but remained standing by the window, gazing out upon Nature in her strong convulsion. It may, however, be doubted whether his mind took note of the wild images that were pictured in his eyes. A cloud was in the horizon of his mind, dimming its heavenly azure. And the maiden's sky was shadowed also.

For two or three minutes the young man stood by the window, looking out at the writhing trees and the rain pouring down an avalanche of water, and then, with a movement that indicated a struggle and a conquest, turned and walked toward the sofa on which the maiden still sat with her face hidden from view. Sitting down beside her, he took her hand. It lay passive in his. He pressed it gently; but she gave back no returning pressure. There came a sharp, quick gleam of lightning, followed by a crash that jarred the house. But Irene did not start—we may question whether she even saw the one or heard the other, except as something remote.

"Irene!"

She did not stir.

The young man leaned closer, and said, in a tender voice—

"Irene—darling—"

Her hand moved in his—just moved—but did not return the pressure of his own.

"Irene." And now his arm stole around her. She yielded, and, turning, laid her head upon his shoulder.

There had been a little storm in the maiden's heart, consequent upon the slight restraint ventured on by her lover when she drew back from the window; and it was only now subsiding.

"I did not mean to offend you," said the young man, penitently.

"Who said that I was offended?" She looked up, with a smile that only half obliterated the shadow. "I was frightened, Hartley. It is a fearful storm!" And she glanced toward the window.

The lover accepted this affirmation, though he knew better in his heart. He knew that his slight attempt at constraint had chafed her naturally impatient spirit, and that it had taken her some time to regain her lost self-control.

Without, the wild rush of winds was subsiding, the lightning gleamed out less frequently, and the thunder rolled at a farther distance. Then came that deep stillness of nature which follows in the wake of the tempest, and in its hush the lovers stood again at the window, looking out upon the wrecks that were strewn in its path. They were silent, for on both hearts was a shadow, which had not rested there when they first stood by the window, although the sky was then more deeply veiled. So slight was the cause on which these shadows depended that memory scarcely retained its impression. He was tender, and she was yielding; and each tried to atone by loving acts for a moment of willfulness.

The sun went down while yet the skirts of the storm were spread over the western sky, and without a single glance at the ruins which lightning, wind and rain had scattered over the earth's fair surface. But he arose gloriously in the coming morning, and went upward in his strength, consuming the vapors at a breath, and drinking up every bright dewdrop that welcomed him with a quiver of joy. The branches shook themselves in the gentle breezes his presence had called forth to dally amid their foliage and sport with the flowers; and every green thing put on a fresher beauty in delight at his return; while from the bosom of the trees—from hedgerow and from meadow—went up the melody of birds.

In the brightness of this morning, the lovers went out to look at the storm-wrecks that lay scattered around. Here a tree had been twisted off where the tough wood measured by feet instead of inches; there stood the white and shivered trunk of another sylvan lord, blasted in an instant by a lightning stroke; and there lay, prone upon the ground, giant limbs, which, but the day before, spread themselves abroad in proud defiance of the storm. Vines were torn from their fastenings; flower-beds

destroyed; choice shrubbery, tended with care for years, shorn of its beauty. Even the solid earth had been invaded by floods of water, which ploughed deep furrows along its surface. And, saddest of all, two human lives had gone out while the mad tempest raged in uncontrollable fury.

As the lover and maiden stood looking at the signs of violence so thickly scattered around, the former said, in a cheerful tone—

"For all his wild, desolating power, the tempest is vassal to the sun and dew. He may spread his sad trophies around in brief, blind rage; but they soon obliterate all traces of his path, and make beautiful what he has scarred with wounds or disfigured by the tramp of his iron heel."

"Not so, my children," said the calm voice of the maiden's father, to whose ears the remark had come. "Not so, my children. The sun and dew never fully restore what the storm has broken and trampled upon. They may hide disfiguring marks, and cover with new forms of life and beauty the ruins which time can never restore. This is something, and we may take the blessing thankfully, and try to forget what is lost, or so changed as to be no longer desirable. Look at this fallen and shattered elm, my children. Is there any hope for that in the dew, the rain and sunshine? Can these build it up again, and spread out its arms as of old, bringing back to me, as it has done daily, the image of my early years? No, my children. After every storm are ruins which can never be repaired. Is it not so with that lightning-stricken oak? And what art can restore to its exquisite loveliness this statue of Hope, thrown down by the ruthless hand of the unsparing tempest? Moreover, is there human vitality in the sunshine and fructifying dew? Can they put life into the dead?"

"No—no—my children. And take the lesson to heart. Outward tempests but typify and represent the fiercer tempests that too often desolate the human soul. In either case something is lost that can never be restored. Beware, then, of storms, for wreck and ruin follow as surely as the passions rage."

CHAPTER II

THE LOVERS

IRENE DELANCY was a girl of quick, strong feelings, and an undisciplined will. Her mother died before she reached her tenth year. From that time she was either at home under the care of domestics, or within the scarcely more favorable surroundings of a boarding-school. She grew up beautiful and accomplished, but capricious and with a natural impatience of control, that unwise reactions on the part of those who attempted to govern her in no degree tempered.

Hartley Emerson, as a boy, was self-willed and passionate, but possessed many fine qualities. A weak mother yielded to his resolute struggles to have his own way, and so he acquired, at an early age, control over his own movements. He went to college, studied hard, because he was ambitious, and graduated with honor. Law he chose as a profession; and, in order to secure the highest advantages, entered the office of a distinguished attorney in the city of New York, and gave to its study the best efforts of a clear, acute and logical mind. Self-reliant, proud, and in the habit of reaching his ends by the nearest ways, he took his place at the bar with a promise of success rarely exceeded. From his widowed mother, who died before he reached his majority, Hartley Emerson inherited a moderate fortune with which to begin the world. Few young men started forward on their life-journey with so small a number of vices, or with so spotless a moral character. The fine intellectual cast of his mind, and his devotion to study, lifted him above the baser allurements of sense and kept his garments pure.

Such were Irene Delancy and Hartley Emerson—lovers and betrothed at the time we present them to our readers. They met, two years before, at Saratoga, and drew together by a mutual attraction. She was the first to whom his heart had bowed in homage; and until she looked upon him her pulse had never beat quicker at sight of a manly form.

Mr. Edmund Delancy, a gentleman of some wealth and advanced in years, saw no reason to interpose objections. The family of Emerson occupied a social position equal with his own; and the young man's character and habits were blameless. So far, the course of love ran smooth; and only three months intervened until the wedding-day.

The closer relation into which the minds of the lovers came after their betrothal and the removal of a degree of deference and self-constraint, gave opportunity for the real character of each to show itself. Irene could not always repress her willfulness and impatience of another's control; nor her lover hold a firm hand on quick-springing anger when anything checked his purpose. Pride and adhesiveness of character, under such conditions of mind, were dangerous foes to peace; and both were proud and tenacious.

The little break in the harmonious flow of their lives, noticed as occurring while the tempest raged, was one of many such incidents; and it was in consequence of Mr. Delancy's observation of these unpromising features in their intercourse that he spoke with so much earnestness about the irreparable ruin that followed in the wake of storms.

At least once a week Emerson left the city, and his books and cases, to spend a day with Irene in her tasteful home; and sometimes he lingered there for two or three days at a time. It happened, almost invariably, that some harsh notes jarred in the music of their lives during these pleasant seasons, and left on both their hearts a feeling of oppression, or, worse, a brooding sense of injustice. Then there grew up between them an affected opposition and indifference, and a kind of half-sportive, half-earnest wrangling about trifles, which too often grew serious.

Mr. Delancy saw this with a feeling of regret, and often interposed to restore some broken links in the chain of harmony.

"You must be more conciliating, Irene," he would often say to his daughter. "Hartley is earnest and impulsive, and you should yield to him gracefully, even when you do not always see and feel as

he does. This constant opposition and standing on your dignity about trifles is fretting both of you, and bodes evil in the future."

"Would you have me assent if he said black was white?" she answered to her father's remonstrance one day, balancing her little head firmly and setting her lips together in a resolute way.

"It might be wiser to say nothing than to utter dissent, if, in so doing, both were made unhappy," returned her father.

"And so let him think me a passive fool?" she asked.

"No; a prudent girl, shaming his unreasonableness by her self-control."

"I have read somewhere," said Irene, "that all men are self-willed tyrants—the words do not apply to you, my father, and so there is an exception to the rule." She smiled a tender smile as she looked into the face of a parent who had ever been too indulgent. "But, from my experience with a lover, I can well believe the sentiment based in truth. Hartley must have me think just as he thinks, and do what he wants me to do, or he gets ruffled. Now I don't expect, when I am married, to sink into a mere nobody—to be my husband's echo and shadow; and the quicker I can make Hartley comprehend this the better will it be for both of us. A few rufflings of his feathers now will teach him how to keep them smooth and glossy in the time to come."

"You are in error, my child," replied Mr. Delancy, speaking very seriously. "Between those who love a cloud should never interpose; and I pray you, Irene, as you value your peace and that of the man who is about to become your husband, to be wise in the very beginning, and dissolve with a smile of affection every vapor that threatens a coming storm. Keep the sky always bright."

"I will do everything that I can, father, to keep the sky of our lives always bright, except give up my own freedom of thought and independence of action. A wife should not sink her individuality in that of her husband, any more than a husband should sink his individuality in that of his wife. They are two equals, and should be content to remain equals. There is no love in subordination."

Mr. Delancy sighed deeply: "Is argument of any avail here? Can words stir conviction in her mind?" He was silent for a time, and then said—

"Better, Irene, that you stop where you are, and go through life alone, than venture upon marriage, in your state of feeling, with a man like Hartley Emerson."

"Dear father, you are altogether too serious!" exclaimed the warm-hearted girl, putting her arms around his neck and kissing him. "Hartley and I love each other too well to be made very unhappy by any little jar that takes place in the first reciprocal movement of our lives. We shall soon come to understand each other, and then the harmonies will be restored."

"The harmonies should never be lost, my child," returned Mr. Delancy. "In that lies the danger. When the enemy gets into the citadel, who can say that he will ever be dislodged? There is no safety but in keeping him out."

"Still too serious, father," said Irene. "There is no danger to be feared from any formidable enemy. All these are very little things."

"It is the little foxes that spoil the tender grapes, my daughter," Mr. Delancy replied; "and if the tender grapes are spoiled, what hope is there in the time of vintage? Alas for us if in the later years the wine of life shall fail!"

There was so sad a tone in her father's voice, and so sad an expression on his face, that Irene was touched with a new feeling toward him. She again put her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly.

"Do not fear for us," she replied. "These are only little summer showers, that make the earth greener and the flowers more beautiful. The sky is of a more heavenly azure when they pass away, and the sun shines more gloriously than before."

But the father could not be satisfied, and answered—

"Beware of even summer showers, my darling. I have known fearful ravages to follow in their path—seen many a goodly tree go down. After every storm, though the sky may be clearer, the earth

upon which it fell has suffered some loss which is a loss for ever. Begin, then, by conciliation and forbearance. Look past the external, which may seem at times too exacting or imperative, and see only the true heart pulsing beneath—the true, brave heart, that would give to every muscle the strength of steel for your protection if danger threatened. Can you not be satisfied with knowing that you are loved—deeply, truly, tenderly? What more can a woman ask? Can you not wait until this love puts on its rightly-adjusted exterior, as it assuredly will. It is yet mingled with self-love, and its action modified by impulse and habit. Wait—wait—wait, my daughter. Bear and forbear for a time, as you value peace on earth and happiness in heaven."

"I will try, father, for your sake, to guard myself," she answered.

"No, no, Irene. Not for my sake, but for the sake of right," returned Mr. Delancy.

They were sitting in the vine-covered portico that looked down, over a sloping lawn toward the river.

"There is Hartley now!" exclaimed Irene, as the form of her lover came suddenly into view, moving forward along the road that approached from the landing, and she sprung forward and went rapidly down to meet him. There an ardent kiss, a twining of arms, warmly spoken words and earnest gestures. Mr. Delancy looked at them as they stood fondly together, and sighed. He could not help it, for he knew there was trouble before them. After standing and talking for a short time, they began moving toward the house, but paused at every few paces—sometimes to admire a picturesque view—sometimes to listen one to the other and respond to pleasant sentiments—and sometimes in fond dispute. This was Mr. Delancy's reading of their actions and gestures, as he sat looking at and observing them closely.

A little way from the path by which they were advancing toward the house was a rustic arbor, so placed as to command a fine sweep of river from one line of view and West Point from another. Irene paused and made a motion of her hand toward this arbor, as if she wished to go there; but Hartley looked to the house and plainly signified a wish to go there first. At this Irene pulled him gently toward the arbor; he resisted, and she drew upon his arm more resolutely, when, planting his feet firmly, he stood like a rock. Still she urged and still he declined going in that direction. It was play at first, but Mr. Delancy saw that it was growing to be earnest. A few moments longer, and he saw Irene separate from Hartley and move toward the arbor; at the same time the young man came forward in the direction of the house. Mr. Delancy, as he stepped from the portico to meet him, noticed that his color was heightened and his eyes unusually bright.

"What's the matter with that self-willed girl of mine?" he asked, as he took the hand of Emerson, affecting a lightness of tone that did not correspond with his real feelings.

"Oh, nothing serious," the young man replied. "She's only in a little pet because I wouldn't go with her to the arbor before I paid my respects to you."

"She's a spoiled little puss," said the father, in a fond yet serious way, "and you'll have to humor her a little at first, Hartley. She never had the wise discipline of a mother, and so has grown up unused to that salutary control which is so necessary for young persons. But she has a warm, true heart and pure principles; and these are the foundation-stones on which to build the temple of happiness."

"Don't fear but that it will be all right between us. I love her too well to let any flitting humors affect me."

He stepped upon the portico as he spoke and sat down. Irene had before this reached the arbor and taken a seat there. Mr. Delancy could do no less than resume the chair from which he had arisen on the young man's approach. In looking into Hartley's face he noticed a resolute expression about his mouth. For nearly ten minutes they sat and talked, Irene remaining alone in the arbor. Mr. Delancy then said, in a pleasant off-handed way,

"Come, Hartley, you have punished her long enough. I don't like to see you even play at disagreement."

He did not seem to notice the remark, but started a subject of conversation that it was almost impossible to dismiss for the next ten minutes. Then he stepped down from the portico, and was moving leisurely toward the arbor when he perceived that Irene had already left it and was returning by another path. So he came back and seated himself again, to await her approach. But, instead of joining him, she passed round the house and entered on the opposite side. For several minutes he sat, expecting every instant to see her come out on the portico, but she did not make her appearance.

It was early in the afternoon. Hartley, affecting not to notice the absence of Irene, kept up an animated conversation with Mr. Delancy. A whole hour went by, and still the young lady was absent. Suddenly starting up, at the end of this time, Hartley exclaimed—

"As I live, there comes the boat! and I must be in New York to-night."

"Stay," said Mr. Delancy, "until I call Irene."

"I can't linger for a moment, sir. It will take quick walking to reach the landing by the time the boat is there." The young man spoke hurriedly, shook hands with Mr. Delancy, and then sprung away, moving at a rapid pace.

"What's the matter, father? Where is Hartley going?" exclaimed Irene, coming out into the portico and grasping her father's arm. Her face was pale and her lips trembled.

"He is going to New York," replied Mr. Delancy.

"To New York!" She looked almost frightened.

"Yes. The boat is coming, and he says that he must be in the city to-night."

Irene sat down, looking pale and troubled.

"Why have you remained away from Hartley ever since his arrival?" asked Mr. Delancy, fixing his eyes upon Irene and evincing some displeasure.

Irene did not answer, but her father saw the color coming back to her face.

"I think, from his manner, that he was hurt by your singular treatment. What possessed you to do so?"

"Because I was not pleased with him," said Irene. Her voice was now steady.

"Why not?"

"I wished him to go to the arbor."

"He was your guest, and, in simple courtesy, if there was no other motive, you should have let his wishes govern your movements," Mr. Delancy replied.

"He is always opposing me!" said Irene, giving way to a flood of tears and weeping for a time bitterly.

"It is not at all unlikely, my daughter," replied Mr. Delancy, after the tears began to flow less freely, "that Hartley is now saying the same thing of you, and treasuring up bitter things in his heart. I have no idea that any business calls him to New York to-night."

"Nor I. He takes this means to punish me," said Irene.

"Don't take that for granted. Your conduct has blinded him, and he is acting now from blind impulse. Before he is half-way to New York he will regret this hasty step as sincerely as I trust you are already regretting its occasion."

Irene did not reply.

"I did not think," he resumed, "that my late earnest remonstrance would have so soon received an illustration like this. But it may be as well. Trifles light as air have many times proved the beginning of life-long separations between friends and lovers who possessed all the substantial qualities for a life-long and happy companionship. Oh, my daughter, beware! beware of these little beginnings of discord. How easy would it have been for you to have yielded to Hartley's wishes!—how hard will it to endure the pain that must now be suffered! And remember that you do not suffer alone; your conduct has made him an equal sufferer. He came up all the way from the city full of sweet anticipations. It was for your sake that he came; and love pictured you as embodying all attractions. But how has

he found you? Ah, my daughter, your caprice has wounded the heart that turned to you for love. He came in joy, but goes back in sorrow."

Irene went up to her chamber, feeling sadder than she had ever felt in her life; yet, mingling, with her sadness and self-reproaches, were complaining thoughts of her lover. For a little half-playful pettishness was she to be visited with a punishment like this? If he had really loved her—so she queried—would he have flung himself away after this hasty fashion? Pride came to her aid in the conflict of feeling, and gave her self-control and endurance. At tea-time she met her father, and surprised him with her calm, almost cheerful, aspect. But his glance was too keen not to penetrate the disguise. After tea, she sat reading—or at least affecting to read—in the portico, until the evening shadows came down, and then she retired to her chamber.

Not many hours of sleep brought forgetfulness of suffering through the night that followed. Sometimes the unhappy girl heaped mountains of reproaches upon her own head; and sometimes pride and indignation, gaining rule in her heart, would whisper self-justification, and throw the weight of responsibility upon her lover.

Her pale face and troubled eyes revealed too plainly, on the next morning, the conflict through which she had passed.

"Write him a letter of apology or explanation," said Mr. Delancy.

But Irene was not in a state of mind for this. Pride came whispering too many humiliating objections in her ear. Morning passed, and in the early hours of the afternoon, when the New York boat usually came up the river, she was out on the portico watching for its appearance. Hope whispered that, repenting of his hasty return on the day before, her lover was now hurrying back to meet her. At last the white hull of the boat came gliding into view, and in less than half an hour it was at the landing. Then it moved on its course again. Almost to a second of time had Irene learned to calculate the minutes it required for Hartley to make the distance between the landing and the nearest point in the road where his form could meet her view. She held her breath in eager expectation as that moment of time approached. It came—it passed; the white spot in the road, where his dark form first revealed itself, was touched by no obscuring shadow. For more than ten minutes Irene sat motionless, gazing still toward that point; then, sighing deeply, she arose and went up to her room, from which she did not come down until summoned to join her father at tea.

The next day passed as this had done, and so did the next. Hartley neither came nor sent a message of any kind. The maiden's heart began to fail. Grief and fear took the place of accusation and self-reproach. What if he had left her for ever! The thought made her heart shiver as if an icy wind had passed over it. Two or three times she took up her pen to write him a few words and entreat him to come back to her again. But she could form no sentences against which pride did not come with strong objection; and so she suffered on, and made no sign.

A whole week at last intervened. Then the enduring heart began to grow stronger to bear, and, in self-protection, to put on sterner moods. Hers was not a spirit to yield weakly in any struggle. She was formed for endurance, pride and self-reliance giving her strength above common natures. But this did not really lessen her suffering, for she was not only capable of deep affection, but really loved Hartley almost as her own life; and the thought of losing him, whenever it grew distinct, filled her with terrible anguish.

With pain her father saw the color leave her cheeks, her eyes grow fixed and dreamy, and her lips shrink from their full outline.

"Write to Hartley," he said to her one day, after a week had passed.

"Never!" was her quick, firm, almost sharply uttered response; "I would die first!"

"But, my daughter—"

"Father," she interrupted him, two bright spots suddenly burning on her cheeks, "don't, I pray you, urge me on this point. I have courage enough to break, but I will not bend. I gave him no offence. What right has he to assume that I was not engaged in domestic duties while he sat talking with

you? He said that he had an engagement in New York. Very well; there was a sufficient reason for his sudden departure; and I accept the reason. But why does he remain away? If simply because I preferred a seat in the arbor to one in the portico, why, the whole thing is so unmanly, that I can have no patience with it. Write to him, and humor a whim like this! No, no—Irene Delancy is not made of the right stuff. He went from me, and he must return again. I cannot go to him. Maiden modesty and pride forbid. And so I shall remain silent and passive, if my heart breaks."

It was in the afternoon, and they were sitting in the portico, where, at this hour, Irene might have been found every day for the past week. The boat from New York came in sight as she closed the last sentence. She saw it—for her eyes were on the look-out—the moment it turned the distant point of land that hid the river beyond. Mr. Delancy also observed the boat. Its appearance was an incident of sufficient importance, taking things as they were, to check the conversation, which was far from being satisfactory on either side.

The figure of Irene was half buried in a deep cushioned chair, which had been wheeled out upon the portico, and now her small, slender form seemed to shrink farther back among the cushions, and she sat as motionless as one asleep. Steadily onward came the boat, throwing backward her dusky trail and lashing with her great revolving wheels the quiet waters into foamy turbulence—onward, until the dark crowd of human forms could be seen upon her decks; then, turning sharply, she was lost to view behind a bank of forest trees. Ten minutes more, and the shriek of escaping steam was heard as she stopped her ponderous machinery at the landing.

From that time Irene almost held her breath, as so she counted the moments that must elapse before Hartley could reach the point of view in the road that led up from the river, should he have been a passenger in the steamboat. The number was fully told, but it was to-day as yesterday. There was no sign of his coming. And so the eyelids, weary with vain expectation, drooped heavily over the dimming eyes. But she had not stirred, nor shown a sign of feeling. A little while she sat with her long lashes shading her pale cheeks; then she slowly raised them and looked out toward the river again. What a quick start she gave! Did her eyes deceive her? No, it was Hartley, just in the spot she had looked to see him only a minute or two before. But how slowly he moved, and with what a weary step! and, even at this long distance, his face looked white against the wavy masses of his dark-brown hair.

Irene started up with an exclamation, stood as if in doubt for a moment, then, springing from the portico, she went flying to meet him, as swiftly as if moving on winged feet. All the forces of her ardent, impulsive nature were bearing her forward. There was no remembrance of coldness or imagined wrong—pride did not even struggle to lift its head—love conquered everything. The young man stood still, from weariness or surprise, ere she reached him. As she drew near, Irene saw that his face was not only pale, but thin and wasted.

"Oh, Hartley! dear Hartley!" came almost wildly from her lips, as she flung her arms around his neck, and kissed him over and over again, on lips, cheeks and brow, with an ardor and tenderness that no maiden delicacy could restrain. "Have you been sick, or hurt? Why are you so pale, darling?"

"I have been ill for a week—ever since I was last here," the young man replied, speaking in a slow, tremulous voice.

"And I knew it not!" Tears were glittering in her eyes and pressing out in great pearly beads from between the fringing lashes. "Why did you not send for me, Hartley?"

And she laid her small hands upon each side of his face, as you have seen a mother press the cheeks of her child, and looked up tenderly into his love-beaming eyes.

"But come, dear," she added, removing her hands from his face and drawing her arm within his—not to lean on, but to offer support. "My father, who has, with me, suffered great anxiety on your account, is waiting your arrival at the house."

Then, with slow steps, they moved along the upward sloping way, crowding the moments with loving words.

And so the storm passed, and the sun came out again in the firmament of their souls. But looked he down on no tempest-marks? Had not the ruthless tread of passion marred the earth's fair surface? Were no goodly trees uptorn, or clinging vines wrenched from their support? Alas! was there ever a storm that did not leave some ruined hope behind? ever a storm that did not strew the sea with wrecks or mar the earth's fair beauty?

As when the pain of a crushed limb ceases there comes to the sufferer a sense of delicious ease, so, after the storm had passed, the lovers sat in the warm sunshine and dreamed of unclouded happiness in the future. But in the week that Hartley spent with his betrothed were revealed to their eyes, many times, desolate places where flowers had been; and their hearts grew sad as they turned their eyes away, and sighed for hopes departed, faith shaken, and untroubled confidence in each other for the future before them, for ever gone.

CHAPTER III

THE CLOUD AND THE SIGN

IN alternate storm and sunshine their lives passed on, until the appointed day arrived that was to see them bound, not by the graceful true-lovers' knot, which either might untie, but by a chain light as downy fetters if borne in mutual love, and galling as ponderous iron links, if heart answered not heart and the chafing spirit struggled to get free.

Hartley Emerson loved truly the beautiful, talented and affectionate, but badly-disciplined, quick-tempered, self-willed girl he had chosen for a wife; and Irene Delancy would have gone to prison and to death for the sake of the man to whom she had yielded up the rich treasures of her young heart. In both cases the great drawback to happiness was the absence of self-discipline, self-denial and self-conquest. They could overcome difficulties, brave danger, set the world at defiance, if need be, for each other, and not a coward nerve give way; but when pride and passion came between them, each was a child in weakness and blind self-will. Unfortunately, persistence of character was strong in both. They were of such stuff as martyrs were made of in the fiery times of power and persecution.

A brighter, purer morning than that on which their marriage vows were said the year had not given to the smiling earth. Clear and softly blue as the eye of childhood bent the summer sky above them. There was not a cloud in all the tranquil heavens to give suggestion of dreary days to come or to wave a sign of warning. The blithe birds sung their matins amid the branches that hung their leafy drapery around and above Irene's windows, in seeming echoes to the songs love was singing in her heart. Nature put on the loveliest attire in all her ample wardrobe, and decked herself with coronals and wreaths of flowers that loaded the air with sweetness.

"May your lives flow together like two pure streams that meet in the same valley, and as bright a sky bend always over you as gives its serene promise for to-day."

Thus spoke the minister as the ceremonials closed that wrought the external bond of union between them. His words were uttered with feeling and solemnity; for marriage, in his eyes, was no light thing. He had seen too many sad hearts struggling in chains that only death could break, ever to regard marriage with other than sober thoughts that went questioning away into the future.

The "amen" of Mr. Delancy was not audibly spoken, but it was deep-voiced in his heart.

There was to be a wedding-tour of a few weeks, and then the young couple were to take possession of a new home in the city, which Mr. Emerson had prepared for his bride. The earliest boat that came up from New York was to bear the party to Albany, Saratoga being the first point of their destination.

After the closing of the marriage ceremony some two or three hours passed before the time of departure came. The warm congratulations were followed by a gay, festive scene, in which glad young hearts had a merry-making time. How beautiful the bride looked! and how proudly the gaze of her newly-installed husband turned ever and ever toward her, move which way she would among her maidens, as if she were a magnet to his eyes. He was standing in the portico that looked out upon the distant river, about an hour after the wedding, talking with one of the bridesmaids, when the latter, pointing to the sky, said, laughing—

"There comes your fate."

Emerson's eyes followed the direction of her finger.

"You speak in riddles," he replied, looking back into the maiden's face. "What do you see?"

"A little white blemish on the deepening azure," was answered. "There it lies, just over that stately horse-chestnut, whose branches arch themselves into the outline of a great cathedral window."

"A scarcely perceptible cloud?"

"Yes, no bigger than a hand; and just below it is another."

"I see; and yet you still propound a riddle. What has that cloud to do with my fate?"

"You know the old superstition connected with wedding-days?"

"What?"

"That as the aspect of the day is, so will the wedded life be."

"Ours, then, is full of promise. There has been no fairer day than this," said the young man.

"Yet many a day that opened as bright and cloudless has sobbed itself away in tears."

"True; and it may be so again. But I am no believer in signs."

"Nor I," said the young lady, again laughing.

The bride came up at this moment and, hearing the remark of her young husband, said, as she drew her arm within his—

"What about signs, Hartley?"

"Miss Carman has just reminded me of the superstition about wedding-days, as typical of life."

"Oh yes, I remember," said Irene, smiling. "If the day opens clear, then becomes cloudy, and goes out in storm, there will be happiness in the beginning, but sorrow at the close; but if clouds and rain herald its awakening, then pass over and leave the sky blue and sunny, there will be trouble at first, but smiling peace as life progresses and declines. Our sky is bright as heart could wish." And the bride looked up into the deep blue ether.

Miss Carman laid one hand upon her arm and with the other pointed lower down, almost upon the horizon's edge, saying, in a tone of mock solemnity—

"As I said to Mr. Emerson, so I now say to you—There comes our fate."

"You don't call that the herald of an approaching storm?"

"Weatherwise people say," answered the maiden, "that a sky without a cloud is soon followed by stormy weather. Since morning until now there has not a cloud been seen."

"Weatherwise people and almanac-makers speak very oracularly, but the day of auguries and signs is over," replied Irene.

"Philosophy," said Mr. Emerson, "is beginning to find reasons in the nature of things for results that once seemed only accidental, yet followed with remarkable certainty the same phenomena. It discovers a relation of cause and effect where ignorance only recognizes some power working in the dark."

"So you pass me over to the side of ignorance!" Irene spoke in a tone that Hartley's ear recognized too well. His remark had touched her pride.

"Not by any means," he answered quickly, eager to do away the impression. "Not by any means," he repeated. "The day of mere auguries, omens and signs is over. Whatever natural phenomena appear are dependent on natural causes, and men of science are beginning to study the so-called superstitions of farmers and seamen, to find out, if possible, the philosophical elucidation. Already a number of curious results have followed investigation in this field."

Irene leaned on his arm still, but she did not respond. A little cloud had come up and lay just upon the verge of her soul's horizon. Her husband knew that it was there; and this knowledge caused a cloud to dim also the clear azure of his mind. There was a singular correspondence between their mental sky and the fair cerulean without.

Fearing to pursue the theme on which they were conversing, lest some unwitting words might shadow still further the mind of Irene, Emerson changed the subject, and was, to all appearance, successful in dispelling the little cloud.

The hour came, at length, when the bridal party must leave. After a tender, tearful partings with her father, Irene turned her steps away from the home of her childhood into a new path, that would lead her out into the world, where so many thousands upon thousands, who saw only a way of velvet softness before them, have cut their tended feet upon flinty rocks, even to the verve end of their tearful journey. Tightly and long did Mr. Delancy hold his child to his heart, and when his

last kiss was given and his fervent "God give you a happy life, my daughter!" said, he gazed after her departing form with eyes front which manly firmness could not hold back the tears.

No one knew better than Mr. Delancy the perils that lay before his daughter. That storms would darken her sky and desolate her heart, he had too good reason to fear. His hope for her lay beyond the summer-time of life, when, chastened by suffering and subdued by experience, a tranquil autumn would crown her soul with blessings that might have been earlier enjoyed. He was not superstitious, and yet it was with a feeling of concern that he saw the white and golden clouds gathering like enchanted land along the horizon, and piling themselves up, one above another, as if in sport, building castles and towers that soon dissolved, changing away into fantastic forms, in which the eye could see no meaning; and when, at last, his ear caught a far-distant sound that jarred the air, a sudden pain shot through his heart.

"On any other day but this!" he sighed to himself, turning from the window at which he was standing and walking restlessly the floor for several minutes, lost in a sad, dreamy reverie.

Like something instinct with life the stately steamer, quivering with every stroke of her iron heart, swept along the gleaming river on her upward passage, bearing to their destination her freight of human souls. Among them was our bridal party, which, as the day was so clear and beautiful, was gathered upon the upper deck. As Irene's eyes turned from the closing vision of her father's beautiful home, where the first cycle of her life had recorded its golden hours, she said, with a sigh, speaking to one of her companions—

"Farewell, Ivy Cliff! I shall return to you again, but not the same being I was when I left your pleasant scenes this morning."

"A happier being I trust," replied Miss Carman, one of her bridesmaids.

Rose Carman was a young friend, residing in the neighborhood of her father, to whom Irene was tenderly attached.

"Something here says no." And Irene, bending toward Miss Carman, pressed one of her hands against her bosom.

"The weakness of an hour like this," answered her friend with an assuring smile. "It will pass away like the morning cloud and the early dew."

Mr. Emerson noticed the shade upon the face of his bride, and drawing near to her, said, tenderly—

"I can forgive you a sigh for the past, Irene. Ivy Cliff is a lovely spot, and your home has been all that a maiden's heart could desire. It would be strange, indeed, if the chords that have so long bound you there did not pull at your heart in parting."

Irene did not answer, but let her eyes turn backward with a pensive almost longing glance toward the spot where lay hidden among the distant trees the home of her early years. A deep shadow had suddenly fallen upon her spirits. Whence it came she knew not and asked not; but with the shadow was a dim foreboding of evil.

There was tact and delicacy enough in the companions of Irene to lead them to withdraw observation and to withhold further remarks until she could recover the self-possession she had lost. This came back in a little while, when, with an effort, she put on the light, easy manner so natural to her.

"Looking at the signs?" said one of the party, half an hour afterward, as she saw the eyes of Irene ranging along the sky, where clouds were now seen towering up in steep masses, like distant mountains.

"If I were a believer of signs," replied Irene, placing her arm within that of the maiden who had addressed her, and drawing her partly aside, "I might feel sober at this portent. But I am not. Still, sign or no sign, I trust we are not going to have a storm. It would greatly mar our pleasure."

But long ere the boat reached Albany, rain began to fall, accompanied by lightning and thunder; and soon the clouds were dissolving in a mimic deluge. Hour after hour, the wind and rain and

lightning held fierce revelry, and not until near the completion of the voyage did the clouds hold back their watery treasures, and the sunbeams force themselves through the storm's dark barriers.

When the stars came out that evening, studding the heavens with light, there was no obscuring spot on all the o'erarching sky.

CHAPTER IV

UNDER THE CLOUD

THE wedding party was to spend a week at Saratoga, and it was now the third day since its arrival. The time had passed pleasantly, or wearily, according to the state of mind or social habits and resources of the individual. The bride, it was remarked by some of the party, seemed dull; and Rose Carman, who knew her friend better, perhaps, than any other individual in the company, and kept her under close observation, was concerned to notice an occasional curtness of manner toward her husband, that was evidently not relished. Something had already transpired to jar the chords so lately attuned to harmony.

After dinner a ride was proposed by one of the company. Emerson responded favorably, but Irene was indifferent. He urged her, and she gave an evidently reluctant consent. While the gentlemen went to make arrangement for carriages, the ladies retired to their rooms. Miss Carman accompanied the bride. She had noticed her manner, and felt slightly troubled at her state of mind, knowing, as she did, her impulsive character and blind self-will when excited by opposition.

"I don't want to ride to-day!" exclaimed Irene, throwing herself into a chair as soon as she had entered her room; "and Hartley knows that I do not."

Her cheeks burned and her eyes sparkled.

"If it will give him pleasure to ride out," said Rose, in a gentle soothing manner, "you cannot but have the same feeling in accompanying him."

"I beg your pardon!" replied Irene, briskly. "If I don't want to ride, no company can make the act agreeable. Why can't people learn to leave others in freedom? If Hartley had shown the same unwillingness to join this riding party that I manifested, do you think I would have uttered a second word in favor of going? No. I am provoked at his persistence."

"There, there, Irene!" said Miss Carman, drawing an arm tenderly around the neck of her friend; "don't trust such sentences on your lips. I can't bear to hear you talk so. It isn't my sweet friend speaking."

"You are a dear, good girl, Rose," replied Irene, smiling faintly, "and I only wish that I had a portion of your calm, gentle spirit. But I am as I am, and must act out if I act at all. I must be myself or nothing."

"You can be as considerate of others as of yourself?" said Rose.

Irene looked at her companion inquiringly.

"I mean," added Rose, "that you can exercise the virtue of self-denial in order to give pleasure to another—especially if that other one be an object very dear to you. As in the present case, seeing that your husband wants to join this riding party, you can, for his sake, lay aside your indifference, and enter, with a hearty good-will, into the proposed pastime."

"And why cannot he, seeing that I do not care to ride, deny himself a little for my sake, and not drag me out against my will? Is all the yielding and concession to be on my side? Must his will rule in everything? I can tell you what it is, Rose, this will never suit me. There will be open war between us before the honeymoon has waxed and waned, if he goes on as he has begun."

"Hush! hush, Irene!" said her friend, in a tone of deprecation. "The lightest sense of wrong gains undue magnitude the moment we begin to complain. We see almost anything to be of greater importance when from the obscurity of thought we bring it out into the daylight of speech."

"It will be just as I say, and saying it will not make it any more so," was Irene's almost sullen response to this. "I have my own ideas of things and my own individuality, and neither of these do I mean to abandon. If Hartley hasn't the good sense to let me have my own way in what concerns myself,

I will take my own way. As to the troubles that may come afterward, I do not give them any weight in the argument. I would die a martyr's death rather than become the passive creature of another."

"My dear friend, why will you talk so?" Rose spoke in a tone of grief.

"Simply because I am in earnest. From the hour of our marriage I have seen a disposition on the part of my husband to assume control—to make his will the general law of our actions. It has not exhibited itself in things of moment, but in trifles, showing that the spirit was there. I say this to you, Rose, because we have been like sisters, and I can tell you of my inmost thoughts. There is a cloud already in the sky, and it threatens an approaching storm."

"Oh, my friend, why are you so blind, so weak, so self-deceived? You are putting forth your hands to drag down the temple of happiness. If it fall, it will crush you beneath a mass of ruins; and not you only, but the one you have so lately pledged yourself before God and his angels to love."

"And I do love him as deeply as ever man was loved. Oh that he knew my heart! He would not then shatter his image there. He would not trifle with a spirit formed for intense, yielding, passionate love, but rigid as steel and cold as ice when its freedom is touched. He should have known me better before linking his fate with mine."

One of her darker moods had come upon Irene, and she was beating about in the blind obscurity of passion. As she began to give utterance to complaining thoughts, new thoughts formed themselves, and what was only vague feelings grew into ideas of wrong; and these, when once spoken, assumed a magnitude unimagined before. In vain did her friend strive with her. Argument, remonstrance, persuasion, only seemed to bring greater obscurity and to excite a more bitter feeling in her mind. And so, despairing of any good result, Rose withdrew, and left her with her own unhappy thoughts.

Not long after Miss Carman retired, Emerson came in. At the sound of his approaching footsteps, Irene had, with a strong effort, composed herself and swept back the deeper shadows from her face.

"Not ready yet?" he said, in a pleasant, half-chiding way. "The carriages will be at the door in ten minutes."

"I am not going to ride out," returned Irene, in a quiet, seemingly indifferent tone of voice. Hartley mistook her manner for sport, and answered pleasantly—

"Oh yes you are, my little lady."

"No, I am not." There was no misapprehension now.

"Not going to ride out?" Hartley's brows contracted.

"No; I am not going to ride out to-day." Each word was distinctly spoken.

"I don't understand you, Irene."

"Are not my words plain enough?"

"Yes, they are too plain—so plain as to make them involve a mystery. What do you mean by this sudden change of purpose?"

"I don't wish to ride out," said Irene, with assumed calmness of manner; "and that being so, may I not have my will in the case?"

"No—"

A red spot burned on Irene's cheeks and her eyes flashed.

"No," repeated her husband; "not after you have given up that will to another."

"To you!" Irene started to her feet in instant passion. "And so I am to be nobody, and you the lord and master. My will is to be nothing, and yours the law of my life." Her lip curled in contemptuous anger.

"You misunderstand me," said Hartley Emerson, speaking as calmly as was possible in this sudden emergency. "I did not refer specially to myself, but to all of our party, to whom you had given up your will in a promise to ride out with them, and to whom, therefore, you were bound."

"An easy evasion," retorted the excited bride, who had lost her mental equipoise.

"Irene," the young man spoke sternly, "are those the right words for your husband? An easy evasion!"

"I have said them."

"And you must unsay them."

Both had passed under the cloud which pride and passion had raised.

"Must! I thought you knew me better, Hartley." Irene grew suddenly calm.

"If there is to be love between us, all barriers must be removed."

"Don't say *must* to me, sir! I will not endure the word."

Hartley turned from her and walked the floor with rapid steps, angry, grieved and in doubt as to what it were best for him to do. The storm had broken on him without a sign of warning, and he was wholly unprepared to meet it.

"Irene," he said, at length, pausing before her, "this conduct on your part is wholly inexplicable. I cannot understand its meaning. Will you explain yourself?"

"Certainly. I am always ready to give a reason for my conduct," she replied, with cold dignity.

"Say on, then." Emerson spoke with equal coldness of manner.

"I did not wish to ride out, and said so in the beginning. That ought to have been enough for you. But no—my wishes were nothing; your will must be law."

"And that is all! the head and front of my offending!" said Emerson, in a tone of surprise.

"It isn't so much the thing itself that I object to, as the spirit in which it is done," said Irene.

"A spirit of overbearing self-will!" said Emerson.

"Yes, if you choose. That is what my soul revolts against. I gave you my heart and my hand—my love and my confidence—not my freedom. The last is a part of my being, and I will maintain it while I have life."

"Perverse girl! What insane spirit has got possession of your mind?" exclaimed Emerson, chafed beyond endurance.

"Say on," retorted Irene; "I am prepared for this. I have seen, from the hour of our marriage, that a time of strife would come; that your will would seek to make itself ruler, and that I would not submit. I did not expect the issue to come so soon. I trusted in your love to spare me, at least, until I could be bidden from general observation when I turned myself upon you and said, Thus far thou mayest go, but no farther. But, come the struggle early or late—now or in twenty years—I am prepared."

There came at this moment a rap at their door. Mr. Emerson opened it.

"Carriage is waiting," said a servant.

"Say that we will be down in a few minutes."

The door closed.

"Come, Irene," said Mr. Emerson.

"You spoke very confidently to the servant, and said we would be down in a few minutes."

"There, there, Irene! Let this folly die; it has lived long enough. Come! Make yourself ready with all speed—our party is delayed by this prolonged absence."

"You think me trifling, and treat me as if I were a captious child," said Irene, with chilling calmness; "but I am neither."

"Then you will not go?"

"I will not go." She said the words slowly and deliberately, and as she spoke looked her husband steadily in the face. She was in earnest, and he felt that further remonstrance would be in vain.

"You will repent of this," he replied, with enough of menace in his voice to convey to her mind a great deal more than was in his thoughts. And he turned from her and left the room. Going down stairs, he found the riding-party waiting for their appearance.

"Where is Irene?" was asked by one and another, on seeing him alone.

"She does not care to ride out this afternoon, and so I have excused her," he replied. Miss Carman looked at him narrowly, and saw that there was a shade of trouble on his countenance, which he could not wholly conceal. She would have remained behind with Irene, but that would have disappointed the friend who was to be her companion in the drive.

As the party was in couples, and as Mr. Emerson had made up his mind to go without his young wife, he had to ride alone. The absence of Irene was felt as a drawback to the pleasure of all the company. Miss Carman, who understood the real cause of Irene's refusal to ride, was so much troubled in her mind that she sat almost silent during the two hours they were out. Mr. Emerson left the party after they had been out for an hour, and returned to the hotel. His excitement had cooled off, and he began to feel regret at the unbending way in which he had met his bride's unhappy mood.

"Her over-sensitive mind has taken up a wrong impression," he said, as he talked with himself; "and, instead of saying or doing anything to increase that impression, I should, by word and act of kindness, have done all in my power for its removal. Two wrongs never make a right. Passion met by passion results not in peace. I should have soothed and yielded, and so won her back to reason. As a man, I ought to possess a cooler and more rationally balanced mind. She is a being of feeling and impulse,—loving, ardent, proud, sensitive and strong-willed. Knowing this, it was madness in me to chafe instead of soothing her; to oppose, when gentle concession would have torn from her eyes an illusive veil. Oh that I could learn wisdom in time! I was in no ignorance as to her peculiar character. I knew her faults and her weaknesses, as well as her nobler qualities; and it was for me to stimulate the one and bear with the others. Duty, love, honor, humanity, all pointed to this."

The longer Mr. Emerson's thoughts ran in this direction, the deeper grew his feeling of self-condemnation, and the more tenderly yearned his heart toward the young creature he had left alone with the enemies of their peace nestling in her bosom and filling it with passion and pain. After separating himself from his party, he drove back toward the hotel at a speed that soon put his horses into a foam.

CHAPTER V

THE BURSTING OF THE STORM

MR. DELANCY was sitting in his library on the afternoon of the fourth day since the wedding-party left Ivy Cliff, when the entrance of some one caused him to turn toward the door.

"Irene!" he exclaimed, in a tone of anxiety and alarm, as he started to his feet; for his daughter stood before him. Her face was pale, her eyes fixed and sad, her dress in disorder.

"Irene, in Heaven's name, what has happened?"

"The worst," she answered, in a low, hoarse voice, not moving from the spot where she first stood still.

"Speak plainly, my child. I cannot bear suspense."

"I have left my husband and returned to you!" was the firmly uttered reply.

"Oh, folly! oh, madness! What evil counselor has prevailed with you, my unhappy child?" said Mr. Delancy, in a voice of anguish.

"I have counseled with no one but myself."

"Never a wise counselor—never a wise counselor! But why, why have you taken this desperate step?"

"In self-protection," replied Irene.

"Sit down, my child. There!" and he led her to a seat. "Now let me remove your bonnet and shawl. How wretched you look, poor, misguided one! I could have laid you in the grave with less agony than I feel in seeing you thus."

Her heart was touched at this, and tears fell over her face. In the selfishness of her own sternly-borne trouble, she had forgotten the sorrow she was bringing to her father's heart.

"Poor child! poor child!" sobbed the old man, as he sat down beside Irene and drew her head against his breast. And so both wept together for a time. After they had grown calm, Mr. Delancy said—

"Tell me, Irene, without disguise of any kind, the meaning of this step which you have so hastily taken. Let me have the beginning, progress and consummation of the sad misunderstanding."

While yet under the government of blind passion, ere her husband returned from the drive which Irene had refused to take with him, she had, acting from a sudden suggestion that came to her mind, left her room and, taking the cars, passed down to Albany, where she remained until morning at one of the hotels. In silence and loneliness she had, during the almost sleepless night that followed, ample time for reflection and repentance. And both came, with convictions of error and deep regret for the unwise, almost disgraceful step she had taken, involving not only suffering, but humiliating exposure of herself and husband. But it was felt to be too late now to look back. Pride would have laid upon her a positive interdiction, if other considerations had not come in to push the question of return aside.

In the morning, without partaking of food, Irene left in the New York boat, and passed down the river toward the home from which she had gone forth, only a few days before, a happy bride—returning with the cup, then full of the sweet wine of life, now brimming with the bitterest potion that had ever touched her lips.

And so she had come back to her father's house. In all the hours of mental anguish which had passed since her departure from Saratoga, there had been an accusing spirit at her ear, and, resist as she would, self-condemnation prevailed over attempted self-justification. The cause of this unhappy rupture was so slight, the first provocation so insignificant, that she felt the difficulty of making out her case before her father. As to the world, pride counseled silence.

With but little concealment or extenuation of her own conduct, Irene told the story of her disagreement with Hartley.

"And that was all!" exclaimed Mr. (sic) Delancey, in amazement, when she ended her narrative.

"All, but enough!" she answered, with a resolute manner.

Mr. Delancy arose and walked the floor in silence for more than ten minutes, during which time Irene neither spoke nor moved.

"Oh, misery!" ejaculated the father, at length, lifting his hands above his head and then bringing them down with a gesture of despair.

Irene started up and moved to his side.

"Dear father!" She spoke tenderly, laying her hands upon him; but he pushed her away, saying—

"Wretched girl! you have laid upon my old head a burden of disgrace and wretchedness that you have no power to remove."

"Father! father!" She clung to him, but he pushed her away. His manner was like that of one suddenly bereft of reason. She clung still, but he resolutely tore himself from her, when she fell exhausted and fainting upon the floor.

Alarm now took the place of other emotions, and Mr. Delancy was endeavoring to lift the insensible body, when a quick, heavy tread in the portico caused him to look up, just as Hartley Emerson pushed open one of the French windows and entered the library. He had a wild, anxious, half-frightened look. Mr. Delancy let the body fall from his almost paralyzed arms and staggered to a chair, while Emerson sprung forward, catching up the fainting form of his young bride and bearing it to a sofa.

"How long has she been in this way?" asked the young man, in a tone of agitation.

"She fainted this moment," replied Mr. Delancy.

"How long has she been here?"

"Not half an hour," was answered; and as Mr. Delancy spoke he reached for the bell and jerked it two or three times violently. The waiter, startled by the loud, prolonged sound, came hurriedly to the library.

"Send Margaret here, and then get a horse and ride over swiftly for Dr. Edmundson. Tell him to come immediately."

The waiter stood for a moment or two, looking in a half-terrified way upon the white, deathly face of Irene, and then fled from the apartment. No grass grew beneath his horse's feet as he held him to his utmost speed for the distance of two miles, which lay between Ivy Cliff and the doctor's residence.

Margaret, startled by the hurried, half-incoherent summons of the waiter, came flying into the library. The moment her eyes rested upon Irene, who still insensible upon the sofa, she screamed out, in terror—

"Oh, she's dead! she's dead!" and stood still as if suddenly paralyzed; then, wringing her hands, she broke out in a wild, sobbing tone—

"My poor, poor child! Oh, she is dead, dead!"

"No, Margaret," said Mr. Delancy, as calmly as he could speak, "she is not dead; it is only a fainting fit. Bring some water, quickly."

Water was brought and dashed into the face of Irene; but there came no sign of returning consciousness.

"Hadn't you better take her up to her room, Mr. Emerson?" suggested Margaret.

"Yes," he replied; and, lifting the insensible form of his bride in his arms, the unhappy man bore her to her chamber. Then, sitting down beside the bed upon which he had placed her, he kissed her pale cheeks and, laying his face to hers, sobbed and moaned, in the abandonment of his grief, like a distressed child weeping in despair for some lost treasure.

"Come," said Margaret, who was an old family domestic, drawing Hartley from the bedside, "leave her alone with me for a little while."

And the husband and father retired from the room. When they returned, at the call of Margaret, they found Irene in bed, her white, unconscious face scarcely relieved against the snowy pillow on which her head was resting.

"She is alive," said Margaret, in a low and excited voice; "I can feel her heart beat."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Emerson, bending again over the motionless form and gazing anxiously down upon the face of his bride.

But there was no utterance of thankfulness in the heart of Mr. Delancy. For her to come back again to conscious life was, he felt, but a return to wretchedness. If the true prayer of his heart could have found voice, it would have been for death, and not for life.

In silence, fear and suspense they waited an hour before the doctor arrived. Little change in Irene took place during that time, except that her respiration became clearer and the pulsations of her heart distinct and regular. The application of warm stimulants was immediately ordered, and their good effects soon became apparent.

"All will come right in a little while," said Dr. Edmundson, encouragingly. "It seems to be only a fainting fit of unusual length."

Hartley drew Mr. Delancy aside.

"It will be best that I should be alone with her when she recovers," said he.

"You may be right in that," said Mr. Delancy, after a moment's reflection.

"I am sure that I am," was returned.

"You think she will recover soon?" said Mr. Delancy, approaching the doctor.

"Yes, at any moment. She is breathing deeper, and her heart beats with a fuller impulse."

"Let us, retire, then;" and he drew the doctor from the apartment. Pausing at the door, he called to Margaret in a half whisper. She went out also, Emerson alone remaining.

Taking his place by the bedside, he waited, in trembling anxiety, for the moment when her eyes should open and recognize him. At last there came a quivering of the eyelids and a motion about the sleeper's lips. Emerson bent over and took one of her hands in his.

"Irene!" He called her name in a voice of the tenderest affection. The sound seemed to penetrate to the region of consciousness, for her lips moved with a murmur of inarticulate words. He kissed her, and said again—

"Irene!"

There was a sudden lighting up of her face.

"Irene, love! darling!" The voice of Emerson was burdened with tenderness.

"Oh, Hartley!" she exclaimed, opening her eyes and looking with a kind of glad bewilderment into his face. Then, half rising and drawing her arms around his neck, she hid her face on his bosom, murmuring—

"Thank God that it is only a dream!"

"Yes, thank God!" replied her husband, as he kissed her in a kind of wild fervor; "and may such dreams never come again."

She lay very still for some moments. Thought and memory were beginning to act feebly. The response of her husband had in it something that set her to questioning. But there was one thing that made her feel happy: the sound of his loving voice was in her ears; and all the while she felt his hand moving, with a soft, caressing touch, over her cheek and temple.

"Dear Irene!" he murmured in her ears; and then her hand tightened on his.

And thus she remained until conscious life regained its full activity. Then the trial came.

Suddenly lifting herself from the bosom of her husband, Irene gave a hurried glance around the well-known chamber, then turned and looked with a strange, fearful questioning glance into his face:

"Where am I? What does this mean?"

"It means," replied Emerson, "that the dream, thank God! is over, and that my dear wife is awake again."

He placed his arms again around her and drew her to his heart, almost smothering her, as he did so, with kisses.

She lay passive for a little while; then, disengaging herself, she said, faintly—
"I feel weak and bewildered; let me lie down."

She closed her eyes as Emerson placed her back on the pillow, a sad expression covering her still pallid face. Sitting down beside her, he took her hand and held it with a firm pressure. She did not attempt to withdraw it. He kissed her, and a warmer flush came over her face.

"Dear Irene!" His hand pressed tightly upon hers, and she returned the pressure.

"Shall I call your father? He is very anxious about you."

"Not yet." And she caught slightly her breath, as if feeling were growing too strong for her.

"Let it be as a dream, Hartley." Irene lifted herself up and looked calmly, but with a very sad expression on her countenance, into her husband's face.

"Between us two, Irene, even as a dream from which both have awakened," he replied.

She closed her eyes and sunk back upon the pillow.

Mr. Emerson then went to the door and spoke to Mr. Delancy. On a brief consultation it was thought best for Dr. Edmundson not to see her again. A knowledge of the fact that he had been called in might give occasion for more disturbing thoughts than were already pressing upon her mind. And so, after giving some general directions as to the avoidance of all things likely to excite her mind unpleasantly, the doctor withdrew.

Mr. Delancy saw his daughter alone. The interview was long and earnest. On his part was the fullest disapproval of her conduct and the most solemnly spoken admonitions and warnings. She confessed her error, without any attempt at excuse or palliation, and promised a wiser conduct in the future.

"There is not one husband in five," said the father, "who would have forgiven an act like this, placing him, as it does, in such a false and humiliating position before the world. He loves you with too deep and true a love, my child, for girlish trifling like this. And let me warn you of the danger you incur of turning against you the spirit of such a man. I have studied his character closely, and I see in it an element of firmness that, if it once sets itself, will be as inflexible as iron. If you repeat acts of this kind, the day must come when forbearance will cease; and then, in turning from you, it will be never to turn back again. Harden him against you once, and it will be for all time."

Irene wept bitterly at this strong representation, and trembled at thought of the danger she had escaped.

To her husband, when she was alone with him again, she confessed her fault, and prayed him to let the memory of it pass from his mind for ever. On his part was the fullest denial of any purpose whatever, in the late misunderstanding, to bend her to his will. He assured her that if he had dreamed of any serious objection on her part to the ride, he would not have urged it for a moment. It involved no promised pleasure to him apart from pleasure to her; and it was because he believed that she would enjoy the drive that he had urged her to make one of the party.

All this was well, as far as it could go. But repentance and mutual forgiveness did not restore everything to the old condition—did not obliterate that one sad page in their history, and leave them free to make a new and better record. If the folly had been in private, the effort at forgiving and forgetting would have been attended with fewer annoying considerations. But it was committed in public, and under circumstances calculated to attract attention and occasion invidious remark. And then, how were they to meet the different members of the wedding-party, which they had so suddenly thrown into consternation?

On the next day the anxious members of this party made their appearance at Ivy Cliff, not having, up to this time, received any intelligence of the fugitive bride. Mr. Delancy did not attempt

to excuse to them the unjustifiable conduct of his daughter, beyond the admission that she must have been temporarily deranged. Something was said about resuming the bridal tour, but Mr. Delancy said, "No; the quiet of Ivy Cliff will yield more pleasure than the excitement of travel."

And all felt this to be true.

CHAPTER VI

AFTER THE STORM

AFTER the storm. Alas! that there should be a wreck-strewn shore so soon! That within three days of the bridal morning a tempest should have raged, scattering on the wind sweet blossoms which had just opened to the sunshine, tearing away the clinging vines of love, and leaving marks of desolation which no dew and sunshine could ever obliterate!

It was not a blessed honeymoon to them. How could it be, after what had passed? Both were hurt and mortified; and while there was mutual forgiveness and great tenderness and fond concessions, one toward the other, there was a sober, thoughtful state of mind, not favorable to happiness.

Mr. Delancy hoped the lesson—a very severe one—might prove the guarantee of future peace. It had, without doubt, awakened Irene's mind to sober thoughts—and closer self-examination than usual. She was convicted in her own heart of folly, the memory of which could never return to her without a sense of pain.

At the end of three weeks from the day of their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Emerson went down to the city to take possession of their new home. On the eve of their departure from Ivy Cliff, Mr. Delancy had a long conference with his daughter, in which he conjured her, by all things sacred, to guard herself against that blindness of passion which had already produced such unhappy consequences. She repeated, with many tears, her good resolutions for the future, and showed great sorrow and contrition for the past.

"It may come out right," said the old man to himself; as he sat alone, with a pressure of foreboding on his mind, looking into the dim future, on the day of their departure for New York. His only and beloved child had gone forth to return no more, unless in sorrow or wretchedness. "It may come out right, but my heart has sad misgivings."

There was a troubled suspense of nearly a week, when the first letter came from Irene to her father. He broke the seal with unsteady hands, fearing to let his eyes fall upon the opening page.

"My dear, dear father! I am a happy young wife."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the old man aloud, letting the hand fall that held Irene's letter. It was some moments before he could read farther; then he drank in, with almost childish eagerness, every sentence of the long letter.

"Yes, yes, it may come out right," said Mr. Delancy; "it may come out right." He uttered the words, so often on his lips, with more confidence than usual. The letter strongly urged him to make her a visit, if it was only for a day or two.

"You know, dear father," she wrote, "that most of your time is to be spent with us—all your winters, certainly; and we want you to begin the new arrangement as soon as possible."

Mr. Delancy sighed over the passage. He had not set his heart on this arrangement. It might have been a pleasant thing for him to anticipate; but there was not the hopeful basis for anticipation which a mind like his required.

Not love alone prompted Mr. Delancy to make an early visit to New York; a feeling of anxiety to know how it really was with the young couple acted quite as strongly in the line of incentive. And so he went down to the city and passed nearly a week there. Both Irene and her husband knew that he was observing them closely all the while, and a consciousness of this put them under some constraint. Everything passed harmoniously, and Mr. Delancy returned with the half-hopeful, half-doubting words on his lips, so often and often repeated—

"Yes, yes, it may come out right."

But it was not coming out altogether right. Even while the old man was under her roof, Irene had a brief season of self-willed reaction against her husband, consequent on some unguarded word

or act, which she felt to be a trespass on her freedom. To save appearances while Mr. Delancy was with them, Hartley yielded and tendered conciliation, all the while that his spirit chafed sorely.

The departure of Mr. Delancy for Ivy Cliff was the signal for both Irene and her husband to lay aside a portion of the restraint which each had borne with a certain restlessness that longed for a time of freedom. On the very day that he left Irene showed so much that seemed to her husband like perverseness of will that he was seriously offended, and spoke an unguarded word that was as fire to stubble—a word that was repented of as soon as spoken, but which pride would not permit him to recall. It took nearly a week of suffering to discipline the mind of Mr. Emerson to the point of conciliation. On the part of Irene there was not the thought of yielding. Her will, supported by pride, was as rigid as iron. Reason had no power over her. She felt, rather than thought.

Thus far, both as lover and husband, in all their alienations, Hartley had been the first to yield; and it was so now. He was strong-willed and persistent; but cooler reason helped him back into the right way, and he had, thus far, found it quicker than Irene. Not that he suffered less or repented sooner. Irene's suffering was far deeper, but she was blinder and more self-determined.

Again the sun of peace smiled down upon them, but, as before, on something shorn of its strength or beauty.

"I will be more guarded," said Hartley to himself. "Knowing her weakness, why should I not protect her against everything that wounds her sensitive nature? Love concedes, is long suffering and full of patience. I love Irene—words cannot tell how deeply. Then why should I not, for her sake, bear and forbear? Why should I think of myself and grow fretted because she does not yield as readily as I could desire to my wishes?"

So Emerson talked with himself and resolved. But who does not know the feebleness of resolution when opposed to temperament and confirmed habits of mind? How weak is mere human strength! Alas! how few, depending on that alone, are ever able to bear up steadily, for any length of time, against the tide of passion!

Off his guard in less than twenty-four hours after resolving thus with himself, the young husband spoke in captious disapproval of something which Irene had done or proposed to do, and the consequence was the assumption on her part of a cold, reserved and dignified manner, which hurt and annoyed him beyond measure. Pride led him to treat her in the same way; and so for days they met in silence or formal courtesy, all the while suffering a degree of wretchedness almost impossible to be endured, and all the while, which was worst of all, writing on their hearts bitter things against each other.

To Emerson, as before, the better state first returned, and the sunshine of his countenance drove the shadows from hers. Then for a season they were loving, thoughtful, forbearing and happy. But the clouds came back again, and storms marred the beauty of their lives.

All this was sad—very sad. There were good and noble qualities in the hearts of both. They were not narrow-minded and selfish, like so many of your placid, accommodating, calculating people, but generous in their feelings and broad in their sympathies. They had ideals of life that went reaching out far beyond themselves. Yes, it was sad to see two such hearts beating against and bruising each other, instead of taking the same pulsation. But there seemed to be no help for them. Irene's jealous guardianship of her freedom, her quick temper, pride and self-will made the position of her husband so difficult that it was almost impossible for him to avoid giving offence.

The summer and fall passed away without any serious rupture between the sensitive couple, although there had been seasons of great unhappiness to both. Irene had been up to Ivy Cliff many times to visit her father, and now she was, beginning to urge his removal to the city for the winter; but Mr. Delancy, who had never given his full promise to this arrangement, felt less and less inclined to leave his old home as the season advanced. Almost from boyhood he had lived there, and his habits were formed for rural instead of city life.

He pictured the close streets, with their rows of houses, that left for the eye only narrow patches of ethereal blue, and contrasted this with the broad winter landscape, which for him had always spread itself out with a beauty rivaled by no other season, and his heart failed him.

The brief December days were on them, and Irene grew more urgent.

"Come, dear father," she wrote. "I think of you, sitting all alone at Ivy Cliff, during these long evenings, and grow sad at heart in sympathy with your loneliness. Come at once. Why linger a week or even a day longer? We have been all in all to each other these many years, and ought not to be separated now."

But Mr. Delancy was not ready to exchange the pure air and widespreading scenery of the Highlands for a city residence, even in the desolate winter, and so wrote back doubtingly. Irene and her husband then came up to add the persuasion of their presence at Ivy Cliff. It did not avail, however. The old man was too deeply wedded to his home.

"I should be miserable in New York," he replied to their earnest entreaties; "and it would not add to your happiness to see me going about with a sober, discontented face, or to be reminded every little while that if you had left me to my winter's hibernation I would have been a contented instead of a dissatisfied old man. No, no, my children; Ivy Cliff is the best place for me. You shall come up and spend Christmas here, and we will have a gay season."

There was no further use in argument. Mr. Delancy would have his way; and he was right.

Irene and her husband went back to the city, with a promise to spend Christmas at the old homestead.

Two weeks passed. It was the twentieth of December. Without previous intimation, Irene came up alone to Ivy Cliff, startling her father by coming in suddenly upon him one dreary afternoon, just as the leaden sky began to scatter down the winter's first offering of snow.

"My daughter!" he exclaimed, so surprised that he could not move from where he was sitting.

"Dear father!" she answered with a loving smile, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him.

"Where is Hartley?" asked the old man, looking past Irene toward the door through which she had just entered.

"Oh, I left him in New York," she replied.

"In New York! Have you come alone?"

"Yes. Christmas is only five days off, you know, and I am here to help you prepare for it. Of course, Hartley cannot leave his business."

She spoke in an excited, almost gay tone of voice. Mr. Delancy looked at her earnestly. Unpleasant doubts flitted through his mind.

"When will your husband come up?" he inquired.

"At Christmas," she answered, without hesitation.

"Why didn't you write, love?" asked Mr. Delancy. "You have taken me by surprise, and set my nerves in a flutter."

"I only thought about it last evening. One of my sudden resolutions."

And she laughed a low, fluttering laugh. It might have been an error, but her father had a fancy that it did not come from her heart.

"I will run up stairs and put off my things," she said, moving away.

"Did you bring a trunk?"

"Oh yes; it is at the landing. Will you send for it?"

And Irene went, with quick steps, from the apartment, and ran up to the chamber she still called her own. On the way she met Margaret.

"Miss Irene!" exclaimed the latter, pausing and lifting her hands in astonishment. "Why, where did you come from?"

"Just arrived in the boat. Have come to help you get ready for Christmas."

"Please goodness, how you frightened me!" said the warm-hearted domestic, who had been in the family ever since Irene was a child, and was strongly attached to her. "How's Mr. Emerson?"

"Oh, he's well, thank you, Margaret."

"Well now, child, you did set me all into a fluster. I thought maybe you'd got into one of your tantrums, and come off and left your husband."

"Why, Margaret!" A crimson flush mantled the face of Irene.

"You must excuse me, child, but just that came into my head," replied Margaret. "You're very downright and determined sometimes; and there isn't anything hardly that you wouldn't do if the spirit was on you. I'm glad it's all right. Dear me! dear me!"

"Oh, I'm not quite so bad as you all make me out," said Irene, laughing.

"I don't think you are bad," answered Margaret, in kind deprecation, yet with a freedom of speech warranted by her years and attachment to Irene. "But you go off in such strange ways—get so wrong-headed sometimes—that there's no counting on you."

Then, growing more serious, she added—

"The fact is, Miss Irene, you keep me feeling kind of uneasy all the time. I dreamed about you last night, and maybe that has helped to put me into a fluster now."

"Dreamed about me!" said Irene, with a degree of interest in her manner.

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