

**ARTHUR**

**TIMOTHY SHAY**

THE ALLEN HOUSE; OR,  
TWENTY YEARS AGO AND  
NOW

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«Public Domain»

**Arthur T.**

The Allen House; Or, Twenty Years Ago and Now / T. Arthur —  
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**T. S. Arthur**  
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**PREFACE**

WE point to two ways in life, and if the young man and maiden, whose feet are lingering in soft green meadows and flowery walks, will consider these two ways in sober earnest, before moving onward, and choose the one that truth and reason tell them leads to honor, success, and happiness, our book will accomplish its right work for them. It is a sad thing, after the lapse of twenty years, to find ourselves amid ruined hopes;—to sit down with folded hands and say, “Thus far life has been a failure!” Yet, to how many is this the wretched summing up at the end of a single score of years from the time that reason takes the helm! Alas! that so few, who start wrong, ever succeed in finding the right way; life proving, even to its last burdened years, a miserable failure!

## CHAPTER I

THE rain had poured in torrents all day, and now, for the third time since morning, I came home, wet, uncomfortable and weary. I half dreaded to look at the slate, lest some urgent call should stare me in the face.

“It must indeed be a case of life and death, that takes me out again to-night,” said I, as my good wife met me in the entry, and with light hands, made active by love, assisted in the removal of my great coat and comforter.

“Now come into the sitting-room,” she said, “your slippers are on the rug, and your dressing-gown warmed and waiting. Tea is ready, and will be on the table by the time you feel a little comfortable. What a dreadful day it has been!”

“Dreadful for those who have been compelled to face the storm,” I remarked, as I drew off my boots, and proceeded to take advantage of all the pleasant arrangements my thoughtful wife had ready for my solace and delight.

It was on my lip to inquire if any one had called since I went out, but the ringing of the tea-bell sent my thought in a new direction; when, with my second self leaning on an arm, and my little Aggy holding tightly by my hand, I moved on to the dining-room, all the disagreeable things of the day forgotten.

“Has any one been here?” I asked, as I handed my cup for a third replenishing. Professional habit was too strong—the query would intrude itself.

“Mrs. Wallingford called to see you.”

“Ah! Is anybody sick?”

“I believe so—but she evaded my inquiry, and said that she wished to speak a word with the Doctor.”

“She don’t want me to call over to-night, I hope. Did she leave any word?”

“No. She looked troubled in her mind, I thought.”

“No other call?”

“Yes. Mary Jones sent word that something was the matter with the baby. It cried nearly all last night, her little boy said, and to-day has fever, and lies in a kind of stupor.”

“That case must be seen to,” I remarked, speaking to myself.

“You might let it go over until morning,” suggested my wife. “At any rate, I would let them send again before going. The child may be better by this time.”

“A call in time may save life here, Constance,” I made answer; the sense of duty growing stronger as the inner and outer man felt the renovating effects of a good supper, and the brightness and warmth of my pleasant home. “And life, you know, is a precious thing—even a baby’s life.”

And I turned a meaning glance upon the calm, sweet face of our latest born, as she lay sleeping in her cradle. That was enough. I saw the tears spring instantly to the eyes of my wife.

“I have not a word to say. God forbid, that in the weakness of love and care for you, dear husband, I should draw you aside from duty. Yes—yes! The life of a baby is indeed a precious thing!”

And bending over the cradle, she left a kiss on the lips, and a tear on the pure brow of our darling. Now was I doubly strengthened for the night. There arose at this instant a wild storm-wail, that shrieked for a brief time amid the chimneys, and around the eaves of our dwelling, and then went moaning away, sadly, dying at last in the far distance. The rain beat heavily against the windows. But I did not waver, nor seek for reasons to warrant a neglect of duty. “I must see Mary Jones’s baby, and that to-night.” I said this to myself, resolutely, by way of answer to the intimidating storm.

Mrs. Jones was a widow, and poor. She lived full a quarter of a mile away. So in deciding to make the visit that night, I hardly think a very strong element of self-interest was included in the motives that governed me. But that is irrelevant.

“As there is no prospect of an abatement in the storm,” said I, after returning to our cosy little sitting-room, “it may be as well for me to see the baby at once. The visit will be over, so far as I am concerned, and precious time may be gained for the patient.”

“I will tell Joseph to bring around the horse,” said my wife.

“No—I will walk. Poor beast! He has done enough for one day, and shall not be taken out again.”

“Horse-flesh is not so precious as man-flesh,” Constance smiled entreatingly, as she laid her hand upon my shoulder. “Let Tom be harnessed up; it won’t hurt him.”

“The merciful man is merciful to his beast,” I made answer. “If horse-flesh is cheaper than man-flesh, like most cheap articles, it is less enduring. Tom must rest, if his master cannot.”

“The decision is final, I suppose.”

“I must say yes.”

“I hardly think your great coat is dry yet,” said my wife. “I had it hung before the kitchen fire. Let me see.”

“You must wait for ten, or fifteen minutes longer,” she remarked, on returning from the kitchen. “One sleeve was completely wetted through, and I have turned it in order to get the lining dry.”

I sat down and took Agnes on my lap, and was just getting into a pleasant talk with her, when the door-bell rung. A shadow fell across my wife’s face.

“People are thoughtless of Doctors,” she remarked, a little fretfully, “and often choose the worst weather and the most untimely seasons to send for them.”

I did not answer, but listened as the boy went to the door. Some one was admitted, and shown into the office.

“Who is it?” I enquired, as Joseph came to the sitting-room.

“Mrs. Wallingford.”

My wife and I exchanged glances. She looking grave and curious; but no remark was made.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Wallingford,” said I, on entering my office. “This is a very bad night for a lady to come out. I hope no one is seriously ill.”

“I wish you would come over and see our Henry, Doctor.”

There was a choking tremor in her voice; and as I looked in her face, I saw that it was pale and distressed.

“What’s the matter?” I inquired.

“I can’t say what it is, Doctor. Something’s wrong. I’m afraid—yes, I’m afraid he’s going out of his senses.”

And she wrung her hands together with a nervous uneasiness in singular contrast with her usual quiet exterior.

“How is he affected?”

“Well, Doctor, he came home last evening looking as white as a sheet. I almost screamed out when I saw the strange, suffering expression on his colorless face. My first thought was that he had fallen somewhere, and been hurt dreadfully. He tried to pass me without stopping; but I put both hands on him, and said—‘Oh, Henry! what does ail you?’ ‘Nothing of any account,’ he answered, in a low, husky tone. ‘I don’t feel right well, and am going to my room to lie down.’ And saying this, he brushed right past me, and went up stairs. I followed after him, but when I tried his door it was fastened on the inside. I called three times before he answered, and then he said—‘Mother, I’m not sick; but I feel bad and want to be alone. Please don’t disturb me to-night.’ I don’t think I would have known the voice if it hadn’t been just then and there. Knowing his disposition, anxious and troubled as I was, I felt that it would be best for the time being to let him alone. And I did so. For an hour or more all in his room was as still as death, and I began to grow very uneasy. Then I heard his feet upon the floor moving about. I heard him walk to his bureau—my ears served me for eyes—then to the mantlepiece, and then to the window. All was still again for some minutes. My heart beat like a hammer, as one vague suggestion after another floated through my mind. Then he crossed the room

with a slow step; turned and went back again; and so kept on walking to and fro. I listened, waiting for the sound to cease; but he walked on and on, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, tramp, tramp, tramp, until it seemed as if every jarring footfall was on my heart. Oh, Doctor! I never had anything to affect me so before in my whole life. An hour passed, and still he walked the floor of his room. I could bear it no longer, and went and called to him. But he seemed deaf, and made no reply. I rattled at the lock and called again and again. Then he came close to the door, and said, speaking a little impatiently for him—

‘Mother! Mother! For Heaven’s sake don’t trouble me! I don’t feel just right, and you must let me alone for the present.’

“Well, he kept on walking for an hour longer, and then everything was still in his room for the night. This morning on trying his door it was unfastened. I went in. He was lying in bed wide awake. But, oh! such a change as I saw in his face. It was colorless as on the evening before; but less expressive of emotion. A dead calm seemed to have settled upon it. I took his hand; it was cold. I pressed his forehead; it was cold also. ‘Henry, my son, how are you?’ I asked. He did not reply; but looked in my face with a cold, steady gaze that chilled me. ‘Are you sick, my son?’ He merely shook his head slowly. ‘Has anything happened? What has happened?’ I pressed my question upon him; but it was of no use. He would not satisfy me. I then asked if he would not rise. ‘Not yet,’ he said. ‘Shall I bring you some breakfast?’ ‘No—no—I cannot eat.’ And he shook his head and shut his eyes, while there came into his face a look so sad and suffering that as I gazed on him I could not keep the tears back.

“And it has been no better with him all the day, Doctor,” added Mrs. Wallingford, heaving a long sigh. “Oh, I am distressed to death about it. Won’t you come and see him? I’m afraid if something isn’t done that he will lose his senses.”

“Have you no conjecture as to the cause of this strange condition of mind?” I asked.

“None,” she replied. “Henry is a reserved young man, you know, Doctor; and keeps many things hidden in his mind even from me that should be outspoken.”

“Has he no love affair on hand?”

“I think not.”

“Hasn’t he been paying attention to Squire Floyd’s daughter?”

“Delia?”

“Yes.”

“I believe not, Doctor.”

“I’ve seen him at the Squire’s.”

“Nothing serious, or I should have known of it. Henry is rather shy about the girls.”

“And you wish me to see him to-night?”

“Yes. Something ought to be done.”

“What is his condition just now?” I inquired. “How did you leave him?”

“He’s been in bed nearly all day, and hasn’t touched a mouthful. To all my persuasions and entreaties he answers—‘Please, mother, let me alone. I will be better after a while.’”

“I think,” said I, after musing on the case, “that, may be, the let-alone prescription will be the best one for the present. He is prostrated by some strong mental emotion—that seems clear; and time must be given for the mind to regain its equipoise. If I were to call, as you desire, it might annoy or irritate him, and so do more harm than good. No medicine that I can give is at all likely to reach his case.”

Mrs. Wallingford looked disappointed, and demurred strongly to my conclusion.

“I’m sure, Doctor, if you saw him you might suggest something. Or, may be, he would open his mind to you.”

“I’ll think it over,” said I. “Mrs. Jones has sent for me to see her baby to-night. I was just about starting when you called. On my way back, if, on reflection, it seems to me advisable, I will drop in at your house.”

“Call at any rate, Doctor,” urged Mrs. Wallingford. “Even if you don’t see Henry, you may be able to advise me as to what I had better do.”

I gave my promise, and the troubled mother went back through storm and darkness to her home. By this time my overcoat was thoroughly dried. As Constance brought it forth warm from the fire, she looked into my face with an expression of inquiry. But I was not ready to speak in regard to Mrs. Wallingford, and, perceiving this at a glance, she kept silence on that subject.

As I opened the front door, the storm swept into my face; but I passed out quickly into the night, and shielding myself with an umbrella, as best I could, bent to the rushing wind, and took my solitary way in the direction of Mrs. Jones’s humble dwelling, which lay quite upon the outskirts of our town. To reach my destination, I had to pass the Old Allen House, which stood within a high stone enclosure, surrounded by stately elms a century old, which spread their great arms above and around the decaying mansion, as if to ward off the encroachments of time. As I came opposite the gate opening upon the carriage way, I stopped suddenly in surprise, for light streamed out from both windows of the north-west chamber, which I knew had been closed ever since the death of Captain Allen, who passed to his account several years before.

This Allen House was one of the notable places in our town; and the stories in circulation touching the Allen family, now almost extinct, were so strongly tinged with romance, that sober-minded people generally received them with a large measure of incredulity.

The spacious old two-story mansion, with its high-pitched roof and rows of dormer windows, was built by the father of Captain Allen, who had also followed the sea, and, it was said, obtained his large wealth through means not sanctioned by laws human or divine. Men and women of the past generation, and therefore contemporaries, did not hesitate to designate him an “old pirate,” though always the opprobrious words were spoken in an undertone, for people were half afraid of the dark, reserved, evil-looking man, who had evidently passed a large portion of his life among scenes of peril and violence. There were more pleasing traditions of the beautiful wife he brought home to grace the luxurious dwelling he had fitted up in a style of almost princely splendor, compared with the plain abode of even the best off people in town. Who she was, or from whence she came, no one knew certainly. She was very young—almost a child—when the elder Captain Allen brought her to S—.

Very little intercourse, I believe, passed between the Allen family and the town’s-people, except in a business way. The first regular entry made into the house beyond the formal drawing-room, was on the occasion of a birth, when the best nurse and gossip in town was summoned to attend the young mistress. A son was born. He was called John; though not under the sign of Christian baptism—John Allen; afterwards Captain Allen. The old sea-dog, his father, was absent at the time; but returned before the infant was four weeks old. The nurse described the meeting of husband and wife as very lover-like and tender on his part, but with scarcely a sign of feeling on hers. She did not repel him, nor turn from him; but received his caresses with the manner of one in whom all quick emotion had died. And so it continued between them—he thoughtful and assiduous, and she cold, and for the most part silent. But, to her babe, the young mother was passionate at times in her loving demonstrations. The pent up waters of feeling gave way in this direction, and poured themselves out, often, in a rushing flood. Towards all others she bore herself with a calm, sweet dignity of manner, that captivated the heart, and made it sigh for a better acquaintance with one around whom mystery had hung a veil that no hand but her own could push aside—and that hand was never lifted.

The next event in the Allen House, noted by the people, was the birth of a daughter. The same nurse was called in, who remained the usual time, and then retired; bearing with her a history of the period, which she related, very confidentially, at tea-tables, and in familiar gossip with choice spirits of her own.

Those who knew her best, were always something in doubt as to which of her stories contained truth and which romance. The latter element mingled largely, it is presumed, in all of them.

A great change had taken place in the Captain's manner. He no longer played the lover to a cold and distant mistress, but carried himself haughtily at times—captiously at times—and always with an air of indifference. All affection seemed transferred to his boy, who was growing self-willed, passionate, and daring. These qualities were never repressed by his father, but rather encouraged and strengthened. On learning that his next heir was a daughter, he expressed impatience, and muttered something about its being strangled at birth. The nurse said that he never deigned even to look at it while she was in the house.

The beautiful young wife showed signs of change, also. Much of the old sweetness had left her mouth, which was calmer and graver. Her manner towards Captain Allen, noted before, was of the same quiet, distant character, but more strongly marked. It was plain that she had no love for him. The great mystery was, how two so wholly unlike in all internal qualities, and external seeming, could ever have been constrained into the relationship, of man and wife. She was, evidently, an English woman. This was seen in her rich complexion, sweet blue eyes, fair hair, and quiet dignity of manner. Among the many probable and improbable rumors as to her first meeting with Captain Allen, this one had currency. A sailor, who had seen a good deal of service in the West Indies, told the following story:

An English vessel from Jamaica, richly freighted, had on board a merchant with his family, returning from a residence of a few years on the island, to the mother country.

They had been out only a day, when a pirate bore down upon them, and made an easy capture of the ship. The usual bloody scenes of that day followed. Death, in terrible forms, met the passengers and crew, and the vessel, after being robbed of its costliest treasures, was scuttled and sent down into the far depths of the ocean, from whence no sign could ever come.

But one living soul was spared—so the story went. An only child of the English merchant, a fair and beautiful young girl, whose years had compassed only the early spring-time of life, flung herself upon her knees before the pirate Captain and begged so piteously for life, that he spared her from the general slaughter he had himself decreed. Something in her pure, exquisitely beautiful face, touched his compassion. There were murmurs of discontent among his savage crew. But the strong-willed Captain had his way, and when he sailed back with his booty to their place of rendezvous, he bore with him the beautiful maiden. Here, it was said, he gave her honorable protection, and had her cared for as tenderly as was possible under the circumstances. And it was further related, that, when the maiden grew to ripe womanhood, he abandoned the trade of a buccaneer and made her his wife. The sailor told this story, shrugged his shoulders, looked knowing and mysterious, and left his auditors to draw what inference they pleased. As they had been talking of Captain Allen, the listeners made their own conclusion as to his identity with the buccaneer. True to human nature, in its inclination to believe always the worst of a man, nine out of ten credited the story as applied to the cut-throat looking captain, and so, after this, it was no unusual thing to hear him designated by the not very flattering sobriquet of the “old pirate.”

Later events, still more inexplicable in their character, and yet unexplained, gave color to this story, and invested it with the elements of probability. As related, the old gossip's second intrusion upon the Aliens, in the capacity of nurse, furnished the town's-people with a few additional facts, as to the state of things inside of a dwelling, upon whose very walls seemed written mystery. In the beginning, Mrs. Allen had made a few acquaintances, who were charmed with her character, as far as she let herself be known. Visits were made and returned for a short season. But after the birth of her first child, she went abroad but rarely, and ceasing to return all visits, social intercourse came to an end. The old nurse insisted that this was not her fault, but wholly chargeable upon the Captain, who, she was certain, had forbidden his wife to have anything to do with the town's-people.

## CHAPTER II

One day, nearly two years after the birth of this second child, the quiet town of S—was aroused from its dreams by a strange and startling event. About a week before, a handsomely dressed man, with the air of a foreigner, alighted from the stage coach at the “White Swan,” and asked if he could have a room. A traveler of such apparent distinction was a rare event in S—; and as he suggested the probable stay of a week or so, he became an object of immediate attention, as well as curiosity.

Night had closed in when he arrived, and as he was fatigued by his journey in the old lumbering stage coach that ran between the nearest sea-port town and S—, he did not show himself again that evening to the curious people who were to be found idling about the “White Swan.” But he had a talk with the landlord. That functionary waited upon him to know his pleasure as to supper.

“The ride has given me a headache,” the stranger said, “which a cup of tea will probably remove. Beyond that, I will take nothing to-night. Your name is—”

“Adams, sir. Adams is my name,” replied the landlord.

“And mine is Willoughby—Col. Willoughby.” And the Englishman bowed with a slight air of condescension.

“I am at your service, Col. Willoughby,” said the landlord in his blunt way. “Just say what you want, and the thing is done.”

“A cup of tea will serve me to-night, my friend. Let it be good and strong; for my head is a little unsettled with this throbbing pain. That stage coach of yours would be something better for a pair of new springs.”

“It’s seen service, and no mistake. But people in these parts don’t calculate much on easy riding. Springs are no great account. We look to the main chance.”

“What is that?”

“Getting over the ground.”

The traveler smiled to himself in a quiet way, as if the landlord’s answer had touched some memory or experience.

Nothing further being remarked, Mr. Adams retired to order a cup of tea for his guest. Something about the Englishman had stimulated his curiosity; and, so, instead of sending the cup of tea by his wife, who did most of the waiting, he carried it to the room himself.

“Sit down, Mr. Adams,” said the traveler, after the tea had been put before him.

The landlord did not wait for a second invitation.

“I hope the tea is to your liking, sir.”

“Excellent. I’ve not tasted better since I left London.”

The traveler spoke blandly, as he held his cup a little way from his lips, and looked over the top of it at his host with something more than a casual glance. He was reading his face with an evident effort to gain from it, as an index, some clear impression of his character.

“My wife understands her business,” replied the flattered landlord. “There is not her equal in all the country round.”

“I can believe you, Mr. Adams. Already this delicious beverage has acted like a charmed potion. My headache has left me as if by magic.”

He set his cup down; moved his chair a little way from the table at which he was sitting, and threw a pleasant look upon the landlord.

“How long have you been in this town, Mr. Adams?” The question seemed indifferently asked; but the landlord’s ear did not fail to perceive in the tone in which it was given, a foreshadowing of much beyond.

“I was born here,” he replied.

“Ah! Then you know all the people, I imagine?”

“I know all their faces, at least.”

“And their histories and characters?”

“Perhaps.”

Something in this “perhaps,” and the tone in which it was uttered, seemed not to strike the questioner agreeably. He bent his brows a little, and looked more narrowly at the landlord.

“I did not see much of your town as I came in this evening. How large is it?”

“Middling good size, sir, for an inland town,” was the not very satisfactory answer.

“What is the population?”

“Well, I don’t know—can’t just say to a certainty.”

“Two thousand?”

“Laws! no sir! Not over one, if that.”

“About a thousand, then?”

“Maybe a thousand, and maybe not more than six or seven hundred.”

“Call it seven hundred, then,” said the traveler, evidently a little amused.

“And that will, in my view, be calling it enough.”

There was a pause. The traveler seemed in doubt as to whether he should go on with his queries.

“Not much trade here, I presume?” He asked, at length.

“Not much to boast of,” said Adams.

Another pause.

“Any well-to-do people? Gentlemen who live on their means?”

“Yes; there’s Aaron Thompson. He’s rich, I guess. But you can’t measure a snake ‘till he’s dead, as they say.”

“True,” said the traveler, seeming to fall into the landlord’s mood. “Executors often change the public estimate of a man as to this world’s goods. So, Aaron Thompson is one of your rich men?”

“Yes, and there’s Abel Reeder—a close-fisted old dog, but wealthy as a Jew, and no mistake. Then there is Captain Allen.”

A flash of interest went over the stranger’s face, which was turned at once from the light.

“Captain Allen! And what of him?” The voice was pitched to a lower tone; but there was no appearance of special curiosity.

“A great deal of him.” The landlord put on a knowing look.

“Is he a sea captain?”

“Yes;” and lowering his voice, “something else besides, if we are to credit people who pretend to know.”

“Ah! but you speak in riddles, Mr. Adams. What do you mean by something more?”

“Why, the fact is, Mr. Willoughby, they do say, that he got his money in a backhanded sort of fashion.”

“By gambling?”

“No, sir! By piracy!”

Col. Willoughby gave a real or affected start.

“A grave charge that, sir.” He looked steadily at the landlord. “And one that should not be lightly made.”

“I only report the common talk.”

“If such talk should reach the ears of Captain Allen?” suggested the stranger.

“No great likelihood of its doing so, for I reckon there’s no man in S—bold enough to say ‘pirate’ to his face.”

“What kind of a man is he?”

“A bad specimen in every way.”

“He’s no favorite of yours, I see?”

“I have no personal cause of dislike. We never had many words together,” said the landlord. “But he’s a man that you want to get as far away from as possible. There are men, you know, who kind of draw you towards them, as if they were made of loadstone; and others that seem to push you off. Captain Allen is one of the latter kind.”

“What sort of a looking man is he?”

“Short; thick-set; heavily built, as to body. A full, coarse face; dark leathery skin; and eyes that are a match for the Evil One’s. There is a deep scar across his left forehead, running past the outer corner of his eye, and ending against the cheek bone. The lower lid of this eye is drawn down, and the inside turned out, showing its deep red lining. There is another scar on his chin. Two fingers are gone from his left hand, and his right hand has suffered violence.”

“He has evidently seen hard service,” remarked the stranger, and in a voice that showed him to be suppressing, as best he could, all signs of interest in the landlord’s communication.

“There’s no mistake about that; and if you could only see him, my word for it, you would fall into the common belief that blood lies upon his conscience.”

“I shall certainly put myself in the way of seeing him, after the spur you have just given to my curiosity,” said Col. Willoughby, in a decided manner, as if he had an interest in the man beyond what the landlord’s communication had excited.

“Then you will have to remain here something more than a week, I’m thinking,” replied the landlord.

“Why so?”

“Captain Allen isn’t at home.”

There was a sudden change in the stranger’s face that did not escape the landlord’s notice. But whether it indicated pleasure or disappointment, he could not tell; for it was at best a very equivocal expression.

“Not at home!” His voice indicated surprise.

“No, sir.”

“How long has he been absent?”

“About a month.”

“And is expected to return soon, no doubt?”

“As to that, I can’t say. Few people in this town I apprehend, can speak with certainty as to the going and coming of Captain Allen.”

“Is he often away?”

“No, sir; but oftener of late than formerly.”

“Is his absence usually of a prolonged character?”

“It is much longer than it used to be—never less than a month, and often extended to three times that period.”

Colonel Willoughby sat without further remark for some time, his eyes bent down, his brows contracted by thought, and his lips firmly drawn together.

“Thank you, my friend,” he said, at length, looking up, “for your patience in answering my idle questions. I will not detain you any longer.”

The landlord arose, and, bowing to his guest, retired from the apartment.

## CHAPTER III

On the next morning Colonel Willoughby plied the landlord with a few more questions about Captain Allen, and then, inquiring the direction of his house, started out, as he said, to take a ramble through the town. He did not come back until near dinner time, and then he showed no disposition to encourage familiarity on the part of Mr. Adams. But that individual was not in the dark touching the morning whereabouts of his friend. A familiar of his, stimulated by certain good things which the landlord knew when and how to dispense, had tracked the stranger from the “White Swan” to Captain Allen’s house. After walking around it, on the outside of the enclosure once or twice, and viewing it on all sides, he had ventured, at last, through the gate, and up to the front door of the stately mansion. A servant admitted him, and the landlord’s familiar loitered around for nearly three hours before he came out. Mrs. Allen accompanied him to the door, and stood and talked with him earnestly for some time in the portico. They shook hands in parting, and Colonel Willoughby retired with a firm, slow step, and his eyes bent downwards as if his thoughts were sober, if not oppressive.

All this Mr. Adams knew; and of course, his curiosity was pitched to a high key. But, it was all in vain that he threw himself in the way of his guest, made leading remarks, and even asked if he had seen the splendid dwelling of Captain Allen. The handsome stranger held him firmly at a distance. And not only on that day and evening, but on the next day and the next. He was polite even to blandness, but suffered no approach beyond the simplest formal intercourse. Every morning he was seen going to Captain Allen’s house, where he always stayed several hours. The afternoons he spent, for the most part, in his own room.

All this soon became noised throughout the town of S—, and there was a little world of excitement, and all manner of conjectures, as to who this Colonel Willoughby might be. The old nurse, of whom mention has been made, presuming upon her professional acquaintance with Mrs. Allen, took the liberty of calling in one afternoon, when, to her certain knowledge, the stranger was in the house. She was, however, disappointed in seeing him. The servant who admitted her showed her into a small reception-room, on the opposite side of the hall from the main parlor, and here Mrs. Allen met her. She was “very sweet to her”—to use her own words—sweet, and kind, and gentle as ever. But she looked paler than usual, and did not seem to be at ease.

The nurse reported that something was going wrong; but, as to its exact nature, she was in the dark. It certainly didn’t look right for Mrs. Allen to be receiving daily the visits of an elegant looking stranger, and her husband away. There was only one opinion on this head.

And so it went on from day to day for nearly a week—Colonel Willoughby, as he had called himself, spending the greater part of every morning with Mrs. Allen, and hiding himself from curious eyes, during the afternoons, in his room at the “White Swan.” Then came the denouement to this exciting little drama.

One day the stranger, after dining, asked Mr. Adams for his bill, which he paid in British gold. He then gave directions to have a small trunk, the only baggage he had with him, sent to the house of Captain Allen.

The landlord raised his eyebrows, of course; looked very much surprised, and even ventured a curious question. But the stranger repelled all inquisition touching his movements. And so he left the “White Swan,” after sojourning there for nearly a week, and the landlord never saw him again.

The news which came on the following day, created no little sensation in S—. Jacob Perkins, who lived near Captain Allen’s, and often worked for him, told the story. His relation was to this effect: About ten o’clock at night, Mrs. Allen sent for him, and he waited on her accordingly. He found her dressed as for a journey, but alone.

“Take a seat, Jacob,” she said. “I wish to have some talk with you.” The man noticed something unusual in her talk and manner.

“Jacob,” she resumed, after a pause, bending towards Mr. Perkins, “can I trust you in a matter requiring both service and secrecy? I have done some kind things for you and yours; I now wish you to return the favor.”

As she spoke, she drew out a purse, and let him see something of its golden contents.

“Say on, Mrs. Allen. You may trust me. If you ask anything short of a crime, it shall be done. Yes, you have been kind to me and mine, and now I will repay you, if in my power to do so.”

Jacob Perkins was in earnest. But, whether gratitude, or that apparition of golden sovereigns, had most influence upon him, cannot at this remote period be said.

“Can you get a pair of horses and a carriage, or light wagon, to-night?”

“I can,” replied Jacob.

“And so as not to excite undue curiosity?”

“I think so.”

“Very well. Next, will you drive that team all night?”

And Mrs. Allen played with the purse of gold, and let the coins it contained strike each other with a musical chink, very pleasant to the ear of Jacob Perkins.

“You shall be paid handsomely for your trouble,” added the lady, as she fixed her beautiful blue eyes upon Jacob with an earnest, almost pleading look.

“I hope there is nothing wrong,” said Jacob, as some troublesome suspicions began turning themselves over in his mind.

“Nothing wrong, as God is my witness!” And Mrs. Allen lifted her pale face reverently upwards.

“Forgive me, madam; I might have known that,” said Jacob. “And now, if you will give me your orders, they shall be obeyed to the letter.”

“Thank you, my kind friend,” returned Mrs. Allen. “The service you are now about to render me, cannot be estimated in the usual way. To me, it will be far beyond all price.”

She was agitated, and paused to recover herself. Then she resumed, with her usual calmness of manner—

“Bring the carriage here—driving with as little noise as possible—in half an hour. Be very discreet. Don’t mention the matter even to your wife. You can talk with her as freely as you choose on your return from Boston.”

“From Boston? Why, that is thirty miles away, at least!”

“I know it, Jacob; but I must be in Boston early to-morrow morning. You know the road?”

“Every foot of it.”

“So much the better. And now go for the carriage.”

Jacob Perkins arose. As he was turning to go, Mrs. Allen placed her hand upon his shoulder, and said—

“I can trust you, Mr. Perkins?”

“Madam, you can,” was his reply; and he passed from the quiet house into the darkness without. The night was moonless, but the stars shone down from an unclouded sky. When Jacob Perkins found himself alone, and began to look this adventure full in the face, some unpleasant doubts touching the part he was about to play, intruded themselves upon his thoughts. He had seen the handsome stranger going daily to visit Mrs. Allen, for now nearly a week, and had listened to the town talk touching the matter, until his own mind was filled with the common idea, that something was wrong. And now, to be called on to drive Mrs. Allen to Boston, secretly, and under cover of the night, seemed so much like becoming a party to some act of folly or crime, that he gave way to hesitation, and began to seek for reasons that would justify his playing the lady false. Then came up the image of her sweet, reverent face, as she said so earnestly, “Nothing wrong, as God is my witness!” And his first purpose was restored.

Punctually, at half-past ten o’clock, the team of Jacob Perkins drove noiselessly in through the gate, and up the carriage-way to the door of the Allen mansion. No lights were visible in any part

of the house. Under the portico were two figures, a man and a woman—the man holding something in his arms, which, on a closer observation, Jacob saw to be a child. Two large trunks and a small one stood near.

“Put them on the carriage,” said Mrs. Allen, in a low, steady voice; and Jacob obeyed in silence. When all was ready, she got in, and the man handed her the sleeping child, and then took his place beside her.

“To Boston, remember, Jacob; and make the time as short as possible.”

No other words were spoken. Jacob led his horses down the carriage-way to the gate, which he closed carefully after passing through; and then mounting to his seat, drove off rapidly.

But little conversation took place between Mrs. Allen and her traveling companion; and that was in so low a tone of voice, that Jacob Perkins failed to catch a single word, though he bent his ear and listened with the closest attention whenever he heard a murmur of voices.

It was after daylight when they arrived in Boston, where Jacob Perkins left them, and returned home with all speed, to wake up the town of S—with a report of his strange adventure. Before parting with Mrs. Allen, she gave him a purse, which, on examination, was found to contain a hundred dollars in gold. She also placed in his hand a small gold locket, and said, impressively, while her almost colorless lips quivered, and her bosom struggled with its pent up feelings—

“Jacob, when my son—he is now absent with his father—reaches his tenth year, give him this, and say that it is a gift from his mother, and contains a lock of her hair. Can I trust you faithfully to perform this office of love?”

Tears filled her eyes; then her breast heaved with a great sob.

“As Heaven is my witness, madam,” answered Jacob Perkins, “it shall be done.”

“Remember,” she said, “that you are only to give this to John, and not until his tenth year. Keep my gift sacred from the knowledge of every one until that time, and then let the communication be to him alone.”

Jacob Perkins promised to do according to her wishes, and then left her looking so pale, sad, and miserable, that, to use his own words, “he never could recall her image as she stood looking, not at him, but past him, as if trying to explore the future, without thinking of some marble statue in a grave-yard.”

She was never seen in S—again.

## CHAPTER IV

The excitement in the little town of S—, when Jacob returned from Boston, and told his singular story, may well be imagined. The whole community was in a buzz.

It was found that Mrs. Allen had so arranged matters, as to get all the servants away from the house, on one pretence or another, for that night, except an old negro woman, famous for her good sleeping qualities; and she was in the land of forgetfulness long before the hour appointed for flight.

Many conjectures were made, and one or two rather philanthropic individuals proposed, as a common duty, an attempt to arrest the fugitives and bring them back. But there were none to second this, the general sentiment being, that Captain Allen was fully competent to look after his own affairs. And that he would look after them, and promptly too, on his return, none doubted for an instant. As for Jacob Perkins, no one professed a willingness to stand in his shoes. The fire-eating Captain would most probably blow that gentleman's brains out in the heat of his first excitement. Poor Jacob, not a very courageous man, was almost beside himself with fear, when his view of the case was confidently asserted. One advised this course of conduct on the part of Jacob, and another advised that, while all agreed that it would on no account be safe for him to fall in the Captain's way immediately on his return. More than a dozen people, friends of Jacob, were on the alert, to give him the earliest intelligence of Captain Allen's arrival in S—, that he might hide himself until the first fearful outbreak of passion was over.

Well, in about two weeks the Captain returned with his little son. Expectation was on tip-toe. People's hearts beat in their mouths. There were some who would not have been surprised at any startling occurrence; an apparition of the scarred sea-dog, rushing along the streets, slashing his sword about like a madman, would have seemed to them nothing extraordinary, under the circumstances.

But expectation stood so long on tip-toe that it grew tired, and came down a few inches. Nothing occurred to arouse the quiet inhabitants. Captain Allen was seen to enter his dwelling about two o'clock in the afternoon, and although not less than twenty sharp pairs of eyes were turned in that direction, and never abated their vigilance until night drew down her curtains, no one got even a glimpse of his person.

Jacob Perkins left the town, and took refuge with a neighbor living two miles away, on the first intimation of the Captain's return.

The next day passed, but no one saw the Captain. On the third day a member of the inquisitorial committee, who had his house under constant observation, saw him drive out with his son, and take the road that went direct to the neighborhood where Jacob Perkins lay concealed in the house of a friend.

Poor Jacob! None doubted but the hour of retribution for him was at hand. That he might have timely warning, if possible, a lad was sent out on a fleet horse, who managed to go by Captain Allen's chaise on the road. Pale with affright, the unhappy fugitive hid himself under a hay rick, and remained there for an hour. But the Captain passed through without pause or inquiry, and in due course of time returned to his home, having committed no act in the least degree notable.

And so, as if nothing unusual had happened, he was seen, day after day, going about as of old, with not a sign of change in his deportment that any one could read. In a week, Jacob Perkins returned to his home, fully assured that no harm was likely to visit him.

No event touching Captain Allen or his family, worthy of record, transpired for several years. The only servants in the house were negro slaves, brought from a distance, and kept as much as possible away from others of their class in town. Among these, the boy, John, grew up. When he was ten years old, Jacob Perkins, though in some fear, performed the sacred duty promised to his mother on that memorable morning, when he looked upon her pale, statuesque countenance for the last time.

A flush covered the boy's face, as he received the locket, and understood from whence it came. He stood for some minutes, wholly abstracted, as if under the spell of some vivid memory.

Tears at length filled his eyes, and glistened on the long fringed lashes. Then there was a single, half-repressed sob—and then, grasping the locket tightly in his hand, he turned from Jacob, and, without a word, walked hastily away.

When the boy was sixteen, Captain Allen took him to sea. From that period for many years, both of them were absent for at least two-thirds of the time. At twenty-five, John took command of a large merchant-man, trading to the South American coast, and his father, now worn down by hard service, as well as by years, retired to his home in S—, to close up there, in such repose of mind as he could gain, the last days of his eventful life. He died soon after by apoplexy.

Prior to this event, his son, the younger Captain Allen, had brought home from Cuba a Spanish woman, who took the name of his wife. Of her family, or antecedents, no one in our town knew anything; and it was questioned by many whether any rite of marriage had ever been celebrated between them. Of this, however, nothing certain was known. None of the best people, so called, in S— paid her the hospitable compliment of a visit; and she showed no disposition to intrude herself upon them. And so they stood towards each other as strangers; and the Allen house remained, as from the beginning, to most people a terra incognita.

Neither Captain Allen nor his Spanish consort, to whom no children were born, as they advanced in years, “grew old gracefully.” Both had repulsive features, which were strongly marked by passion and sensuality. During the last two years of his life I was frequently called to see him, and prescribe for his enemy, the gout, by which he was sorely afflicted. Mrs. Allen also required treatment. Her nervous system was disordered; and, on closer observation, I detected signs of a vagrant imagination, leading her away into states verging upon insanity. She was fretful and ill-tempered; and rarely spoke to the Captain except complainingly, or in anger. The visits I made to the Allen house, during the lifetime of Captain Allen, were among the most unsatisfactory of all my professional calls. I think, from signs which met my eyes, that something more than bitter words passed occasionally between the ill-matched couple.

Late in the day, nearly five years anterior to the time of which I am now writing, I was summoned in haste to visit Captain Allen. I found him lying on a bed in the north-west chamber, where he usually slept, in a state of insensibility. Mrs. Allen received me at the door of the chamber with a frightened countenance. On inquiry as to the cause of his condition, she informed me that he had gone to his own room about an hour before, a little the worse for a bottle of wine; and that she had heard nothing more from him, until she was startled by a loud, jarring noise in his chamber. On running up stairs, she found him lying upon the floor, insensible.

I looked at her steadily, as she gave me this relation, but could not hold her eyes in mine. She seemed more uneasy than troubled. There was a contused wound just below the right temple, which covered, with its livid stain, a portion of the cheek. A cursory examination satisfied me that, whatever might be the cause of his fall, congestion of the brain had occurred, and that but few chances for life remained. So I informed Mrs. Allen. At the words, I could see a shudder run through her frame, and an expression of something like terror sweep over her face.

“His father died of apoplexy,” said she in a hoarse whisper, looking at me with a side-long, almost stealthy glance, not full and open-eyed.

“This is something more than apoplexy,” I remarked; still observing her closely.

“The fall may have injured him,” she suggested.

“The blow on his temple has done the fearful work,” said I.

There was a perceptible start, and another look of fear-almost terror.

“For heaven's sake, doctor,” she said, rousing herself, and speaking half imperatively, “do something! Don't stand speculating about the cause; but do something if you have any skill.”

Thus prompted, I set myself to work, in good earnest, with my patient. The result was in no way flattering to my skill, for he passed to his account in less than an hour, dying without a sign.

I shall never forget the wild screams which rang awfully through the old mansion, when it was announced to Mrs. Allen that the Captain was dead. She flung herself upon his body, tore her hair, and committed other extravagances. All the slumbering passions of her undisciplined nature seemed quickened into sudden life, overmastering her in their strong excitement. So it would have seemed to a less suspicious observer; but I thought that I could detect the overacting of pretence. I may have done her wrong; but the impression still remains. At the funeral, this extravagant role of grief was re-enacted, and the impression was left on many minds that she was half mad with grief.

Occasionally, after this event, I was summoned to the Allen House to see its unhappy mistress. I say unhappy, for no human being ever had a face written all over with the characters you might read in hers, that was not miserable. I used to study it, sometimes, to see if I could get anything like a true revelation of her inner life. The sudden lighting up of her countenance at times, as you observed its rapidly varying expression, made you almost shudder, for the gleam which shot across it looked like a reflection from hell. I know no other word to express what I mean. Remorse, at times, I could plainly read.

One thing I soon noticed; the room in which Captain Allen died—the north-west chamber before mentioned—remained shut up; and an old servant told me, years afterwards, that Mrs. Allen had never been inside of it since the fatal day on which I attended him in his last moments.

At the time when this story opens the old lady was verging on to sixty. The five years which had passed since she was left alone had bent her form considerably, and the diseased state of mind which I noticed when first called in to visit the family as a physician, was now but a little way removed from insanity. She was haunted by many strange hallucinations; and the old servant above alluded to, informed me, that she was required to sleep in the room with her mistress, as she never would be alone after dark. Often, through the night, she would start up in terror, her diseased imagination building up terrible phantoms in the land of dreams, alarming the house with her cries.

I rarely visited her that I did not see new evidences of waning reason. In the beginning I was fearful that she might do some violence to herself or her servants, but her insanity began to assume a less excitable form; and at last she sank into a condition of torpor, both of mind and body, from which I saw little prospect of her ever rising.

“It is well,” I said to myself. “Life had better wane slowly away than to go out in lurid gleams like the flashes of a dying volcano.”

## CHAPTER V

And now, reader, after this long digression, you can understand my surprise at seeing broad gleams of light reaching out into the darkness from the windows of that north-west chamber, as I breasted the storm on my way to visit the sick child of Mary Jones. No wonder that I stood still and looked up at those windows, though the rain beat into my face, half blinding me. The shutters were thrown open, and the curtains drawn partly aside. I plainly saw shadows on the ceiling and walls as of persons moving about the room. Did my eyes deceive me? Was not that the figure of a young girl that stood for a moment at the window trying to pierce with her eyes the thick veil of night? I was still in doubt when the figure turned away, and only gave me a shadow on the wall.

I lingered in front of the old house for some minutes, but gaining no intelligence of what was passing within, I kept on my way to the humbler dwelling of Mary Jones. I found her child quite ill, and needing attention. After doing what, in my judgment, the case required, I turned my steps towards the house of Mrs. Wallingford to look into the case of her son Henry, who, according to her account, was in a very unhappy condition.

I went a little out of my way so as to go past the Allen House again. As I approached, my eyes were directed to the chamber windows at the north-west corner, and while yet some distance away, as the old elms tossed their great limbs about in struggling with the storm, I saw glancing out between them the same cheery light that met my astonished gaze a little while before. As then, I saw shadows moving on the walls, and once the same slender, graceful figure—evidently that of a young girl—came to the window and tried to look out into the deep darkness.

As there was nothing to be gained by standing there in the drenching storm, I moved onward, taking the way to Mrs. Wallingford's dwelling. I had scarcely touched the knocker when the door was opened, and by Mrs. Wallingford herself.

“Oh, Doctor, I'm so glad you've come!” she said in a low, troubled voice.

I stepped in out of the rain, gave her my dripping umbrella, and laid off my overcoat.

“How is Henry now?” I asked.

She put her finger to her lip, and said, in a whisper,

“Just the same, Doctor—just the same. Listen! Don't you hear him walking the floor overhead? I've tried to get him to take a cup of tea, but he won't touch any thing. All I can get out of him is—‘Mother—dear mother—leave me to myself. I shall come right again. Only leave me to myself now.’ But, how can I let him go on in this way? Oh, Doctor, I am almost beside myself! What can it all mean? Something dreadful has happened.”

I sat listening and reflecting for something like ten minutes. Steadily, from one side the room overhead to the other, went the noise of feet; now slowly, now with a quicker motion: and now with a sudden tramp, that sent the listener's blood with a start along its courses.

“Won't you see him, doctor?”

I did not answer at once, for I was in the dark as to what was best to be done. If I had known the origin of his trouble, I could have acted understandingly. As it was, any intrusion upon the young man might do harm rather than good.

“He has asked to be let alone,” I replied, “and it may be best to let him alone. He says that he will come out right. Give him a little more time. Wait, at least, until to-morrow. Then, if there is no change, I will see him.”

Still the mother urged. At last I said—

“Go to your son. Suggest to him a visit from me, and mark the effect.”

I listened as she went up stairs. On entering his room, I noticed that he ceased walking. Soon came to my ears the murmur of voices, which rose to a sudden loudness on his part, and I distinctly heard the words:

“Mother! you will drive me mad! If you talk of that, I will go from the house. I *must* be left alone!”

Then all was silent. Soon Mrs. Wallingford came down. She looked even more distressed than when she left the room.

“I’m afraid it might do harm,” she said doubtfully.

“So am I. It will, I am sure, be best to let him have his way for the present. Something has disturbed him fearfully; but he is struggling hard for the mastery over himself, and you may be sure, madam, that he will gain it. Your son is a young man of no light stamp of character; and he will come out of this ordeal, as gold from the crucible.”

“You think so, Doctor?”

She looked at me with a hopeful light in her troubled countenance.

“I do, verily. So let your heart dwell in peace.”

I was anxious to get back to my good Constance, and so, after a few more encouraging words for Mrs. Wallingford, I tried the storm again, and went through its shivering gusts, to my own home. There had been no calls in my absence, and so the prospect looked fair for a quiet evening—just what I wanted; for the strange condition of Henry Wallingford, and the singular circumstance connected with the old Allen House, were things to be conned over with that second self, towards whom all thought turned and all interest converged as to a centre.

After exchanging wet outer garments and boots, for dressing gown and slippers; and darkness and storm for a pleasant fireside; my thoughts turned to the north-west chamber of the Allen House, and I said—

“I have seen something to-night that puzzled me.”

“What is that?” inquired my wife, turning her mild eyes upon me.

“You know the room in which old Captain Allen died?”

“Yes.”

“The chamber on the north-west corner, which, as far as we know, has been shut up ever since?”

“Yes, I remember your suspicion as to foul play on the part of Mrs. Allen, who, it is believed, has never visited the apartment since the Captain’s death.”

“Well, you will be surprised to hear that the shutters are unclosed, and lights burning in that chamber.”

“Now!”

“Yes—or at least half an hour ago.”

“That is remarkable.”

My wife looked puzzled.

“And more remarkable still—I saw shadows moving on the walls, as of two or three persons in the room.”

“Something unusual has happened,” said my wife.

“Perhaps Mrs. Allen is dead.”

This thought had not occurred to me. I turned it over for a few moments, and then remarked,

“Hardly probable—for, in that case, I would have been summoned. No; it strikes me that some strangers are in the house; for I am certain that I saw a young girl come to the window and press her face close up to one of the panes, as if trying to penetrate the darkness.

“Singular!” said my wife, as if speaking to herself. “Now, that explains, in part, something that I couldn’t just make out yesterday. I was late in getting home from Aunt Elder’s you know. Well, as I came in view of that old house, I thought I saw a girl standing by the gate. An appearance so unusual, caused me to strain my eyes to make out the figure, but the twilight had fallen too deeply. While I still looked, the form disappeared; but, through an opening in the shrubbery, I caught another glimpse of it, as it vanished in the portico. I was going to speak of the incident, but other matters pushed it, till now, from my thoughts when you were at home.”

“Then my eyes did not deceive me,” said I; “your story corroborates mine. There is a young lady in the Allen House. But who is she? That is the question.”

As we could not get beyond this question, we left the riddle for time to solve, and turned next to the singular state of mind into which young Henry Wallingford had fallen.

“Well,” said my wife, speaking with some emphasis, after I had told her of the case, “I never imagined that he cared so much for the girl!”

“What girl?” I inquired.

“Why, Delia Floyd—the silly fool! if I must speak so strongly.”

“Then he is really in love with Squire Floyd’s daughter?”

“It looks like it, if he’s taking on as his mother says,” answered my wife, with considerable feeling. “And Delia will rue the day she turned from as true a man as Henry Wallingford.”

“Bless me, Constance! you’ve got deeper into this matter, than either his mother or me. Who has been initiating you into the love secrets of S—?”

“This affair,” returned my wife, “has not passed into town talk, and will, I trust, be kept sacred by those who know the facts. I learned them from Mrs. Dean, the sister of Mrs. Floyd. The case stands thus: Henry is peculiar, shy, reserved, and rather silent. He goes but little into company, and has not the taking way with girls that renders some young men so popular. But his qualities are all of the sterling kind—such as wear well, and grow brighter with usage. For more than a year past, he has shown a decided preference for Delia Floyd, and she has encouraged his attentions. Indeed, so far as I can learn from Mrs. Dean, the heart of her niece was deeply interested. But a lover of higher pretensions came, dazzling her mind with a more brilliant future.”

“Who?” I inquired.

“That dashing young fellow from New York, Judge Bigelow’s nephew.”

“Not Ralph Dewey?”

“Yes.”

“Foolish girl, to throw away a man for such an effigy! It will be a dark day that sees her wedded to him. But I will not believe in the possibility of such an event.”

“Well, to go on with my story,” resumed Constance. “Last evening, seeing, I suppose, that a dangerous rival was intruding, Henry made suit for the hand of Delia, and was rejected.”

“I understand the case better now,” said I, speaking from a professional point of view.

“Poor young man! I did not suppose it was in him to love any woman after that fashion,” remarked Constance.

“Your men of reserved exterior have often great depths of feeling,” I remarked. “Usually women are not drawn towards them; because they are attracted most readily by what meets the eye. If they would look deeper, they would commit fewer mistakes, like that which Delia Floyd has just committed.”

## CHAPTER VI

Delia Floyd was a girl of more than ordinary attractions, and it is not surprising that young Wallingford was drawn, fascinated, within the charmed circle of her influence. She was, by no means, the weak, vain, beautiful young woman, that the brief allusion I have made to her might naturally lead the reader to infer. I had possessed good opportunities for observing her, for our families were intimate, and she was frequently at our house. Her father had given her a good education—not showy; but of the solid kind. She was fond of books, and better read, I think, in the literature of the day, than any other young lady in S—. Her conversational powers were of a high order. Good sense, I had always given her credit for possessing; and I believed her capable of reading character correctly. She was the last one I should have regarded as being in danger of losing a heart to Ralph Dewey.

In person, Delia was rather below than above the middle stature. Her hair was of a dark brown, and so were her eyes—the latter large and liquid. Her complexion was fresh, almost ruddy, and her countenance animated, and quick to register every play of feeling.

In manner, she was exceedingly agreeable, and had the happy art of putting even strangers at ease. It was no matter of wonder to me, as I said before, that Henry Wallingford should fall in love with Delia Floyd. But I did wonder, most profoundly, when I became fully assured, that she had, for a mere flash man, such as Ralph Dewey seemed to me, turned herself away from Henry Wallingford.

But women are enigmas to most of us—I don't include you, dear Constance!—and every now and then puzzle us by acts so strangely out of keeping with all that we had predicated of them, as to leave no explanation within our reach, save that of evil fascination, or temporary loss of reason. We see their feet often turning aside into ways that we know lead to wretchedness, and onward they move persistently, heeding neither the voice of love, warning, nor reproach. They hope all things, believe all things, trust all things, and make shipwreck on the breakers that all eyes but their own see leaping and foaming in their course. Yes, woman is truly an enigma!

Squire Floyd was a plain, upright man, in moderately good circumstances. He owned a water power on the stream that ran near our town, and had built himself a cotton mill, which was yielding him a good annual income. But he was far from being rich, and had the good sense not to assume a style of living beyond his means.

Henry Wallingford was the son of an old friend of Squire Floyd's. The elder Mr. Wallingford was not a man of the Squire's caution and prudence. He was always making mistakes in matters of business, and never succeeded well in any thing. He died when his son was about eighteen years of age. Henry was at that time studying law with Judge Bigelow. As, in the settlement of his father's estate, it was found to be wholly insolvent, Henry, unwilling to be dependent on his mother, who had a small income in her own right, gave notice to the Judge that he was about to leave his office. Now, the Judge was a man of penetration, and had already discovered in the quiet, reserved young man, just the qualities needed to give success in the practice of law. He looked calmly at his student for some moments after receiving this announcement, conning over his face, which by no means gave indications of a happy state of mind.

“You think you can find a better preceptor?” said the Judge, at last, in his calm way.

“No, sir! no!” answered Henry, quickly. “Not in all this town, nor out of it, either. It is not that, Judge Bigelow.”

“Then you don't fancy the law?”

“On the contrary, there is no other calling in life that presents to my mind any thing attractive,” replied Henry, in a tone of despondency that did not escape the Judge.

“Well, if that is the case, why not keep on? You are getting along bravely.”

“I must support myself, sir—must do something besides sitting here and reading law books.”

“Ah, yes, I see.” The Judge spoke to himself, as if light had broken into his mind. “Well, Henry,” he added, looking at the young man, “what do you propose doing?”

“I have hands and health,” was the reply.

“Something more than hands and health are required in this world. What can you do?”

“I can work on a farm, if nothing better offers. Or, may be, I can get a place in some store.”

“There’s good stuff in the lad,” said Judge Bigelow to himself. Then speaking aloud—

“I’ll think this matter over for you, Henry. Let it rest for a day or two. The law is your proper calling, and you must not give it up, if you can be sustained in it.”

On that very day, Judge Bigelow saw Squire Floyd, and talked the matter over with him. They had but one sentiment in the matter, and that was favorable to Henry’s remaining where he was.

“Can he be of any service to you, in your office, Judge—such as copying deeds and papers, hunting up cases, and the like?” asked the Squire.

“Yes, he can be of service to me in that way; and is of service now.”

“You can afford to pay him something?” suggested Squire Floyd.

“It is usual,” replied the Judge, “to get this kind of service in return for instruction and office privileges.”

“I know; but this case is peculiar. The death of Henry’s father has left him without a support, and he is too independent to burden his mother. Unless he can earn something, therefore, he must abandon the law.”

“I understand that, Squire, and have already decided to compensate him,” said the Judge. “But what I can offer will not be enough.”

“How much can you offer?”

“Not over a hundred dollars for the first year.”

“Call it two hundred, Judge,” was the ready answer.

The two men looked for a moment into each other’s faces.

“His father and I were friends from boyhood,” said Squire Floyd. “He was a warm-hearted man; but always making mistakes. He would have ruined me two or three times over, if I had been weak enough to enter into his plans, or to yield to his importunities in the way of risks and securities. It often went hard for me to refuse him; but duty to those dependent on me was stronger than friendship. But I can spare a hundred dollars for his son, and will do it cheerfully. Only, I must not be known in the matter; for it would lay on Henry’s mind a weight of obligation, not pleasant for one of his sensitive disposition to bear.”

“I see, Squire,” answered Judge Bigelow to this; “but then it won’t place me in the right position. I shall receive credit for your benevolence.”

“Don’t trouble yourself on that score,” answered the Squire, laughing. “It may be that I shall want some law business done—though heaven forbid! In that case, I will call on you, and you can let Henry do the work. Thus the equilibrium of benefits will be restored. Let the salary be two hundred.”

And so this matter being settled, Henry Wallingford remained in the office of Judge Bigelow. The fact of being salaried by the Judge, stimulated him to new efforts, and made him forward to relieve his kind preceptor of all duties within the range of his ability. There came, during the next year, an unusually large amount of office practice—preparing deeds, making searches, and drawing up papers of various kinds. In doing this work, Henry was rapid and reliable. So, when Squire Floyd tendered his proportion of the young man’s salary to his neighbor, the Judge declined receiving it. The Squire urged; but the Judge said—

“No; Henry has earned his salary, and I must pay it, in simple justice. I did not think there was so much in him. Business has increased, and without so valuable an assistant, I could not get along.”

So the way had opened before Henry Wallingford, and he was on the road to a successful manhood. At the time of his introduction to the reader, he was in his twenty-third year. On attaining his majority, he had become so indispensable to Judge Bigelow, who had the largest practice in the

county, that no course was left for him but to offer the young man a share in his business. It was accepted; and the name of Henry Wallingford was thenceforth displayed in gilt letters, in the office window of his preceptor.

From that time, his mind never rested with anything like care or anxiety on the future. His daily life consisted in an almost absorbed devotion to his professional duties, which grew steadily on his hands. His affection was in them, and so the balance of his mind was fully sustained. Ah, if we could all thus rest, without anxiety, on the right performance of our allotted work! If we would be content to wait patiently for that success which comes as the orderly result of well-doing in our business, trades, or professions, what a different adjustment would there be in our social condition and relations! There would not be all around us so many eager, care-worn faces—so many heads bowed with anxious thought—so many shoulders bent with burdens, destined, sooner or later, to prove too great for the strength which now sustains them. But how few, like Henry Wallingford, enter with anything like pleasure into their work! It is, in most cases, held as drudgery, and regarded only as the means to cherished ends in life wholly removed from the calling itself. Impatience comes as a natural result. The hand reaches forth to pluck the growing fruit ere it is half ripened. No wonder that its taste is bitter to so many thousands. No wonder that true success comes to so small a number—that to so many life proves but a miserable failure.

## CHAPTER VII

The morning which broke after that night of storm was serene and beautiful. The air had a crystal clearness, and as you looked away up into the cloudless azure, it seemed as if the eye could penetrate to an immeasurable distance. The act of breathing was a luxury. You drew in draught after draught of the rich air, feeling, with every inhalation, that a new vitality was absorbed through the lungs, giving to the heart a nobler beat, and to the brain a fresh activity. With what a different feeling did I take up my round of duties for the day! Yesterday I went creeping forth like a reluctant school boy; to-day, with an uplifted countenance and a willing step.

Having a few near calls to make, I did not order my horse, as both health and inclination were better served by walking. Soon after breakfast I started out, and was going in the direction of Judge Bigelow's office, when, hearing a step behind me that had in it a familiar sound, I turned to find myself face to face with Henry Wallingford! He could hardly have failed to see the look of surprise in my face.

"Good morning, Henry," I said, giving him my hand, and trying to speak with that cheerful interest in the young man which I had always endeavored to show.

He smiled in his usual quiet way as he took my hand and said in return,

"Good-morning, Doctor."

"You were not out, I believe, yesterday," I remarked, as we moved on together.

"I didn't feel very well," he answered, in a voice pitched to a lower key than usual; "and, the day being a stormy one, I shut myself up at home."

"Ah," said I, in a cheerful way, "you lawyers have the advantage of us knights of the pill box and lancet. Rain or shine, sick or well, we must travel round our parish."

"All have their share of the good as well as the evil things of life," he replied, a little soberly. "Doctors and lawyers included."

I did not observe any marked change in the young man, except that he was paler, and had a different look out of his eyes from any that I had hitherto noticed; a more matured look, which not only indicated deeper feeling, but gave signs of will and endurance. I carried that new expression away with me as we parted at the door of his office, and studied it as a new revelation of the man. It was very certain that profounder depths had been opened in his nature—opened to his own consciousness—than had ever seen the light before. That he was more a man than he had ever been, and more worthy to be mated with a true woman. Up to this time I had thought of him more as a boy than as a man, for the years had glided by so quietly that bore him onward with the rest, that he had not arisen in my thought to the full mental stature which the word manhood includes.

"Ah," said I, as I walked on, "what a mistake in Delia Floyd! She is just as capable of high development as a woman as he is as a man. How admirably would they have mated. In him, self-reliance, reason, judgment, and deep feeling would have found in her all the qualities they seek—taste, perception, tenderness and love. They would have grown upwards into higher ideas of life, not downwards into sensualism and mere worldliness, like the many. Alas! This mistake on her part may ruin them both; for a man of deep, reserved feelings, who suffers a disappointment in love, is often warped in his appreciation of the sex, and grows one-sided in his character as he advances through the cycles of life."

I had parted from Henry only a few minutes when I met his rival, Ralph Dewey. Let me describe him. In person he was taller than Wallingford, and had the easy, confident manner of one who had seen the world, as we say. His face was called handsome; but it was not a manly face—manly in that best sense which includes character and thought. The chin and mouth were feeble, and the forehead narrow, throwing the small orbs close together. But he had a fresh complexion, dark, sprightly eyes,

and a winning smile. His voice was not very good, having in it a kind of unpleasant rattle; but he managed it rather skillfully in conversation, and you soon, ceased to notice the peculiarity.

Ralph lived in New York, where he had recently been advanced to the position of fourth partner in a dry goods jobbing house, with a small percentage on the net profits. Judging from the air with which he spoke of his firm's operations, and his relation to the business, you might have inferred that he was senior instead of junior partner, and that the whole weight of the concern rested on his shoulders.

Judge Bigelow, a solid man, and from professional habit skilled in reading character, was, singularly enough, quite carried away with his smart nephew, and really believed his report of himself. Prospectively, he saw him a merchant prince, surrounded by palatial splendors.

Our acquaintance was as yet but slight, so we only nodded in passing. As we were in the neighborhood of Squire Floyd's pleasant cottage, I was naturally curious, under the circumstances, to see whether the young man was going to make a visit at so early an hour; and I managed to keep long enough in sight to have this matter determined. Ralph called at the Squire's, and I saw him admitted. So I shook my head disapprovingly, and kept on my way.

Not until late in the afternoon did I find occasion to go into that part of the town where the old Allen house was located, though the image of its gleaming north-west windows was frequently in my thought. The surprise occasioned by that incident was in no way lessened on seeing a carriage drive in through the gateway, and two ladies alight therefrom and enter the house. Both were in mourning. I did not see their faces; but, judging from the dress and figure of each, it was evident that one was past the meridian of life, and the other young. Still more to my surprise, the carriage was not built after our New England fashion, but looked heavy, and of a somewhat ancient date. It was large and high, with a single seat for the driver perched away up in the air, and a footman's stand and hangings behind. There was, moreover, a footman in attendance, who sprung to his place after the ladies had alighted, and rode off to the stables.

"Am I dreaming?" said I to myself, as I kept on my way, after witnessing this new incident in the series of strange events that were half-bewildering me. But it was in vain that I rubbed my eyes; I could not wake up to a different reality.

It was late when I got home from my round of calls, and found tea awaiting my arrival.

"Any one been here?" I asked—my usual question.

"No one." The answer pleased me for I had many things on my mind, and I wished to have a good long evening with my wife. Baby Mary and Louis were asleep: but we had the sweet, gentle face of Agnes, our first born, to brighten the meal-time. After she was in dream-land, guarded by the loving angels who watch with children in sleep, and Constance was through with her household cares for the evening, I came into the sitting-room from my office, and taking the large rocking-chair, leaned my head back, mind and body enjoying a sense of rest and comfort.

"You are not the only one," said my wife, looking up from the basket of work through which she had been searching for some article, "who noticed lights in the Allen House last evening."

"Who else saw them?" I asked.

"Mrs. Dean says she heard two or three people say that the house was lit up all over—a perfect illumination."

"Stories lose nothing in being re-told. The illumination was confined to the room in which Captain Allen died. I am witness to that. But I have something more for your ears. This afternoon, as I rode past, I saw an old-fashioned English coach, with a liveried driver and footman, turn into the gate. From this two ladies alighted and went into the house; when the coach was driven to the stables. Now, what do you think of that?"

"We are to have a romance enacted in our very midst, it would seem," replied my wife, in her unimpassioned way. "Other eyes have seen this also, and the strange fact is buzzing through the town. I was only waiting until we were alone to tell you that these two ladies whom you saw, arrived at the

Allen House in their carriage near about daylight, on the day before yesterday. But no one knows who they are, or from whence they came. It is said that they made themselves as completely at home as if they were in their own house; selected the north-west chamber as their sleeping apartment; and ordered the old servants about with an air of authority that subdued them to obedience.”

“But what of Mrs. Allen?” I asked, in astonishment at all this.

“The stories about her reception of the strangers do not agree. According to one, the old lady was all resistance and indignation at this intrusion; according to another, she gave way, passively, as if she were no longer sole mistress of the house.”

Constance ceased speaking, for there came the usual interruption to our evening *tete-a-tete*—the ringing of my office bell.

“You are wanted up at the Allen House, Doctor, said my boy, coming in from the office a few moments afterwards.

“Who is sick?” I asked.

“The old lady.”

“Any thing serious?”

“I don’t know, sir. But I should think there was from the way old Aunty looked. She says, come up as quickly as you can.”

“Is she in the office?”

“No, sir. She just said that, and then went out in a hurry.”

“The plot thickens,” said I, looking at Constance.

“Poor old lady!” There was a shade of pity in her tones.

“You have not seen her for many years?”

“No.”

“Poor old witch of Endor! were better said.”

“Oh!” answered my wife, smiling, “you know that the painter’s idea of this celebrated individual has been reversed by some, who affirm that she was young and handsome instead of old and ugly like modern witches.”

“I don’t know how that may be, but if you could see Mrs. Allen, you would say that ‘hag’ were a better term for her than woman. If the good grow beautiful as they grow old, the loving spirit shining like a lamp through the wasted and failing walls of flesh, so do the evil grow ugly and repulsive. Ah, Constance, the lesson is for all of us. If we live true lives, our countenances will grow radiant from within, as we advance in years; if selfish, worldly, discontented lives, they will grow cold, hard, and repulsive.”

I drew on my boots and coat, and started on my visit to the Allen House. The night was in perfect contrast with the previous one. There was no moon, but every star shone with its highest brilliancy, while the galaxy threw its white scarf gracefully across the sky, veiling millions of suns in their own excessive brightness. I paused several times in my walk, as broader expanses opened between the great elms that gave to our town a sylvan beauty, and repeated, with a rapt feeling of awe and admiration, the opening stanza of a familiar hymn:—

“The spacious firmament on high, With all the blue ethereal sky, And spangled heavens, a shining frame, Their great Original proclaim.”

How the beauty and grandeur of nature move the heart, as if it recognized something of its own in every changing aspect. The sun and moon and stars—the grand old mountains lifting themselves upwards into serene heights—the limitless expanse of ocean, girdling the whole earth—rivers, valleys, and plains—trees, flowers, the infinite forms of life—to all the soul gives some response, as if they were akin.

I half forgot my interest in old Mrs. Allen, as my heart beat responsive to the pulsings of nature, and my thoughts flew upwards and away as on the wings of eagles. But my faithful feet had borne me steadily onwards, and I was at the gate opening to the grounds of the Allen House, before I was

conscious of having passed over half the distance that lay between that and my home. I looked up, and saw a light in the north-west chamber, but the curtains were down.

On entering the house, I was shown by the servant who admitted me, into the small office or reception room opening from the hall. I had scarcely seated myself, when a tall woman, dressed in black, came in, and said, with a graceful, but rather stately manner—

“The Doctor, I believe?”

How familiar the voice sounded! And yet I did not recognise it as the voice of any one whom I had known, but rather as a voice heard in dreams. Nor was the calm, dignified countenance on which my eyes rested, strange in every lineament. The lady was, to all appearance, somewhere in the neighborhood of sixty, and, for an elderly lady, handsome. I thought of my remark to Constance about the beauty and deformity of age, and said to myself, “Here is one who has not lived in vain.”

I arose as she spoke, and answered in the affirmative.

“You have come too late,” she said, with a touch of feeling in her voice.

“Not dead?” I ejaculated.

“Yes, dead. Will you walk up stairs and see her?”

I followed in silence, ascending to the chamber which had been occupied by Mrs. Allen since the old Captain’s death. It was true as she had said; a ghastly corpse was before me. I use the word ghastly, for it fully expresses the ugliness of that lifeless face, withered, marred, almost shorn of every true aspect of humanity. I laid my hand upon her—the skin was cold. I felt for her pulse, but there was no sign of motion in the arteries.

“It is over,” I said, lifting myself from my brief examination, “and may God have mercy upon her soul!” The last part of the sentence was involuntary.

“Amen!”

I felt that this response was no idle ejaculation.

“How was she affected?” I asked. “Has she been sick for any time? Or did life go out suddenly?”

“It went out suddenly,” replied the lady—“as suddenly as a lamp in the wind.”

“Was she excited from any cause?”

“She has been in an excited state ever since our arrival, although every thing that lay in our power has been done to quiet her mind and give it confidence and repose.”

She spoke calmly, as one, who held a controlling position there, and of right. I looked into her serene face, almost classic in its outlines, with an expression of blended inquiry and surprise, that it was evident did not escape her observation, although she offered no explanation in regard to herself.

I turned again to the corpse, and examined it with some care. There was nothing in its appearance that gave me any clue to the cause which had produced this sudden extinguishment of life.

“In what way was she excited?” I asked, looking at the stranger as I stepped back from the couch on which the dead body was lying.

She returned my steady gaze, without answering, for some moments. Either my tone or manner affected her unpleasantly, for I saw her brows contract slightly, her full lips close upon themselves, and her eyes acquire an intenser look.

“You have been her physician, I believe?” There was no sign of feeling in the steady voice which made the inquiry.

“Yes.”

“I need not, in that case, describe to you her unhappy state of mind. I need not tell you that an evil will had the mastery over her understanding, and that, in the fierce struggle of evil passion with evil passion, mind and body had lost their right adjustment.”

“I know all this,” said I. “Still, madam, in view of my professional duty, I must repeat my question, and urge upon you the propriety of an undisguised answer. In what way was she excited? and what was the cause leading to an excitement which has ended thus fatally?”

“I am not in the habit of putting on disguises,” she answered, with a quiet dignity that really looked beautiful.

“I pray you, madam, not to misunderstand me,” said I. “As a physician, I must report the cause of all deaths in the range of my practice. If I were not to do so in this case, a permit for burial would not be issued until a regular inquest was held by the Coroner.”

“Ah, I see,” she replied, yet with an air of indecision. “You are perfectly right, Doctor, and we must answer to your satisfaction. But let us retire from this chamber.”

She led the way down stairs. As we passed the memorable north-west room, she pushed the door open, and said,

“Blanche, dear, I wish to see you. Come down to the parlor.”

I heard faintly the answer, in a very musical voice. We had scarcely entered the parlor, when the lady said—

“My daughter, Doctor.”

A vision of beauty and innocence met my gaze. A young girl, not over seventeen, tall like her mother, very fair, with a face just subdued into something of womanly seriousness, stood in the door, as I turned at mention of her presence.

A single lamp gave its feeble light to the room, only half subduing the shadows that went creeping into corners and recesses. Something of a weird aspect was on every thing; and I could not but gaze at the two strangers in that strange place to them, under such peculiar circumstances, and wonder to see them so calm, dignified, and self-possessed. We sat down by the table on which the lamp was standing, the elder of the two opposite, and the younger a little turned away, so that her features were nearly concealed.

“Blanche,” said the former, “the Doctor wishes to know the particular incidents connected with the death of Mrs. Allen.”

I thought there was an uneasy movement on the part of the girl. She did not reply. There was a pause.

“The facts are simply these, Doctor,” and the mother looked me steadily in the face, which stood out clear, as the lamp shone full on every feature. “From the moment of our arrival, Mrs. Allen has seemed like one possessed of an evil Spirit. How she conducted herself before, is known to me only as reported by the servants. From the little they have communicated, I infer that for some time past she has not been in her right mind. How is it? You must know as to her sanity or insanity.”

“She has not, in my opinion, been a truly sane woman for years,” was my answer.

“As I just said,” she continued, “she has seemed like one possessed of an evil spirit. In no way could we soften or conciliate her. Her conduct resembled more nearly that of some fierce wild beast whose den was invaded, than that of a human being. She would hold no friendly intercourse with us, and if we met at any time, or in any part of the house, she would fix her keen black eyes upon us, with an expression that sent a shudder to the heart. My daughter scarcely dared venture from her room. She so dreaded to meet her. Twice, as she flew past me, in her restless wanderings over the house, muttering to herself, I heard her say, as she struck her clenched hand in the air, ‘I can do it again, and I will!’”

A cold chill crept over me, for I remembered the death of Captain Allen; and this was like a confirmation of what I had feared as to foul play.

“There is no trusting one wholly or even partially insane. So we were always on our guard. Not once, but many times during the few nights we have spent here, have we heard the door of our chamber tried after midnight. It was plain to us that it was not safe to live in this way, and so we had come to the reluctant conclusion that personal restraint must be secured. The question as to how this could best be done we had not yet decided, when death unraveled the difficulty.”

The speaker ceased at this part of her narrative, and lifting from the table a small bell, rung it. A maid entered. I had never seen her before.

“Tell Jackson that I want him.”

The girl curtsied respectfully, and withdrew.

Nothing more was said, until a man, whom I recognized at a glance to be a regularly trained English servant, presented himself.

“Jackson,” said the lady, “I wish you to relate exactly, what occurred just previously to, and at the time of Mrs. Allen’s death.”

The man looked bewildered for a moment or two; but soon recovering himself, answered without hesitation.

“Hit ‘appened just in this way, ma’am. I was a comin’ hup stairs, when I met the hold lady a tearin’ down like a mad cat. She looked kind o’ awful. I never saw anybody out of an ‘ospital look that way in all my life before. She ‘eld an hiron poker in ‘er ‘and. As my young lady—” and he looked towards Blanche—“was in the ‘all, I didn’t think it safe for ‘er if I let the hold woman go down. So I just stood in ‘er way, and put my harms across the stairs so”—stretching his arms out. “My! but ‘ow she did fire up! She stood almost a minute, and then sprung on me as if she was a tiger. But I was the strongest, and ‘olding ‘er in my harms like as I would a mad kitten, I carried ‘er hup to ‘er room, put ‘er hin, and shut the door. My young lady saw it hall, for she followed right hup after me.”

He looked towards Blanche.

“Just as it occurred,” she said, in a low, sweet fluttering voice.

“I heard the strife,” said her mother, “and ran up to see what was the matter. I reached the door of Mrs. Allen’s room just as Jackson thrust her in. He did not use any more violence than was needed in a case of such sudden emergency. He is strong, and held her so tightly that she could not even struggle. One wild, fierce scream rent the air, as he shut the door, and then all was silent as death. I went in to her instantly. She was on the floor in a convulsion. You were sent for immediately; but it was too late for human intervention. Jackson, you can go.”

The man bowed with an air of deferential respect, and retired.

“Now, sir,” she added, turning to me, “you have the facts as they occurred. I have no wish to give them publicity, for they are family matters, and these are always in their degree, sacred. If, however, you think it your duty as a physician, to make the matter one of official investigation, I can have nothing to say.”

I thought for some minutes before answering. The story, as related by the servant, I fully credited.

“Let me see the body again,” said I, coming at length to a conclusion.

We went up stairs, all three together; but only two of us entered the chamber of death. As we neared the door, Blanche caught at her mother’s arm, and I heard her say, in a whisper:

“Dear mamma! spare me that sight again. It is too horrible!”

“The presence of your daughter is not needed,” said I, interposing. “Let her retire to her own room.”

“Thank you!” There was a grateful expression in her voice, as she uttered these brief words, and then went back, while we passed in to the apartment where the dead woman was still lying.

As I looked upon her face again, it seemed even more ghastly than before; and I could hardly repress a shudder. My companion held a lamp; while I made as careful an examination as was possible under the circumstances. I did not expect to find any marks of violence, though I searched for them about her head, neck, and chest. But, under the circumstances, I felt it to be my duty to know, from actual search, that no such signs existed. In every aspect presented by the corpse, there was a corroboration of the story related by the serving man. It was plain, that in a fit of half insane, uncontrollable passion, the nice adjustment of physical forces had been lost.

“I am fully satisfied, madam,” said I, at length, turning from my unpleasant task.

She let her calm, earnest eyes dwell on mine for a few moments, and then answered, with a softened tone, in which there was just a perceptible thrill of feeling—

“If I were a believer in omens, I should take this sad incident, following so quickly on our removal to a new country and a new home, as foreshadowing evil to me or mine. But I do not so read external events.”

“Between a life like hers, and a life like yours, madam, there can be no possible nearness; nor any relation between your spiritual affinities and hers. The antipodes are not farther apart,” said I, in return; “therefore, nothing that has befallen her can be ominous as to you.”

“I trust not,” she gravely answered, as we left the room together.

To my inquiry if I could serve her in any way, in the present matter, she simply requested me to send a respectable undertaker, who would perform what was fitting in the last rites due to the dead.

I promised, and retired.

## CHAPTER VIII

The appearance, manner, and bearing of the two strangers impressed me strongly. The elder had evidently moved in refined and cultivated society all her life. There was about her the air of “a lady, born and bred”—dignified, calm, easy, and courteous. The daughter was a lovely blossom on this stately stem—delicate, beautiful, sweet with the odors of innocence. I see her now as I saw her on that first night of our meeting—to my eyes a new born vision of loveliness.

I found Constance awaiting, with curious interest, my return. I was going right into the heart of this new wonder, and could not fail to bring back some revelation that would satisfy, in a measure, the excitement of mind produced by so singular an intrusion of strangers upon our quiet town. I answered her first look of inquiry by the words:—

“It is over. Another book of life is sealed up here to be opened in eternity.”

“Dead! Not dead?”

“Yes, Constance, Mrs. Allen is dead. Her spirit had passed away before my arrival.”

“How did she die?—from what cause?”

“From what I can learn she died in a fit of passion.” I then related all that I had seen and heard.

“But who can they be?” This query came as a natural sequence. “What right have they in the Allen House?”

“Whoever they may be,” I replied, “they act, or, at least, the elder of the two ladies acts as if her right there was not even open to a question. And, perhaps, it is not.”

“But what can they be to the Allens?”

“I will give you,” said I, “the benefit of my guessing on the subject. You recollect the story told about Captain Allen’s mother; how she went off a great many years ago with a stranger—an Englishman.”

Constance remembered all about this family history, for it was the romance of our town.

“My conclusion is that this lady is the sister of Captain Allen—the child that his mother took with her when she fled from her husband’s house. I am strengthened in this belief from the first impression of her voice, as if the tones had in them something familiar.”

We talked this matter over, looking at it in every way, until we satisfied ourselves that my conjectures must be true. The quiet manner in which they had intruded themselves, and taken possession of the house—unheralded as far as we knew—could not but present itself to our minds as a matter of special wonder. The more we coned it over the more we were puzzled. Before coming home I had called at an undertaker’s, and notified him that his services were wanted at the Allen House. Early on the next day I took the liberty of calling there myself. I sent up my name, and awaited, with some interest, my reception. The visit might be regarded as an intrusion, and I was prepared to receive a message from the lady asking to be excused. Not so, however. I had been seated only a few moments, when I heard the rustle of her garments on the stairs. My first glance at her face assured me that I was no unwelcome visitor.

“Thank you, Doctor,” she said, as she extended her hand, “for this early call. Our meeting last night for the first time can hardly be called a pleasant one—or the associations connected with it such as either of us might wish to recall.”

“Our control over events is so slight,” I made answer as I resumed my seat, “that we should separate unpleasant feelings as far as possible from any memories connected with them.”

A faint, sad smile just lightened up her placid face as she said, in reply to the remark.

“Ah, Doctor, that may not be. Lives are too intimately blended here for any one to suffer or do wrong without leaving a burden of sadness on other memories.”

“True; but the burden will be light or heavy according to our strength.”

She looked at me without replying, for the remark was so palpable, that it seemed to involve nothing beyond a literal fact.

“Or rather,” I said, “the burden will be heavy or light according to our state or quality.”

There was a sign of awakening interest in her countenance as if my remark had touched some hidden spring of thought.

“If we are right with ourselves,” I went on, “the disturbance produced by others’ misconduct will not reach very far down. The pressure of sadness may lie upon us for a season; but cannot long remain; for the pure heart will lift itself into serene atmospheres.”

“But, who is right with himself?” she said. “Whose heart is pure enough to dwell in these serene atmospheres? Not mine, alas!”

I looked into the suddenly illuminated face as she put these questions, in surprise at the quick change which had passed over it. But the tone in which she uttered the closing sentence was touched with tender sadness.

“Rather let me say,” I made answer, “*in the degree* that we are right with ourselves. None attain unto perfection here.”

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