

unintentional upon Clare's part,— and gave him a surprise when we discovered it.

"Well," he declares, "I never knew or loved another child, what more likely than that she should form the warp and woof of my dreams."

The certainty of the likeness was decided beyond a question, by the little lady herself—who when taken one day by her sisters, to the Exhibition rooms, sprang from May's detaining hand, the moment her eyes rested upon it, crying to the amusement of the bystanders,

"Me! Me! oh pretty me, let me kiss pretty Tiny!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARCH.

Mr. Lea, a widower of perhaps forty years of age, has been staying in this city for the greater part of the last winter. He is a man of wealth and high respectability, and has but two children, Mary and Laura. He has done me the honor of making me an offer of marriage.

He was very manly and open in the manner of his proposal, stating that it was because his home was so desolate that he sought to make another the sharer of his life.

"The wife of my youth must ever be loved, although with a mournful affection. My Mary in Heaven must ever share my heart with the dearest upon earth."

But for the sake of his daughter who loved me, for the sake of himself, who needed and would cherish me and mine so tenderly, he besought me to give him hope.

Of course I refused him, thanking him for his kindness, but assuring him that my intentions were, never to contract a second union.

He was grieved, hoped it would make no difference in our relations as friends, and so on, which, of course, I gladly concurred with, and there the matter rested, my quondam lover becoming my esteemed friend.

Mary was grieved and disappointed for a while, and let the secret out (by her efforts at pettishness) to the elder portion of the family.

We talked the matter over. Ernest was disposed to be very indignant about it, and say some very severe things.

Harley looked unutterably uncomfortable under his re-

marks, and to relieve him, and silence Ernest, I made light of the affair, acting as though such things did not wound and hurt me terribly as they in reality do.

Before the night was over, I had cause to regret my slight attempt at diplomacy. Regret it with bitter scalding tears, and the heartache of a whole week.

We were talking late in the afternoon, and as soon as it was passed, I thought no more of the conversation.

During study hour, which is always immediately after tea, while the rest were busy, I was seated alone reading, when Estelle came in, saying:

"Harley and I are going to Thackeray's lecture; I wish we could induce you to go, Bertha."

"Oh, I will content myself with hearing you deliver the lecture when you return," was my answer.

When they had been gone awhile, Ernest came in and throwing himself into an easy chair began to read. We sat so long silent, and my book which was "The House of the Seven Gables," enchained me so completely, that I had forgotten I was not alone, when suddenly his voice brought me back from Miss Hepsibeh's little shop to my own little sitting room.

"Bertha, what did you mean to-night, tell me?"

"Mean, when? what on earth is the matter, Ernest? you look as if you meant to eat me, do you?" and I drew back in feigned alarm.

"Oh, Bertha, Bertha," he said in a low tone almost like a groan, "pity me! pity me!"

"I do, Ernest, I did not know you needed my pity, what is it, what ails you, dear?" I replied, going to his side quickly,

He clasped me suddenly in his arms, and holding me so tightly to him I was almost breathless, said:

"Darling, darling, sweetest, I love you! God help me, I love you. Day and night for years have I knelt praying to you with wordless agony, and never daring to tell you of the burning love in my heart. How that heart was bleeding, loving you always in vain, my angel, my darling, my Bertha."

At first I was stunned. I heard every word so distinctly, never losing one letter, every sound fell upon my brain like burning lava; and when the last words were said, and he

kissed me wildly, it seemed as though the fiery flood had reached my heart's core, and with the words:

"Pity, Oh my Father!" I fell lifeless upon the floor. When I knew anything again, I was lying in his arms, the cold air piercing me, while he rained hot passionate kisses upon my face, calling in wild agonized cries upon me, by every love tone and name, to speak to him. Even now, the shuddering horror of that awakening, the dull disgust I felt for him, the utter loathing, comes over me like an evil dream.

I could for the instant have killed myself and him, for it seemed better to be lying dead upon the dark gravel below us, with our white faces turning whiter and colder in the moonlight, than to live on, when his love kisses lay like a heavy pall of pollution upon my brow. Love kisses! and for me! oh the vow I had taken into my soul, that sad night long ago, had been broken, had been ruthlessly crushed away from, me and I stood forsworn, though God knows by no deed of my own.

Could I help but hate him for the instant, as these thoughts rushed like a strong flood through my mind? Could I help saying what I did, as I rose, a fierce bitter pride giving me a momentary strength, and freeing myself passionately from his clasping arms, winding my own round the iron bars of the verandah.—

"Leave me! leave me! Ernest, I hate! oh I hate you!"

For one moment he paused irresolute, as if he did not take the meaning of my words, then as the moon pale and cold, fell upon my passionate face and shrinking form, a swift agony swept over his, and with a low cry of horror he sprang through the window, into the room.

That sharp quick cry, sounding like the wail of a broken heart, the wild look of woe upon his face, which even then, struck me as full of strange manly beauty,—the despairing hopelessness of his actions, recalled me to a sense of what I had said and to whom.

My old friend, the dear comrade whom in old times had been near and dear to us: all the love of my heart for this friend of years, came quickly upon me. I had known him so long, he had been so tender and faithful, it came over me with a mighty throe of regret, that I had been un-

kind to Walter's early friend, his tried true friend, and I cried aloud in sorrowful remorse,

"Earnest, dear Earnest, come back!" but it was too late, for even as I spoke rushing with quick step to the stairway, I heard the hall door clang after him.

Oh the pain it struck into my heart,— what would happen now,—where was he gone,—what would the end be! and I went bitterly back to my old place on the sofa, and lay with my hands clasped over my eyes, picturing a thousand dreary things, the oftenest and the dreariest, a solemn river upon which the moonlight lay, and far down in the depths where the moonbeams could not come, a tall form with dark tangled curls laying heavily above the white temples which had ceased to throb, and the white face as I watched floated up and up, until it lay with the calm unfeeling moon shining into the eyes from which the soul's light had faded,— I could not rid me of the picture.

"And if it should be, and I the cause, God pity me," burst from my white lips, but the last word brought a comfort with them, did God ever cease to pity me. Oh my Father I know now, that the grief of that night is happily past, thou heardest my prayers, and answered them. Not far away, oh my God, not distant from thy poor child, but so nigh, so graciously nigh ever. My Father who pities me.

When the others came in and sat talking, I could not bear it and went silently down to the deserted school-room, and in the darkness paced up and down trying to think, a vain effort then.

But when I could remain alone no longer and went back to the gay party above, I was fain to hide my eyes from the bright light, and my ears from their gay merry prattle, in a shaded corner.

But bye and bye even this was unendurable, for I could not hear the sound of the street door, though I strove never so hard, above the laughing ripples of their young voices. And he might come, and go again and I would not know it.

I bore it quietly, sitting with my fingers tightly upon my eyes, pleading the headache which was nothing to the heart-ache below, to which it was but the faint accompaniment, until at last it was too much and I sprang up saying, as much like myself as I could,

"Oh Harley, would you mind doing something for me to-night?"

He looked surprised but arose instantly, and leading the way to his room said,

"Certainly, I will do it willingly."

When he had closed the door he seated me in a chair, for my strength was all gone now, and I shook like an aspen leaf.

"What is it, little sister, what is this trouble?" he asked.

"Ernest," I said in a quick, breathless tone.

"What of him?" and I felt him start as he held me, "what of Ernest, dear?"

"Save him! save him!" I said throwing myself into his arms as the vision of the river and the sad white face upon its bosom came before me. "Oh Harley if he comes to harm what shall I do, the sin will be mine."

He was very pale, bending over me a moment he said,

"Poor sister, poor little Bertha, it is a sad fate which compels us, who should protect and guard you, thus to persecute you, thus to stir the fountains of your quiet heart," then after a moment he added, "only be patient my sister, all will be well, God is very gracious He will not afflict even you whom He draws home by sorrow, beyond what you are able to endure."

For a moment he was very still, I think he prayed for me, then he went to the door opening it and I could just hear,

"Marion I want to speak to you a moment," above the hum.

"What is the matter?" she asked as she closed the door.

"Marion," he said slowly and calmly, "hear me quietly, something is the matter, do not get excited, your Uncle Ernest and mamma have had some trouble, and he has gone away displeased and she is distressed, do not speak to her now my pet, she is not able to bear it, and I want you to be quite calm, for I depend upon you to get all the rest quietly to bed, can you do it without attracting attention, to anything unusual?"

"I am quite cool, dear Uncle, certainly, trust me."

"I do dear, if you are not to be trusted I know not who is, go love," and he laid his hand tenderly upon her arm.

I sat up white and anxious as she went out, wondering in a dull sort of way what she would do.

"Dear me," she began as she left the study door, "they quite mystified me, mamma and Uncle Harley closeted and I called in, I began to suspect some grand conspiracy, and

here, I am simply requested to bid you good night for mamma, whose poor head aches so sadly she can not undergo a siege of kisses well as she likes them," then she added—

"So as they have some work upon the *tapis*, if you think best Aunt Estelle, perhaps it would be as well to get the house quiet, and let them sit here, for Uncle Harley has let his fire go down, and it is quite cold in there. The first hour in the morning will be drawing instead of Algebra or German, as both Dr. Wilbur and Mr. Raymond may be otherwise engaged young ladies."

"What happy inspiration made her think of that, dear child," muttered Harley, as he stepped out into the room.

"Marion dear, do not inconvenience the young ladies by sending them away post haste, if they prefer staying up longer"—he began.

"I do not think they will prefer doing anything but just what would please mamma best," she said quietly, "and I think she must need rest sadly when she feels unable to say good night to her flock of bonnie bairns."

Then, when they were all gone, she came softly up to me and laying her soft hands upon my forehead:

"Dear mamma," she said, "can I do anything else to help you?"

"No, darling, nothing else."

"Then, good night, sweet mother, call me if you need me?"

"But do you not want to know what all this trouble means?"

"Not now, dearest, you are not able," then in a whisper she said, "I think I do know already, he would have been what Mr. Lea asked to be,—now we need speak of it no more."

As soon as she had gone, Harley went out on what was, of course, a fruitless errand; for an hour, I sat cold and chilled waiting for him; Marion came in and wrapped a shawl around me, and I saw her no more.

Harley came back and insisted I should go to bed and let him wait up; but this would have been an aggravation of Ernest's misery. So at last he went to his room, shutting me up in mine. But I only stayed a little while until the house was still again; then I went down and paced the whole night up and down the hall and lower rooms.

And hour after hour passed, but he came not; every stroke of the clock struck a knell into my heart; but it did no good, and when the grey shadows stole up the old staircase, I followed them, and crept wearily into bed, not to sleep, only to pray.

In the morning, my pale cheeks were easily accounted for by last night's headache. How I dragged through the day, I know not; but it seemed a week in length. Late in the afternoon, I laid down again, striving vainly to gain some sleep, when suddenly Harley came to my door, bringing a note from Ernest to himself:

Dear Harley,—I am so engaged, I shall not be able to come home through the day. Tell the rest not to be anxious if I do not come back for a couple of days.

In haste, E. WILBUR.

"It was sent by a boy who was gone before I could make any enquiries."

"No matter, thank God he is safe; show this to the rest, it will account for his absence."

Now I had assurance of his safety, I was comparatively relieved, and could wait in patience until he returned.

The next day, late in the afternoon, Marion came to where I was seated, and whispered:

"I saw Uncle Ernest go into his office a moment since."

Without a word, I went swiftly down the staircase to the little room which after class hours he still uses for his office.

He sat at the table, his head buried in his hands, and never moved when I opened the door.

"Ernest," I said, laying my hand upon his arm; but he made no answer, nor seemed to notice me.

"Ernest! my brother, speak to me," and I drew away his hand from before his face. Oh what a pale haggard face it was. God pity me that I was the cause.

He spoke no word, but gave me such a look. Oh, I could not endure it. I threw my arms wildly round him, saying, in an agony of grief and repentance:

"Forgive me, my brother, my heart is broken!"

"Bertha! Bertha!" he murmured; then, after a pause in a broken trembling tone he added, "you do not hate me now?—I was mad—I was frenzied then, I—"

But I laid my hand over his lips, hushing his reproaches.

"I know, I know, we were both beside ourselves; but it

is over now, we will speak of it no more. This thing must come no more between us. Walter Percy's wife and dearest friend, must have no unkindly thoughts against each other. My brother must not desert me."

"My sister, my patient enduring Bertha, Walter's little wife, I have done you a grievous wrong. But, oh I loved you so, this love has grown within me every day. I have fought against it night and day until I deemed it conquered. Oh forgive me, my sister, that it was not so! For one hour it gained the mastery over me, and made me a madman. But now—now I have put it away with a strong hand, and will keep it far from your sight ever more.

Through such sore temptations and horrors have I come since we stood together, that my strength is well nigh gone, but my will is strong, to subdue whatever may distress you, henceforth you need not fear me. Will you trust me sister?"

"My brother Ernest! yes! through all I will trust and bless you ever more, my own true friend—"

But this time had sorely afflicted him. That night a raging fever laid him low, and for more than a week he was entirely delirious. Then he recovered, but so slowly, that now he has gone on a long traveling expedition to recruit his health and spirits, by a change of air and scene.

Poor fellow, his reproaches were so bitter, so heart-felt. I know what he so plaintively asserts is true.

"I could not help it for this time, it mastered me."

This unwise and marvelous passion, which has so shocked me, will be put away now, I know it will, I know I may trust him,—for he is a strong brave hearted man, and not a silly pining boy, sighing for what is unattainable.

Now he is gone away—and when he returns, we will meet as though this had never been.—

This coming month Stuart is to graduate at the High School, then we shall have plenty of work to do, getting our boys ready for leaving home. It will be hard to loose them all at once, but it seems best, for I fear to have Howard away from Stuart's influence.

His school associations are beyond my reach, and I shudder to think my little truthful boy may become tainted with the evil influences by which he may without my knowledge be surrounded. But Stuart can watch over his out door associations, and direct them always as now.

And moreover this house full of girls is not the best place to bring up a boy, they spoil him. His winning gentle ways, make him a favorite with all. And I dread lest he grow effeminate wanting that strong, self reliance so admirable in man.

There is an excellent school, near the college, (Yale) where the two older boys are going, therefore we have resolved to send him thither. Not as a boarding scholar however, that would be but an aggravation of my troubles. But instead of taking one room, as was first intended; they will take two as pleasant ones as they can procure near the college, and Howard will be with them.

I have such a safe contented heart when I think over this arrangement, I cannot doubt but it is for the best.

In the months upon months which must roll away while we live apart what a comfort it will be to think,

"Stuart has Howard in his arms safely locked up to-night," or else, "Howard is sure to know his lessons this morning, because Stuart learned them with him last-night."

And then when Stuart is worn out with too much study, the other two will do him good with their merry talk and tricks, that is a comfort too!

The house is bright and cheerful with their gay voices. Every old nook and corner seems to beam out with happiness, as their merry faces peep into it.

How we shall miss them, when they are gone, my noble boys. I shall pine for them, I will look in vain for my frail Howard's pleading eyes, and tender embraces. I will sorrow that my fervent loving Clare no more pours into my ear his dreams of beauty: but more than all shall I miss the firm true helping hand of my own brave Stuart, true good wise soul, which were worthy of the dearest treasures of my poor heart. Often as I sit and watch them gay and free, laughing with some coquettish maiden, I say with a smile, "Youth and Hope are near akin."

In the first week of Earnest Wilbur's absence I received this letter which explains many things which were dark before.

"Bertha—forgive me, my heart is broken. Oh I have been mad—but am not now. Do you remember years and years ago when we two, Walter Percy and I came to your summer home in the sunny isle of the Mediterranean? Then in that time so

fraught with beauty, sunbeams and flowers— moonlight and songs,— mingling now in my memory, into one mist-like whole, I learned my first dream of love,— from it I awoke one night— seeing Walter Percy's arms woven round Bertha Howard as they stood looking out upon the moonlit sea.

"My Bertha, I had dreamed it might sometime be, but then I know my folly, what was I to compete with Walter Percy, whom all men worshipped, whom I with every pulsation of my heart, honored and loved; my noble, glorious friend.

"Then when I knew the love I craved could never be mine, I began the many years of pilgrimage you used to wonder at.

"Oh I strove in all those years to wean my heart from you, to remember *how* I was to love you— Walter's wife,— and when I met you years after in Paris with three bright little ones about you, I deemed my lesson learned,— and nursed the belief, you where no more to me than the wife of my friend should be.—

"But when I met you here a widowed, desolate woman— blame me not that the old love,—the old longings came back with tenfold force. Oh I could not help the strong wild wish to gather you poor weary child into my bosom, and guard you from life's storms,— but bear me witness that knowing your love and grief for my boyhood's friend, in all this time we have dwelt quietly together, with a great strength, I have kept out of sight my long tried love,— never by word or sign, giving you cause to doubt my brother-heart, until now.

"And, now it is all over, all the old sweet confidence: for the hope a few light words from you caused to spring up within me, I have wrested away from me your old faith, the dear trustfulness which has been my joy.

"Bertha, do not hate me, pity me, oh woman! you should not hate me that I love you. My soul is weary, so weary, moaning fiercely and bitterly over the evil I have done."—

It is without date or name, and yet how this letter speaks to me. The very chirography has a piteous appealing look about it which makes the tears well up to my eyes. Poor

Ernest, dear Ernest, come back, it is not hard to forgive you anything.

It shall make no difference, I will be his friend and he mine, as of old, only with this difference, we must oftener call to mind as Harley and I do, that we are brother and sister, it makes it easier I think for us to remember what is best. It seems so strange he should have loved me in the old time, the dear old time.

How the strange wild happiness of that summer comes over me, bright and beautiful, though a death, my precious mother's death, lies like a cloud at the end of it; but Walter helped me bear the sorrow, and thus even this cloud, else so dark and fearful, was made to have a roseate hue, and a circlet of silver round about it.

It seems a strange sad thing that what gave Walter and me such great happiness, should have caused one whom we both prized so highly, misery. Thus it is ever, the very flash which brightens and illumines one life, blinds and scorches another, perhaps better worthy of the goodness; but it is the other way too, the rule works both ways. I like to remember "there can be no rainbow without there is first a cloud."

CHAPTER XXXV.

APRIL.

STUART's examination passed off as we knew it would, first-best; but Stuart's triumphs have grown to be so certain now-a-days, that I tell him:

"The zest is half gone, now we cannot bring ourselves to doubt and fear beforehand."

Of course he protests with grave assurance against their being any certainty in the matter; but we know better, and are so proud of him we never doubt any good thing for him.

Brave heart, steadfast spirit. The *hardest* right always the one he chooses, duty, stern duty, the watchword which

he bears aloft. Following with a firm determined step and steadfast eye, "The Right," come what will, no matter for the thorns which line his way, no matter for the jutting rocks over which the path may lie, he never turns aside to an easier, but presses on through all danger and suffering, towards the shining light far above him, my true-hearted Stuart.

He is one in a thousand, nay in ten thousand, now with his manhood just gathering its mantle over him, his merry laughing eyes overshadowed with the thoughts of life and life duties. The true heart within him so earnest in its aspirations.

Oh, I do not fear for him, his way in life may be rough and thorny, I think it will be; but he will conquer all. Boy though he is, I reverence him, even though knowing it, it humbles him.

If my own Howard proves what Stuart is, I ask no more. I think he will, how can he help but be good: Walter, his father, a memory which will prove a shield, Stuart his elder brother, a firm example, a true friend to guide him. I oftentimes think of the poet's words, when I look at Stuart, he acts them so entirely:

"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not our goal,
Dust thou art to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."

MAY.

Last night for a long while Clare and I walked 'neath the shade of the old trees. The moon rode high and calm, a pale fair ladye in the skies, bright and serene, taking her nightly round, encircled with a starry crown; sometimes clear and pure—riding unhidden through the clear ether, but oftentimes with a sheen of silvery clouds athwart her brightness, casting a shadow where erewhile all was light.

Clarence is keenly alive to the beautiful in everything, especially the *beautés de nature*, bowing down soul and spirit before all that is fair.

As we walked up and down the shadowy paths, he confided

to me as his wont, his wild poet dreams,—his hopes for the future, and many a bright flash of glorious thought shone out from his boyish heart, as his fervent Italian tongue poured forth its flood of hopes and anticipations.

And when we stood taking a parting glance at the beautiful night, after our walk was a long while over, and we were communing silently with our hearts, he said while a sad light came into his eyes which had been glowing a little while before.

"I think the moon is such a fit semblance of one's own life, so fair and bright but now, nothing but beauty clustering round it, when suddenly the clouds gather thickly and heavily over it, hiding every ray of light, save a dim faint reflection, which lingers like the shadow of the gladness which is past."

"But then my boy, even while you watch with sad eyes the beauty overcast, the clouds are riven, and a ray of hope glances out, telling of a better time to come, and suddenly the fair pale moon pushing back the darkness which would yet envelope her, rides above, pure and bright as in the old times."

"Oh it is true, it is true," he said fervently, the old brightness coming back once more into his eyes; "and the clouds of sorrow themselves are silvered over with beauty, and make the good more enjoyable from contrast, oh yes, life is beautiful, even its clouds."

And we stood in the door way, watching the queen of heaven descend throwing her flood of silver lovingly over all things, even over this dark gray house, with its jutting corners and heavy arches, which never throw back one kindly glance, but dull and sombre stand cold and gray, half hidden by the shadows the old trees cast.

We stood thus hand in hand, and gazing with outward eyes upon the scene, took in a deep draught of contentment in this bit of earth and sky, which is vouchsafed to us amidst the stirring bustle of this ever busy city, the noise of which comes with a smothered sound over the high stone walls around us.

But my heart went back to other scenes and other days, to moons which shone so gaily once, which had no shadow over them for me, and I doubt not that the boy beside me,

thought of the young mother in her far away grave, over which this same pale moon kept a vigil.

When we turned to go in, Clare said in a low tone:

"It is beautiful, so beautiful, thank God."

And then he repeated the last verse of a poem we had read that night, by "Claudius," I think:

"Du der ilm gegeben,
Mit seinem trauten Licht,
Hast Freund' am frohen Leben
Soust gebst du ilm uns nicht."

Dear Clare, his soul is filled with an unfading beauty, and my old fear that he might come to be a dreamer, without the desire to do his appointed work whatever it might be, is over now. For though when we compare him with Stuart we do not call him a brilliant student, yet he is an earnest fellow, and has well earned the praises of his masters.

Above all, he has learned to conquer himself, "I have learned from 'Arty' to let dreaming be my reward for some piece of hard work," he says, laughingly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JUNE 28.

THIS year the girls pleaded very earnestly in this wise:

"Dear Mrs. Percy, we have always had a pic-nic in the woods, just as we had last year, except never on so grand a scale as then. It would not do to have such a coronation as we had last year every season, indeed we could not if we would, so please let us have a water-party this time."

"A water-party, I do not quite understand what you mean by that?"

"Oh, for the whole school with as many of their friends as are desirous of going, to take one of the elegant steamers