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Gertrude (Chapters 24-25)

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GERTRUDE.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“It grieves me, Mr. Austin, that I must leave you to-morrow for a few days.”

As Miss Bernard spoke this, her countenance, not less than her voice, spoke all that her words expressed, and much more. She spoke them with downcast eyes, and, when she ventured to look up, she was gratified to see in Henry’s face, a look which said that his silence was not that of indifference, but of surprise and concern.

“I am suddenly summoned to Washington,” she continued; “and shall see some of your friends there. What shall I say to them for you?”

She spoke this playfully, but her lip quivered, and her voice, for once, refused to obey her will. But her agitation was unnoticed, and she had full leisure to recover herself and observe that of Henry. Not a muscle moved, but a livid hue came over his pale cheek, a dew started from his lip, and the gaze of his eye was stony and without lustre, and without speculation. Yet he had enough of self-possession to utter the set form of words in common use on such occasions, and then sunk into silence, which she had no power to disturb. As he sat gazing on vacancy, she gazed on him with hardly less emotion than his own. She could not read all his thoughts, but she read enough to feel assured, that one feeling alone could cause the heart-broken desolation she witnessed. At length he said, “I hardly know whether I can yet use a pen, but I will try to trouble you with a letter, if you will be good enough to have the materials for writing placed near me.”

Thus courteously dismissed, the lady withdrew to give the necessary orders, not sorry for the termination of an interview, in which she had seen all

she wished and more. She did not see Henry again until late in the evening, when he sent to ask her presence in his room. He handed her a letter with a request that she would deliver it. This she promised to do, and, extending her hand, bade him farewell. He retained the hand, and said in a tone almost sepulchral, “May I ask, Miss Bernard, that you will deliver that letter *with your own hand,—and—and in the presence of no third person.*”

As he said this, he bent his head to his breast, and while his right hand grasped convulsively that of Miss Bernard, he placed the left above his brow, leaving only the ghastly paleness of his lips and cheek imperfectly visible. She gazed on him, and, for a moment, forgot herself, in her sympathy with suffering manifestly so intense. As if unconsciously, her other hand was placed upon his forehead, and bending over him, she said in a low voice, but in tones such as she alone could utter, “I will—I will—depend upon it, I will.”

What a charm there is, what dewy freshness to the burning brow of man, in the touch of Woman’s hand! Henry raised his, and pressed that soft hand to his forehead. It seemed to cool the fever of his brain; and tears, the first he had shed, gushed from his eyes. The hand was pressed more strongly, and he clung with a stronger grasp to the other. He bowed his head upon it, and brought it to his lips, unconscious of the tears that rained upon it. He raised his head and looked upon her face, so full of tenderness and sympathy, that to his eye it shone as the face of an angel. With convulsive energy, both hands were strongly drawn down, and, yielding to the force, she sunk upon his

bosom. For an instant he strained her to it, and again she stood erect. Again were both hands pressed to his lips, as he murmured—"bless you! bless you! kindest and best! May heaven bless you." He released her hand and she was gone.

In all this Henry was conscious of nothing more than the relief the heart over-burthened always feels, in the moment when first a secret and crushing affliction is disclosed to the ear of sympathy. It had not been his purpose to divulge his secret, but it had escaped him, and the weight upon his soul seemed lighter than before. But this relief was only for a moment, and as he returned to a full sense of his wretchedness, he wished that he could be again alone in the desolation of his heart, with none on earth to know its misery.

Miss Bernard was far differently affected. She reeled from the room, drunk with the rapture of that extatic moment, when she was almost crushed against the breast of him she loved. Whatever compunctious visitings had, but the moment before, disposed her to repair the mischief that had been done, and to aid in restoring a right understanding between Henry and Gertrude were dissipated;—and forever. She felt, that having effected a lodgment in the confidence of Henry, she had secured an avenue to his heart, which, once opened, is rarely closed; and she at once resolved, that it should be by no fault of hers, if that violent outburst of feeling did not prove most happy both for him and herself.

Animated by this hope, she took her departure for Washington at an early hour of the next day, and, long before night, drove up to the door of Mrs. Pendarvis. The first person to meet and welcome her was Mrs. Austin, who, running out, received her as she alighted from her carriage, embraced her fondly, and led her into the house. But in that short moment the wily matron found time to say—"Not a word about Henry. Gertrude knows nothing of his accident, and it would mar her happiness to learn the sufferings of her brother, as she calls him."

"And how is dear Gertrude? quite recovered I hope."

"O perfectly! though still feeble and delicate, but, in her romantic sentimental way, exceedingly happy."

"And what does this mysterious summons mean? A wedding I suppose. And when?"

"To-morrow night; and the next morning they are off for South Carolina. The Colonel thinks, and so do we all, that in this uncertain season of early spring a Southern climate may be of service to Gertrude's health. We say nothing of this to her, but she is all compliance."

"To-morrow night: and off next morning. That is very well, for positively I must return home at the same time. Indeed, I would hardly have left home, but that I wished to show Col. Harlston and

Gertrude how entirely I could sympathize in their happiness."

As she said this, the lady's cheek and brow glowed with indignant recollections of the taunts of Ludwell, and sparks of real fire seemed to flash from her eyes. Mrs. Austin, whose suspicions had been wide awake, was eager to disclaim them, and to assure her no such thought had entered the mind of her daughter, or the Colonel.

"There was certainly nothing in my conduct," said the young lady, "to justify any such suspicion; but I happen to know positively that the idea was insinuated to him by another, and he has, perhaps, by this time, hinted it to Gertrude. I am so thankful to dear Mrs. Pendarvis for giving me an opportunity to be present."

It was indeed to Mrs. Pendarvis, that Miss Bernard owed the invitation; for Mrs. Austin had a sort of undefined horror of the consequences which might attend an interview between the young lady and either of the parties. For herself, she secretly resolved that none such should take place except in her presence. And faithfully did she adhere to this resolution. She accompanied Miss Bernard to Gertrude's chamber, remained with her there, attended her to the parlor, and never trusted her out of her sight until she saw her lodged for the night in her own room. The next day, the same system of *surveillance* was diligently kept up, to the great satisfaction of Miss Bernard herself, who soothed her own conscience by the fact, that, at no moment, had it been possible, literally to deliver the letter with her own hand, without the presence of a third person.

I trust the reader enters into and approves the feeling which has restrained me from dwelling on the circumstances intervening between poor Gertrude's recovery and her marriage, which led to that event. The subject is so full of horror, that gladly would I draw a veil over the whole, and more than once have I regretted, that I ever commenced this "owre true tale" of heart breaking wretchedness. I will only do violence to my own feelings so far as to remind the reader, that in the eyes of Gertrude, Henry must have seemed the falsest and most heartless of mankind; while for Harlston, she could not help feeling a degree of grateful admiration easily mistaken for love. He was noble and generous—handsome, intelligent, and complete in all the lineaments of a gentleman. What more could woman's heart desire? She may have had a struggle with her feelings. None with her conscience. No sordid motive influenced her conduct. More sinned against than sinning, the error was hers: the crime was that of another. But, be it error or crime, it is one that never goes unpunished. The judgments of God are sure to find it out, for it is an offence against the law of Him, who so constituted the sexes, that they who are two may become one; and who frowns on the

union of any, whom he has not already united by that mystic tie, that blends into one the hearts of such as truly love. But the punishment will come; and if there be any, who, under its infliction, may be regarded as objects rather of pity than reproach, let me hope that poor Gertrude will be of the number.

She was married!

She was married! We read of a people who rejoiced at funerals, and mourned when a human being was ushered into this bad world. How they celebrated weddings we are not told. But we find the registers of deaths and marriages following each other in our newspapers, and often when we read, "she is married," O how often, had it been better, had we read in the following paragraph, "she is dead."

She was married. Was she happy? She certainly could not expect to be as happy as she might have been, but for the cruel wound her young heart had received. None such can "ever close without a scar"—and on her's the scar remained. Was it no more than a scar? She thought so. What love for Harlston, what hopes for herself could make her happy under the thought that he whom she had loved as a brother, and admired as the pattern of every excellence, was dead to generosity, recreant to honor, false, perjured and base? How could she but mourn; and how could her unselfish heart waste a feeling over her own loss, when she thought of Henry *lost to himself*? She thought, and she thought truly, that in the enjoyment of all besides that heart could wish, this idea would mar her happiness.

And Harlston—the generous, high-minded, noble, delicate Harlston! was he not the happiest of mankind? O yes, he was: for with a conscience void of offence toward God and man, he found himself in possession of that "pearl of great price"—the pure heart of an unsophisticated, devoted woman. To him, for reasons which the reader may hereafter know, there was nothing so precious—nothing which had caused so many anxious hopes and fears. But now his fears were at an end, and his hopes were swallowed up in fruition. For had he not assurance—proof—absolute certainty, that the hand of Gertrude Courtney would not be given but to the man of her heart: and when, at the altar she vowed to love, honor and obey, what though her hand trembled in his ardent grasp, what though her voice cleaved to her lips, what though the tears sprang to her beautiful eyes—what was all this but maiden modesty and filial regrets? Had ten thousand angels spoken from heaven, he could not have been more convinced, she that would never have yielded even a tacit assent to those words, had but the shadow of another stood between him and her heart. He was in Paradise. Aye! Paradise is but the type of human bliss. The serpent brood still lurks beneath the flowers, inheriting all the ma-

lignity, and much of the power of their father, the Devil.

The health of Gertrude was so delicate, that her husband's plan was to travel South, by slow stages; and every precaution was taken to guard her against the least discomfort or fatigue. On no account was she ever to be disturbed in the morning, and no day's journey was to be so long as to prevent her from retiring early to rest. The day after the wedding was, as Mrs. Austin had said, fixed for their departure, and Dumfries was to be the first stage. Harlston had left his pillow without even venturing to steal a kiss from the fair being who lay sleeping by his side. But her sleep was so calm, so tranquil, and, but that there was a little moisture on her long eye lashes, it seemed so happy. But she was about to leave her *mother*, perhaps forever, and a slight murmur, in which that word alone could be distinguished, interpreted the tear. He stole from the room, and gave orders that she should not be disturbed.

Breakfast past—Miss Bernard was gone, the carriages were all ready, and Gertrude still slept. The morning wore on, and yet her bell was not heard.

Poor girl! She had slept soundly, calmly refreshingly, and awoke to that sort of distinct consciousness of all the realities of her fate, which so often surprises us at such moments. Things forgotten, things imperfectly remembered—all the past and all the present were palpable before her. Henry, as he knelt by her side and vowed to devote his life to her happiness, was present to her eyes,—his burning words were in her ears—her glowing cheek rested on his shoulder,—her face was hid in his bosom—she heard the throb of that true, true heart: All this was real. All this had been. And how could it be, that he, so true in all beside, was false to her? Might there not have been some mistake—some series of mistakes? Did not her thoughts wrong him; and if so—?

Eager to escape these thick coming fancies, she was about to spring from her bed and hasten to her toilette, when, on the pillow beside her cheek, appeared a letter addressed to Miss Courtney. Was not the hand-writing Henry's? She hastily turned it over, and the well-remembered seal was there. To open it to read it, was the work of a moment. Time stood still with her, and no interval for hesitancy or reflection was allowed.

The letter ran thus:

"I hardly know with what purpose I write this letter; for I have nothing to tell you that you do not know, and nothing to ask to which I can expect an answer. To complain would be unmanly: to reproach you unkind, indeed unjust. I have no thought of doing either, and this I believe is all I have to say. No, Gertrude! No, my Sister! Fear no reproach from me. I persuade myself

that all you have done, was done in kindness—mistakenly done, but kindly.

“Was I not right when I prevented you from binding yourself by a vow, which you would so soon have wished to break? So soon! So soon!!! But what am I, to give laws to the heart, and to determine *how long* it shall be, before a simple country girl shall find a charm in splendor and fashion, in comparison with which, all that before had pleased, shall seem poor and mean? I was aware that all that has happened was possible, though in the fond delusion that possessed my mind I feared it not. I do not think that you mistook your feelings toward me. But we both miscalculated their strength. We were mistaken; and you now love another, and he will be—O! may he be to you all that I would have been!

“You see how calmly I speak of this. I own it costs me an effort, but surely the effort itself is enough to show that there is no reason why you should refuse to see me, through fear of giving me pain;—why you should even have refused to answer the letter handed you by Mr. Fielding. I am sure, (I repeat,) that it was kindly meant. I less wonder that you refused to see me, that you ordered the servant to say you were not at home, at the very moment when my ear was drinking in the music of your voice. You may well have shrunk from witnessing the pang you must have inflicted, had you admitted me. But why not break the matter to me by letter? Why leave me to learn my fate as I might from others, instead of mitigating it by one kind word to your long loved and devoted *brother*? Was all this done in the kind hope that resentment and disgust might take possession of my mind, and reconcile me to my loss? This must have been your purpose; and but that I should despise myself for such feelings, gladly would I have it so. No! I am wrong. I am unjust to you and to myself. Not for the world would I harbor a thought injurious to you. Not for the world would I abate one tittle of the intensity of that love, which prompted my vow to devote my life to you, and you alone. That vow is irrevocable; nor is its obligation to be weakened by any thing that has happened, or can happen. You will see me no more. Such is your own wish, and such is my determination. But you will hear of me Gertrude. You shall not hear that I am unhappy. You shall not hear that I have abandoned myself to sloth or dissipation, or any of the devices to which those resort, who know not how to cope with sorrow. May you be happy. May he whom you have honored by your preference, honor you in return, by making the name he bestows on you illustrious. But however that may be, it shall be my care, that in the proudest moment of your life, it shall not be your least pride to think of the love I have borne, and shall ever bear you, and to know yourself the leading star of my destiny. From

this moment I enter myself a candidate for fame, and you must not forget that whatever honors I may win are yours—a secret, mysterious offering, which you alone will understand, and by which alone, you shall ever be reminded of him who was once your own

HENRY.”

At a late hour of the morning, Gertrude had not yet appeared, and anxiety began to mingle itself with the impatience of her friends. Her mother at last determined to go to her chamber, where she found her half-dressed, with traces of tears in her eyes and on her cheeks, and with a countenance, which, though calm, betokened the deepest grief. But there was nothing in all this which the approaching separation from her friends might not explain. This interpretation was confirmed by the emotion of the poor girl at the sight of her mother. At once, to give expression to her natural feelings at parting, and to hide the far different emotions accompanying a half-awakened suspicion, she threw herself into Mrs. Austin's arms, and burying her face on her bosom, wept convulsively. This unchecked flow of tears took something of the weight from her heart, and recovering her self-possession, she finished her toilette, and went down to the parlor sad, but composed.

“What a piece of work is Man!” exclaims Hamlet. But what a piece of work is WOMAN!! Born to suffer, she indeed suffers well, wearing deep in her uncomplaining breast, the grief that corrodes the heart, while yet it breathes no sigh and sheds no tear. Man is unequal to the task of understanding the fortitude necessary to sustain poor Gertrude in the part she had to act. To woman this is no such mystery, and few, too few, are there, who have not had occasion to look out upon the world with smiling eyes, while the heart was torn with all the pangs of disappointed hope, or slighted love, or rankling jealousy, or cold neglect. As is the burthen, so seems to be the strength that bears it. Let but the respect she owes to herself or to the dignity of her sex be engaged to conceal her grief, and the greater the struggle, the more complete is her triumph.

So it was with Gertrude; and Harlston, who gave her all his sympathy, led her away from her weeping, but exulting mother, without discovering tokens of any deeper feeling than the occasion absolutely demanded.

CHAPTER XXV.

The reader can be at no loss to know, that Henry's fatal letter was placed on Gertrude's pillow by no hand but that of Miss Bernard. It was without date, and as Gertrude had heard nothing of his accident, she had no means of conjecturing when it had been written, or whence, or how it came. He

had never been named in her presence since the day of his unexpected appearance in Washington, and Harlston himself had never heard of his existence.

I own myself at a loss to interpret the conduct of Miss Bernard in this literal fulfilment of her mission. Her motives were probably mixed, and of a very opposite character. In her intercourse with Henry, the romance of her original passionate nature had been fully awakened, and she shrunk from the thought of saying to him, who seemed truth itself, that she had done what she had not done; and he had given her no right to decide whether the letter should be delivered or not, according to circumstances. The dread of displeasing him was the uppermost feeling in her mind. She wished, therefore, to be able to say with truth, that she had kept her promise. She had indeed good reason to suspect that she had but kept it to the ear. But how many are there of much stricter morality than Miss Bernard, who cheat themselves into the belief, that there is no falsehood in the uttering of true words, however false the impression they may convey to the hearer. There is perhaps no art more studied than that of telling the truth, so as to make others believe a lie. It is the great art of almost all who achieve what the world calls greatness.

Not only had she been entrusted with no discretion, but she had had no intimation of the contents of the letter. What right had she to know that it was not such a one as a brother, "as Gertrude called him," (so said Mrs. Austin,) might write to a sister? What right had she to presume him ignorant of what was about to take place? It might indeed be, that the letter was one which would be fatal to Gertrude's peace. But what then?—

Aye! What then? The answer to this question called up the feeling which it required all her ingenuity to cover over with excuses drawn from the obligation of truth and good faith. What then? What was Gertrude that her peace of mind should be Miss Bernard's care? Who but Gertrude had stood in the way of her designs on Harlston? Who now stood between her and Henry? Whatever might be the purport of the letter, all possibility of explanation was now gone, and no consequence unfavorable to her plans could come of it. And should these plans be baffled; should Henry remain insensible to Miss Bernard's charms, would it be no solace to the pangs of disappointed passion, to know that the cause of her disappointment was not more happy than herself?

Be that as it may, the deed was resolved on; and Miss Bernard, familiar with the localities, and the well-oiled noiseless lock, and carpeted floor, stole into Gertrude's room, laid the letter on her pillow, and vanished. But she was not so well satisfied with what she had done, that she did not shudder at the thought of meeting Henry's eye. She might have

reached home long before sunset, but she turned aside to dine and spend the evening with a neighbor, and delayed her arrival until he had retired to rest.

Hastening to her room, she seized her pencil, and wrote, in apparent haste, the following note, every word of which had been conned on the road.

"There was something mysterious in the invitation which summoned me to Washington, that led me to suspect, that I was called to be present at a wedding. But as the fact was not communicated to me, I had no right to hint my suspicions. The event proved I was not mistaken. Miss Courtney was married last night to Col. Harlston, and as my friend set out this morning for her Southern home, I had nothing to detain me from my *duty* to the *preserver of my life*. You were probably apprised of what was about to take place, and will rejoice to hear that the health of your sweet sister is quite restored, and that she is as happy as she has so much cause to be, in her union to a man, who, to great wealth, joins every estimable quality. Let me hope to see you in the morning, with your own health much improved.

L.

"The letter was *faithfully* delivered."

Neither part of this wish was fated to be accomplished. She did not see Henry next day, and it was reported that he had a return of fever, which rendered him invisible to her for more than a week. But the effect of this was to accelerate the knitting of his broken limb, and, when next Miss Bernard was admitted to his room, she found him pale and emaciated, but calm and self-possessed, and strong enough to move about the room.

Miss Bernard hoped that some allusion might have been made to the late event, to Gertrude herself, or at least to the family. In this she was disappointed. The reserve of Henry was impenetrable. He was less disposed to conversation than before, and conversed only on indifferent subjects. No topic was touched which afforded any opportunity for a display of sentiment, or the slightest manifestation of sympathy, and the lady had the mortifying consciousness, that she was making no progress to her object.

Matters continued in this state, until Henry was nearly well enough to travel, and had announced his intention of doing so in a few days, when one evening, as he and Miss Bernard sat together, a gentleman was announced, who wished to see Mr. Austin. Miss Bernard immediately rose to leave the room, but female curiosity suggested pretexts for delay, long enough to secure a glimpse of the features of the new comer. She thought she had seen them before, but where she could not remember, until, as she left the room, she heard Henry exclaim, "Ah! Fielding: my friend!"

She heard no more; but she had heard enough to make her repent of her curiosity. The possi-

bility of meeting with that gentleman and being recognized by him, was one of the dangers of her situation, which had never occurred to her. She still hoped that she might have left the room unobserved, and should he stay a week, she secretly determined that she would never be without a headache, or some other distemperature, to excuse her appearance in the parlor. But her hope was unfounded, for no sooner had Fielding returned the greeting of his friend, than he exclaimed—"But good Heaven! How is this? Did not I hear that Miss Courtney was married?"

"I understand she is," said Henry in a voice choked with emotion.

"I heard, too, that she had gone to the South, and yet I find her here."

"Here!" exclaimed Henry, with a start that, at another moment, would have sent a pang through his frame. "Here? Where? When did she arrive?"

"Was it not she who just left the room?"

The excitement of Henry's manner was gone in a moment, and he answered sadly enough, "O! no. That is her friend, Miss Bernard, who lives here. You have perhaps seen them together, and mistaken one for the other."

"You forget," said Fielding, "that I saw her alone, and handed her your letter. Whoever this may be, this is certainly the lady to whom I gave it."

Henry looked incredulous, but amazed, and Fielding added, "It may be that they are much alike, and if so, the resemblance is astonishing."

"You forget, my good friend," said Henry, struggling at a smile, "that you see so little of ladies, that you have never learned to look one in the face, and never know whether her eyes are blue or black."

"That is true enough generally. But I had more than an idle curiosity to see one who was an object of so much interest to you. Try me. I caught but a glimpse of this lady, but I will describe her. She is a neat and graceful figure, a little under the middle size, a brilliant, clear brunette, with rich, brown hair, and bright hazel eyes."

"Your description happens to be right, and but confirms what I have said. The lady you saw in Washington," (and Henry shaded his eyes, and his voice sunk as he proceeded,) "was tall, and a decided blonde, perfectly fair, with soft blue eyes and flaxen hair."

"The lady I saw in Washington! I tell you, man, this is the same."

"Impossible!" said Henry sadly. "Impossible. You must be mistaken."

"Well! Be it so. Be it so. I was mistaken. But I am not now. But let it be, and tell me of yourself—your health, and all about this cursed accident. It is not long since I heard of it, and I have just found leisure to visit you. By the bye, our friend Holcombe is in the same predicament.

He had a letter for you, and did not know where you were until I told him. He could not come to see you just now, and has enclosed it in this."

Saying this, he handed a letter, which Henry, using no ceremony with his friend, instantly opened and read as follows:

"MY DEAR AUSTIN,

I have just heard of your whereabouts, and will see you in a few days. Meantime I send the enclosed by Fielding. It was handed me the morning you left Washington, and I took it immediately to our room, but you were gone. Expecting to overtake you, I carried it to Baltimore, and have had it ever since. As it may be of some importance, I send it at once by Fielding, who is as regular as the post, and a thousand times as sure and faithful.

Yours truly,

HOLCOMBE."

The enclosed was Gertrude's short, tender, passionate note. It fell from his hands and the scales from his eyes. But the light it afforded was but "darkness visible"—for it opened to his view an abyss of crime and misery, in which he saw poor Gertrude, even more wretched than himself, the victim and the sport of fiends in human shape.

But who were they? Was Laura Bernard one of them? He again questioned Fielding about his interview with the supposed Miss Courtney, and satisfied himself that she had indeed been personated on that occasion by her treacherous friend. To Fielding, who was in all his confidence, he told all, as far as he understood it, and proposed that they should remain together that night and set out in the morning for Baltimore.

"What!" exclaimed the other. "I spend a night under this roof! I eat that woman's bread! Let me go at once. Let me not see her, for if I do I shall not be able to treat her with common civility."

"Be it so," said Henry. "But I *must* see her again, though but for a moment. Wait for me to night at the next public house, and send a carriage for me early in the morning."

To this, Fielding assented, and went his way. Full of anxiety and alarm, Miss Bernard was divided between a wish to see Henry, and a dread of the explanation that might ensue. Halting between the two, she passed the evening in restless agony, and at length retired, but not to sleep, without seeking an interview. This departure from the regular routine of her attention to her patient, confirmed him in the conviction that there was no mistake in Fielding's statement. Under other circumstances, the knowledge that Gertrude still loved him, and that she too was unhappy, might have brought on fever and frenzy. As it was, he saw at a glance, the course that lay before him, and prepared himself for action, with a coolness akin to

the intrepidity with which a brave man faces certain death. He accordingly wrote a polite note to the mistress of the house, apologizing for his abrupt departure which he attributed to a call of business, brought by Mr. Fielding; and another to the daughter, requesting that he might see her for a moment in the morning. How he passed the rest of the night needs not be told.

By sunrise he was ready for the road, and soon after the expected carriage appeared. He then repaired to the parlor. Miss Bernard was already there. She had passed the night in schooling herself for the interview, and she was composed, and her words and voice were under command. But the excited eye, the deadly paleness struggling with the dusky red, the swollen veins, the general aspect of despairing guilt, were things that would not disappear at her bidding; and it required no sense of moral deformity to make her hideous in Henry's sight.

"You are leaving us, Mr. Austin," she said in a tone rendered more pathetic by the very huskiness of her voice.

"I find it unexpectedly necessary, Madam. Before I go, give me leave to ask what was done with a letter to Miss Courtney, handed to you in January by my friend, Mr. Fielding."

The look which accompanied these words made all prevarication impossible.

"I gave it to Mrs. Austin," was the reply.

"And she? What did she do with it?"

"She burnt it immediately in my presence."

"Was she aware that such a letter was expected?"

"She was."

"Did she know the name of the person who was to deliver it?"

"She did."

"Had you any reason to believe that Miss Courtney expected it?"

"None. I was assured by Mrs. Austin, that the intimation that such a letter would be sent had not reached her."

"And was it at Mrs. Austin's request that you personated her daughter?"

"It was. It was," exclaimed she passionately, and blushing deeply at this humiliating confession.

"It was; but I had no idea what use she intended to make of it. I had no doubt she meant to give it to Gertrude, and remonstrate with her on the imprudence of a clandestine correspondence. She told me so. O Mr. Austin! O Henry! I was myself deceived; vilely, basely cheated."

In the fervor of this assurance, she clasped her hands, and bent forward, as if uncertain whether to throw herself at his feet or on his bosom. He stepped back, and she would have fallen, had he not caught her hand. Grasping it firmly, he placed her on a sofa, and bending over her, added: "One more question, madam. The letter I myself handed

you. It was delivered? To Miss Courtney, or to Mrs. Harlston?"

"To Mrs. Harlston."

"Then may the fiend you serve!"—he exclaimed, starting back. "Miss Bernard," he added, subduing his feelings, and speaking with solemn sternness, "as you would hope forgiveness from Man or God, let the mischief you have done stop here; and let the knowledge of this wretched transaction die with you."

She would have spoken in reply, but he was gone.

Henry could no longer doubt the part acted by Mrs. Austin. He had ascertained that his first letter to Gertrude had been suppressed, and the second intercepted by her; and that it was not by Gertrude herself, but by some other, that he had been repulsed from the door of Mrs. Pendarvis. Convinced of all this, he resolved to see her no more. The difficulty was to avoid exposing to his father the conduct of his wife. This he resolved that he would not do, and he put his ingenuity to the utmost stretch to devise for himself such a course of action and such an account of his motives, as might afford no ground to suspect his dissatisfaction with her.

As soon as he reached the place of his destination, he wrote as follows:

MY DEAR FATHER:

"You will be gratified to learn that I am sufficiently recovered to have left the hospitable roof, where I experienced so much care and kindness, and that I am so far on my way to Baltimore. I have stopped here to write this letter; because, as I am about to take a step of very great importance, I wish to apprise you of it without delay,

"My long confinement has afforded me much leisure for reflection on your affairs and my own. Your late losses, your feeble health, and your numerous family, all conspire to make me feel that I owe more to you and them, than I can ever accomplish by continuing at Bloomingdale. I must seek a larger and loftier theatre, and, not to halt between extremes, I have turned my thoughts toward the great commercial emporium of the Union. On such a theatre, I am aware that success is more doubtful, but in the like degree is it more desirable, and the attempt is more congenial to the new maxim, (*magnis decidere ausis*), by which I have resolved to govern myself in future. In coming to this determination, I have not consulted you, not because I distrusted your judgment, but because I feared the bias of feelings which I had found it so hard to overcome. I do not fear that you will think me deficient in duty and respect, or attribute to any selfish feeling my conduct, in putting every thing to hazard, in the hope of rendering myself essentially useful to you and yours. All I am, and all I have, or may acquire, are yours. It is not

probable that I shall ever marry ; and you will perhaps guess my meaning, when I add, that I would not return to Bloomingdale at this time, because I wish not to revive feelings that must be painful, or to recall thoughts that ought to be forgotten. Hence this apparently sudden resolution. It is perhaps sudden ; yet taken on full deliberation. My prudent and sagacious friend, Fielding, who alone is enough in my confidence to be put in possession of all the facts, fully approves it. The main point is the correctness of my estimate of myself. It would be vain to attempt to correct that by appealing from the partial judgment of self-love to the no less partial judgment of a father. On that point a candid and disinterested friend is the best counsellor, and Fielding bids me go on and prosper. I shall tax my good friend, Edwards, with the proper disposition of such of my unfinished business as he cannot attend to, among my brethren of the bar. To him, too, I shall commit the collection of my debts, on the faith of which, Fielding, whose outer coat of formal business habits covers a most generous heart, has advanced me all the money I shall need, until I can make more.

“ You see then, my dear father, that my resolution is not only taken, but in actual course of execution. I saw enough of New-York, when there, to satisfy me as to the advantages of the position, and I am now on my way thither. On my arrival I shall keep you advised of my plans and prospects in detail. Let me hope that all may meet your approbation. Commend my love to all who love me, and think of me ever as your dutiful and devoted son,

HENRY.”

And Henry has separated himself forever from the friends of his youth ; and Gertrude has gone to the broad Savannahs and blooming fields of the South ; and Dr. Austin plods on in the duties of his profession, laboring to make some provision for his little children ; and Mrs. Austin, secure in the possession of the grove, and enabled by the liberality of Harlston to prosecute her little plans for improving and ornamenting the grounds, is the happiest, the proudest, the most self-satisfied of mothers. Her conscience was silenced by the maxim, “ that the means may be sanctified by the end,” and she easily persuaded herself that Gertrude was happy, and Henry not miserable.

How far she was right in these conjectures may one day be told. It may have been seen how my pen has dragged along over the pages that unfolded her machinations and their consequences. The effort it has cost me, makes me doubt whether I can ever man myself to the task of tracing to the end the history of two fond and true hearts, that never more found peace until they rested beneath the clod of the valley.