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Gertrude (Chapters 12-15)

N. Beverley Tucker

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GERTRUDE.

CHAPTER XII.

The letter ran thus :

“ If my dear sister has expected to hear from me, she must, by this time, have learned enough from others to account for my silence. It cannot be necessary to tell you more than you already know, of late astounding events. But you may like to hear how we have borne them; for I am sure, that, when they first reached you, it must have been your most earnest wish to be with your mother in her hour of trial and distress. I was myself almost selfish enough to desire the cheering influence of your presence, but I did not permit myself to wish you taken from the gay scenes where you have so much to make you happy, and harassed by the anxieties, bustle and confusion attendant on our preparations to leave this sweet and beloved spot. But, in truth, we have borne it better than I could have hoped. My father, you know, is not sanguine, and, therefore, not liable to be cast down by misfortune. When he saw the blow coming, he dreaded it most on account of *our* mother, (I am indeed proud to call her so,) and he never doubted his own firmness but when he thought of her distress. Little did he know her nobleness of nature and the energy that lay hid beneath the softness of her manners and the delicacy of her habits. She has shown herself a heroine worthy of those days, when a lady girded on her husband's sword, and sent him forth to do battle, strong in her confidence and shielded by her hopeful prayers. Upon the whole, we have all learned to look upon the thing in its best light and to feel precisely as if we never had been any richer than we now are. My father still possesses the means of maintaining his family and educating his boys, as long as his life is spared. Should he be taken from us, I shall be in condition to take his place; and if he lives but a few years longer, William and George will be prepared to assist me. In that case the younger children, (and especially *our* dear little sister,) will probably miss no comfort and no advantage they would have enjoyed had this thing never happened. The worst consequence to my father is, that it will now be impossible to persuade him to withdraw from business, and take the indulgence his years require. In short, my dear Gertrude, you are the only real sufferer, for it may be, that now your mind may be less at ease than heretofore, in what you perhaps may call your *dependent* situation. It is to relieve you from this thought—to banish it from your mind, that I write this letter. I know that my father feels towards you, in all things, as if you were his own daughter, and I understand enough of his affairs to know that, so long as he lives, he

will still be in condition to discharge the duties of a father as heretofore without any inconvenience to himself. The only doubt is of his ability to make such farther provision for you at his death, as may guard you against dependence in *future*. Surely I need not say, dear Gertrude, that, while I live, you can never be dependent but on one, whom duty and inclination would alike prompt to save you, not only from want or inconvenience, but even from one anxious thought, or painful feeling. I ought not even to have said this, lest it seem to imply the possibility of your doubting it.

But what room can there be for such fears on account of one, with whom the wealthiest of the land are eager to share their fortunes? None, my sister, unless through extreme delicacy and fastidiousness this advantage be thrown away. Do not suspect that I am going to join the cry of those who blamed you for not sacrificing yourself for gold to the coxcomb A.—the brute B.—the fool C.—the knave D. and so on down the alphabet, and to the end of the catalogue of purse-proud wretches, who have had the insolence to presume, that charms like yours were to be purchased by the highest bidder. I mean no more than to suggest, that the contrast between these and the men that now surround you, is a fair measure of the advantage of your position. Not only will your hand be always sought by the foremost in the society, in any place where you may happen to be, but none but the foremost will presume to approach you. It is only in country places like this, that you are in danger of being insulted by the addresses of knaves, fools or clowns. If you happen to meet, at Washington, any one of those I have mentioned, you will find him standing aloof, as if spell bound, and only admiring you at a distance, as a tavern waiter admires a princess. B. has gone there and if you see him, you will find this remark verified. Now “there is a tide, you know, in the affairs of men,” (and yet more of women, who, doomed to passivity, must wait its rising,) the flow of which is not to be neglected. I am not going to unsay any thing I have formerly said on this subject, but merely to guard what I have said against misconstruction. It is base and wicked to marry for money; but it is neither base nor wicked to try to keep a check upon the affections in one case, and to give the rein to them in another direction. It is indeed quite inconsistent with those romantic notions, which are so beautiful they deserve to be true, and so sweet it is a pity they are not wise, to be at all influenced by pecuniary considerations in making our choice, even though the choice thus made be made sincerely. But even this is no reason for resisting a bias which has no existence, and checking the motions of love in the heart toward one who is rich, when, if he were but poor, he might be the object of passionate and romantic attachment. Your mother has just been speaking to me of one, to

whom these ideas are probably quite applicable. I mean Colonel Harlston, of the House of Representatives. I infer this, in part, from the favorable impression he seems to have made on you, and in part from his character, as given to me by those who know him well. If this may be depended on, he is not deficient in any one quality which should commend him to the favor of a lady. His standing is so high, his merit of every kind so unquestionable that any woman, *whose heart is disengaged*, would be accounted fortunate in attracting his regard. I am but speaking of what others tell me; and I know him only through those whom friendship may incline to speak too favorably of him.

My father, who accompanies our mother, will tell you all the particulars of his misfortunes, which you do not already know. For the news of the neighborhood, I refer you to your mother herself. But it is my own privilege, dear Gertrude, to tell you how tenderly I am your brother and friend.

H. A.

“Cleverly got up,” said Henry to himself as he read over this piece of diplomacy. “I hope she will understand those underscored words, and see that all I have said is to be regarded only as a pretty lecture on prudence, which does not apply, and is not intended to apply to her case. But suppose she should not happen to understand this! What will she think? That I think myself now too poor to think of a poor wife? Then she will expect to hear, by the next advices, that I have made up my mind to Miss Thornhill, with her acres, and her slaves, and her guineas, and her jewels, and her folly, and her indelicacy;—though of that no one knows any thing but myself. That ever a woman should expect to win by wooing! Well! Gertrude shall not misunderstand me. So here goes for a *ruse d’ amour*. I ought to be ashamed to practice on the confidence of that noble-minded and sincere woman, by making her the unconscious bearer of a postscript to unsay all this; but the secrets of the heart are its sacred franchises, and we have a right to guard them. Besides, we do not mean to *do* any thing without her approbation. Gertrude would not, nor would I have her capable of it. Indeed I am not sure the good lady did not mean to give me a hint that she suspects the truth, and does not entirely disapprove it, though she may wish to give this Carolina nabob a fair chance.”

While thus soliloquising, he folded his letter, cut a piece of paper to fit it exactly, trimmed his pen to a fine nib, and then, in the prettiest, mysterious-looking little characters, wrote on it as follows:

“I take it for granted, dearest G., that the mysterious aspect of this paper will catch your attention and secure it the first reading. Otherwise I should flatter myself, that the perusal of the envelope would give you more pain than I have a mind to inflict. As it is, I seize the occasion to assure

you that, in all my difficulties, you have never been absent from my mind, and my constant thought has been how much these difficulties would enhance our mutual love and mutual enjoyment, by making each more necessary to the happiness of the other. But this is not all. The conversation with your mother, which led to the writing of this letter, inspires me with a hope, that, without suspecting our attachment, she would really not be sorry to hear of it. So strong was this impression on my mind, that, had it not been your secret as well as mine, I should have let it out. I have not room to tell you what passed, but I will do so in a few days and then you have my consent to speak out or not, according to your own judgment. I go to — in the morning, and, as soon as I return I will write to you more fully. I shall send my letter under cover to my friend, Mr. Fielding. I presume you do not know him, for he does not visit at Mrs. Pendarvis's, and is too much a man of business to be a man of pleasure. But he is a gentleman—delicate, honorable and true as steel. He will call at 11 o'clock in the morning of Friday week and send in his card to you. That hour is too early for fashionable visitors, so that you may have the drawing-room to yourself. It may be well to let him find you there. I have but left room for one word more, and in that word my whole soul breathes itself out to you. *Love.*"

The letter was folded—the mysterious postscript duly enclosed and Henry was about to seal it unceremoniously with a wafer, when a new thought struck him. To his watch there hung a beautiful seal, exquisitely engraved, which had been given him by his mother. There was a something romantic in her family history connected with this seal, which had made it an object of peculiar interest to him and, of course, to Gertrude. They had often looked at it together, and talked over the sad tale of the faithful but unfortunate love of her to whom it had once belonged. It was a tale of a former generation imperfectly recollected, and perhaps garnished with more circumstances of an interesting character than properly belonged to it. The history was one which made the seal appropriate to the occasion, and, though he did not write on rose-colored paper, or make use of perfumed wax, yet he did use wax, and stamped it with an impression which he knew Gertrude would love to look upon.

Dr. Austin, exhausted by the fatigues of a busy day, had gone to rest. His wife, still engaged in preparations for her journey, had just thrown herself, for a moment, into a chair in the parlor, when Henry entering, handed her the letter.

She took it, and seemed to be about to look into it, as a matter of course, when she observed the seal. She only said carelessly, "O! it is sealed;" when Henry, in reply, more to the action and look than the words, said, "Gertrude will show it to you."

"I shall ask her to do so," said the lady, "for it will give me my cue for saying what I wish to say. That is my only reason for wishing to see it. Your influence with her is so great, that whatever I may urge will have double weight, if I take care to shape my advice so as to secure for it the support of your authority."

"I am satisfied," said Henry, "that if you go no further than I have done, you may count on her ready acquiescence. I have only advised her to give her judgment and her heart fair play, and to let no idle fear of being thought mercenary, deter her from securing the substantial advantages that wealth affords."

"Thank you, my son. That is exactly what I would have you to say. And now good night: for I must go to my room and finish packing. How long I may be kept up I do not know; and heaven knows I am weary enough. What o'clock is it? My watch has stopped. Pray lend me yours, for positively I will not work after midnight, whatever I may leave undone. Thank you. Good night."

We sometimes see persons so old that we wonder if they ever could have been young. And yet they have been; and, what is more, few ever live so long as to forget the incidents and feelings of youth. Mrs. Courtney herself was one of those with whom "the course of love did not run smooth," and, her heart still clinging to the memory of her first husband, she loved to recollect the many devices by which, in their case, passion had sought to hide itself from the watchful eyes of parents and guardians. The device of Henry was certainly his own, but it was no new invention. The interest he took in Gertrude could not be mistaken. Since her departure it had been more apparent than ever. The mention of her name never failed to call up manifestations of deep thoughts and feelings. But in these there was nothing of the restlessness and eagerness he had sometimes displayed while she was at home. There was an obvious sense of security—the confidence of a man sure of himself in the achievement of some high purpose. In short, Henry and Gertrude understood each other. She was sure of it. *And yet she was not sure of it:* and the means of removing every doubt were in her hands.

Mrs. Austin hastened to her own room. The poker was thrust into the fire. It was red hot. She poised it in her right hand. She held the letter in the left. She hesitated. What was she about to do? If the letter contained nothing that was not meant for her eye, she was doing no wrong. If treachery had been practised, she had a right to defend herself against it, by such means as the artifice used against her put into her hands. The glowing iron was brought near the wax. It yielded. It gave way. The letter was opened: the inclosure withdrawn; the folds were replaced and the

impression restored. Had the heart and countenance of Mrs. Austin borne no more marks of what had been done than appeared upon the wax, all would have been well. But the next morning her countenance was all unruffled. She met Henry with a smiling eye and an open brow; took leave of him most affectionately, and Judas himself could not have given a more loving kiss than she bestowed on him at parting.

CHAPTER XIII.

In his journey to Washington Dr. Austin was not without a hope that he might recover something from the wreck of his affairs; and, as he had many friends, he thought it possible that, by effecting a loan, he might rescue his property from the harpies that were preparing to pounce on it. He was doomed to disappointment in both particulars. The bank was utterly gone, the assets wasted, and nothing left for stock-holders, bill-holders, or depositors. It was one of the first and most effectual of those *operations*, as they are called, that have since become so common. The number of persons ruined, and the yet greater number involved in distress and embarrassment made it impossible for one to assist another. "*Sanve qui pent*" was the order of the day; and it was unreasonable to expect that, in such an hour of universal dismay, any man would hazard his own safety in attempts, which might be unavailing, to rescue another from ruin.

A few days sufficed to convince the Doctor of the futility of any efforts he could make in Washington. But he had the satisfaction to find, as he had expected, that the welcome of Mrs. Pendarvis was more kind and cordial than ever. The arrangements made by her, for the accommodation and comfort of her sister, assumed at once an air of permanency, and every thing was done to make her feel, that the roof which had so long sheltered her was still her home, and, if necessary, would be her home for life. He saw something too of Colonel Harlston—enough to leave no doubt of his worth, and as little of his attachment to Gertrude. Of her feelings he was less able to judge. To all eyes but her mother's, sympathy with her parents in their misfortunes seemed to predominate over her mind. She was afflicted and distressed. Her eyes bore the traces of tears shed in secret, and, even in company, she was so little able to conceal her dejection, that it did not escape the eye of Colonel Harlston. He knew nothing of the cause, and could do nothing to soothe her, except by a manner which showed the desire to do so. And how were such manifestations met by her? Most gratefully. His sympathy seemed indeed, in some mysterious way, to add to her distress, and yet her eyes were sometimes lifted to his countenance with an expression which seemed to say, that, in him, she felt she had indeed a friend. To the good

Doctor in his simplicity, these things wore a doubtful, perhaps a hopeful aspect. The mother, who was in possession of a secret, with which she dared not trust her husband, saw more deeply. Perhaps she deceived herself. But to her it seemed that Gertrude's eye, in glancing at Harlston, spoke of the comparison she was making between his disinterested devotion, and the cold and cautious prudence of one from whose generosity she had expected so much, and to whom she had been ready to sacrifice all her brilliant prospects. Could she have so mistaken Henry? She was humbled and mortified at the thought: too much humbled to be indignant. But at times she felt that she wronged him, and then her indignation rose against *herself*, and her cheek glowed, and her eye flashed, and her whole aspect, to the self-deluding mother, seemed that of one, in whom a sense of wrong and just resentment are about to triumph over abused affection.

What the feelings of poor Gertrude must have been the reader knows as well as I do. If there be any that does not, any explanation I could give would be lost upon him. I can only speak of their effects. They affected her spirits, they affected her health. The anxiety of Harlston was awakened, and his sympathy became more manifest, and his attentions more tender. Were they more soothing? It was hard to say. Her eye would sometimes meet his earnest gaze with a glance, which seemed to say, that she could trust her whole happiness to him; and then anon, with burning cheek and excited eye, she would hurry to her chamber, and hide from all the workings of the deep thoughts that engrossed her. The Colonel saw that something distressing had occurred, and he saw that the distress was not confined to her. What it was he knew not, and he did not presume to ask. Perhaps it was something that would make his friendship more valuable, if it did not make his love more acceptable. Time would show. But meanwhile his visits became more frequent, and his intercourse with Mrs. Pendarvis and her family more intimate.

We must leave this state of things to work out their appropriate results while we accompany our good Doctor to that solitary home which was soon to be his home no longer. On his return he found letters awaiting him. One was from the gentleman whose offer to purchase the Grove he had accepted. He opened it with a glistening eye, as he thought, that now indeed his family were without a roof to shelter them, which he could call his own.

But a distress of a far deeper character awaited him. The letter ran thus—

"*My dear sir.*"

I was never more in earnest than in my offer to purchase the place where you reside; and I trust I shall not be suspected of caprice in withdrawing it.

But to guard against this, I have but to say that I am a considerable stockholder in the bank of — and the fund, from which I expected to pay for the property, consisted of my stock in that institution and a considerable sum deposited there. All this is lost. But I should still be glad to make the purchase; for I hope I can still afford to indulge my taste in the choice of my residence; but I find it impossible to raise the money without a sacrifice of other property. I should be ashamed to offer less than I have offered; but the price of all property is so stricken down by the distresses of the country, and innumerable failures, that it would take twice as much of other property to pay for yours, at the price I have offered, as would have sufficed for that purpose twelve months ago. I hope therefore you will not persist in selling. Indeed the attempt will be vain, unless you are disposed to take half price, which, I presume is not the case. But I much doubt whether you will not find it impossible to obtain more. I hope no necessity compels the sale. If so, I need not tell you, that I am the last man in the world to drive a hard bargain with a friend in difficulty. Would an exchange for other property of equal value suit you? Yours, &c., &c."

"Miserable comfort" indeed did the Doctor receive from this letter; and more anxious than ever were the thoughts which accompanied him to his pillow. The next morning he resolved to seek an interview with his friend Edwards, but just as he took up his hat to go out, he saw that gentleman riding up to the door. So far from expressing any surprise at the sad and anxious expression of the Doctor's countenance, that of Mr. Edwards wore the marks of yet greater concern.

"My good friend," said Edwards, "I wish I could announce myself as the bearer of comfortable tidings. You know I have given notice, according to McScrew's instructions, that the sale of this property is to take place in less than ten days. In the mean time my duty to him, and my interest in you have both led me to try to ascertain what may be the chance of finding a purchaser. Hearing of but one person who wished to purchase, and not believing that he has the disposition or the ability to pay a fair price, I wrote to McScrew, to know of him whether I should buy in the property for him, and at what price. To my great surprise, he declined to avail himself of my services, saying, that he had no disposition to become the purchaser, at any price. I was concerned to learn this; and moreover my own conscience reproached me for the injustice I had done the man, in suspecting, as I did, that he is urging the sale at this time, in order that he may get back the property for a song. I hardly knew how to believe that this was not so; when yesterday I chanced to discover, that McScrew was in correspondence with the paltry pettifogger, who had been pretending that he

wished to become the purchaser. Having my suspicion aroused by this, (for, unless McScrew proposes to do some dirty trick, he always calls on me,) I had recourse to a little dextrous cross examination, by which I discovered that he is to bid for McScrew, and if possible to get the property for less than is due."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed the Doctor; "I am indeed unfortunate! Not only is my property to be sacrificed, but, even then, I am to remain indebted to this rapacious and merciless wretch!"

"Not so," said Edwards. "I tried to learn from the fellow what he was authorized to give, and, on his refusal to tell me, I told him plainly that, on putting up the property, the auctioneer would be instructed publicly, not to cry any bid for a less sum than the amount for which it is bound. This drew him out: he insisted that I had no right to refuse any bid, however low, and declared that I would be obliged to accept any that might be offered. This put me in possession of his secret, and I thereupon drily told him, that the courts were open to his employer; but that, until constrained by an express decree, I should act on my own sense of duty. You may rest assured then, my good friend, that the sale will not take place at all on the day appointed, or that it shall forever release you from McScrew's clutches."

"This seems like scant consolation," replied the Doctor; "and yet I am not only thankful, as I ought to be, but I find myself rejoicing at what, half an hour ago, seemed, to my mind, the greatest calamity."

"I am indeed afraid," said Henry, who had been hitherto silent; "that the property will by no means command more than the debt. I had, until lately, no conception of the universal prostration of all prices."

"Be it so," said the Doctor. "But I shall at least be a free man, and with my diminished property, and the treasure that I have discovered in the heart of my noble-minded wife, I shall esteem myself richer than I was."

At this moment the door flew open and a figure sprang into the room that not a little startled the company. It was that of a beautiful girl, in the careless dress which young ladies in the country wear to school, with a chicken bonnet in her hand, and her loose hair, crisped by a slight sleet, that was falling, floating in natural curls upon her neck. "Like the sweet moon on the horizon's verge, the maid was on the eve of womanhood," her features beautifully regular, her dark eyes sparkling through tears, and her whole face glowing with health and excitement.

"What does all this mean?" she exclaimed, in entering. "Oh, uncle, how could you serve me so? Never to let me know that the dear grove was to be sold, until I found it out by chance! And there I saw it in the newspaper, and your name to it too."

You that have always pretended to be the Doctor's friend."!!

"And so he is, my dear Lucy," said the Doctor. "The best of friends. He has only done what he was obliged to do."

"Obliged to do it indeed! Who obliges him? And why is the place to be sold?"

"Because I am in debt, my dear; and I have no other means of paying my debts. But you must not quarrel with your uncle, for, if it were not for him, it would probably be sacrificed for the fourth of its value, and I should be still in debt. As it is it will not sell for half price."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed she. "The sweetest place in all the country, that every body wants. I am sure I have heard fifty people say they would give almost any thing for it; and why will they not be eager to buy it now?"

"Because nobody has any money now, dear. Every one is ruined."

"No but they are not though. I am not ruined. Am I ruined uncle? Have not I got ever so much money in the — somewhere or other, and why can not you buy it, and let the Doctor have it, or lend him the money to pay his debts?"

A sudden start, a glance of intelligence between Edwards and the Doctor, a gleam of hope on the countenance of the latter, and a smile of admiring gratitude from Henry followed this speech. But soon the face of Edwards darkened again, and he shook his head sadly.

"It will not do," said he, addressing the Doctor. "The small amount of cash I have in hand could not be more securely invested than in such a purchase or such a loan; but to raise the rest I should be under the necessity of selling government stocks, which, though worth as much as ever, are, like every thing else, below par, and must be sold at a loss."

"And what of that," exclaimed Lucy. "What of the loss? Who cares for the loss. Oh, uncle! sell it! sell it! and let us have dear Gertrude back again."

"And what am I to say, pretty one, when, a few years hence you ask me what has become of your money?"

"Say! Why say I told you what to do with it."

"And so you think the staid demure spinster Miss Lucy Townsend, that may then be, will be satisfied that I threw away her cash at the suggestion of a silly girl of fourteen."

"Good gracious! Mr. Edwards," exclaimed the ingenuous girl, with a flush of earnest indignation. "How can you think so meanly of me! But you don't, I know you don't. Now tell me, uncle," added she in a softened and conciliating tone, "do you think I could be so base, as to call you to account for doing what I requested?"

Saying this, she threw her arms around his neck, and looked up in his face with an expression so

ingenuous, affectionate and confiding, that there was no resisting it. The doctor's eyes filled: Henry turned away to hide his emotion, and Edwards, tenderly kissing her forehead, replied: "No dear, I did but jest with you. I have no idea that I shall ever have to settle my accounts with that same staid spinster. Long before that time comes there will be no Miss Lucy Townsend to settle with. But what am I to do, when some gentleman, whom the law has constituted you lord and master, comes to me asking for his wife's fortune?"

"And do you think," exclaimed Lucy, extricating herself from his arms; "Do you think I would ever marry any man who would be mean enough—"

As she uttered these words her eye unconsciously turned toward Henry, and in the moment her cheek, and brow, and neck, and bosom, all flushing, rosy red, she ran out of the room. Edwards and the Doctor, both following the glance of her eye, observed the averted head of Henry, and were thus assured that he had not seen that sudden manifestation of a feeling, of which she perhaps had never been conscious until that moment. She too, when she had time to recollect herself, remembered this, and had consolation in thinking that to him, at least, she had not betrayed herself. He had indeed seen nothing, nor did he turn his head in time to mark the looks of mutual intelligence which passed between the two other gentlemen.

"It will do," said Edwards musingly. "I think it will do."

"I think so," replied the Doctor. "God forbid the dear generous girl should lose any thing by me. I will bind myself to indemnify you for any loss you may sustain, and, in doing this, indemnify her. I have property enough to make you safe, and under all the circumstances," he added, with a meaning smile, "I think Henry will be sufficient security."

These words aroused Henry's attention, and caused him, for the first time, to turn his eye, with an enquiring glance, on Edwards, who answered with a smile and a nod of acquiescence. The Doctor then went in quest of Lucy, whom he found in Gertrude's chamber, with her face buried in a pillow. He tried in vain to raise her or to take it from her. But no sooner did he say that her wish would be fulfilled, than she flung it away, and throwing herself into his arms, burst into tears. "Oh! I am so happy! So happy!" exclaimed the warm-hearted girl as she ran back into the parlor. "Dear Gertrude will come back to us; and we will live together, and may be the dear grove may be our own home one of these days. O, dear uncle, you have made me so happy. Well! good bye now. I must go to school, and I do expect Miss Jane will scold me finely." Saying this she recovered her bonnet, accepted a shawl which the Doctor found in Gertrude's room, and sheltered by an umbrella, carried by Henry, took the pathway through the meadow, and returned home in a style

quite different from that in which she had left it. But the change in her feelings was yet greater. In that short half hour her sorrow was turned into joy; she was awakened to a sense of her own value and of the true worth and use of fortune; and more than all, she had passed, in a moment from the child to the woman. Even in their short walk Henry perceived a change in her manner. The fawn-like skittishness of the girl was exchanged for maiden modesty, and her playful *brusquerie* for decorous gentleness. All this might have seemed a riddle to him; but in the same short time he had learned to look upon her with so much respect, that this *self-respectful* demeanor seemed quite natural. How she excused her absence from school, and how she performed her tasks when there, I have no certain means of knowing. But I remember hearing the school-mistress say, about that time, that Lucy Townsend was generally very good, but sometimes very bad; and that she had been crossed in one day seven times, for coming late to school; for reading without looking at the book; for blunders in geography, history and arithmetic, and for blotting her copy-book as if she had been writing a love letter, and weeping over it.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Doctor and his friends, without loss of time, sat about adjusting the details of this new scheme, which were so satisfactory, that before night he wrote a letter to his wife full of hope and comfort. In this he fully explained the formidable danger to which he had been exposed by the machination of McScrew; and showed how it had been entirely averted by the generous interposition of little Lucy. It was not in human nature to forbear to speak of that tell-tale blush, or of the change in Henry's deportment toward the young lady. In the few moments that elapsed before she left the house, there was a deep, respectful tenderness in his tone and countenance; and even his attention in waiting on her home was something new toward one, who, equally at home at either house, ran back and forth from one to the other at all hours, with or without a bonnet as the humor of the moment might be. A man of far less penetration than the Doctor might have seen, that this was no more than ought to have been expected, had Lucy been as ugly as she was beautiful. But the wish is often father to the thought; and the good father's prudence conspired with his gratitude and admiration to awaken a strong desire, that his son might not prove insensible to so much beauty and so much sweetness, now seen under such advantageous circumstances. If he painted the indications of Henry's feelings somewhat too highly, it was because he saw them through the rose-tinted atmosphere of Hope. It was certainly not his design to deceive his wife, or to place in her hands the means of deceiving

another. What use she made of it will be seen hereafter. The reader must bear with me, though I detain him a little longer with the dry details of business transactions, on which other matters of a far different character so much depended.

The next morning brought the Doctor the following letter.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Jan. — 18—.

My dear sir:

I pray you to pardon the liberty I am about to take. Accident has made me acquainted with the difficulties in which you have been involved by the disastrous condition of the country. In such a state of general distress, no man can expect any aid from friends involved in the same calamity; and they who are exempt from it would be wanting in the duties of common humanity, should they forbear to extend, even to mere strangers, any assistance in their power. I trust I might rest my apology for what I am about to do solely on this ground. But honored as I am by the friendship of Mrs. Pendarvis, may I not hope to be regarded not as a mere stranger, by one whose happiness is so dear to her.

Let me say then, my dear sir, that I have received advices that my cotton-crop has been well sold, and that there is now, to my credit, in the hands of my merchant in New-York, a much larger sum than can be necessary to a bachelor. On this fund I have drawn the accompanying draught for — thousand dollars, which I beg you to use as your occasions may require.

I might stop here, were it not necessary to anticipate certain enquiries, which, in case my offer is accepted, will certainly be made. You will ask by what means I would propose to have the repayment of this money secured; and will most probably suggest that the mortgage on your property shall be assigned to me. As I not only do not wish for any thing of this sort, but do most earnestly deprecate it, it becomes necessary that I should give my reasons.

Foremost among these is a matter, with which, for quite another reason, it is my duty to acquaint you. This is my attachment to your charming ward, Miss Courtney. I beg you not to think me so indelicate as to assign this as a reason for doing what you may perhaps call a favor, or for being less strict with you than with a mere stranger. My reason is of exactly the opposite character.

That you may understand me at once, let me say that I am anxious that Miss C. shall by no possibility come to a knowledge of this transaction. Certain melancholy events in the history of my own family have made it a fixed principle with me, never to marry, unless under a conviction, that she who gives me her hand, gives her heart with it. While I would cheerfully sacrifice every thing, but my honor, to secure the favor of Miss Courtney, no

earthly consideration could tempt me to become her husband, without a firm conviction of her decided, undoubting and settled preference of me before any other man on earth. I would not be willing to rely on any thing which her own heart might mistake for this. No freak of fancy, no opinion of my merit, and, to come nearer to the point, no *impulse of gratitude* would satisfy the cravings of my heart, and the conditions, on which alone I would ever consent to put my peace in the power of any woman.

I have every reason to believe that Miss Courtney's feelings are entirely disengaged. Her uniform cheerfulness, and the very proper interest that she takes in the attentions of all who have a right to approach her, leave no doubt on this point. This might perhaps be attributed to a defect of sensibility, but for the acute feeling, and the deep distress which I have lately detected, and which, as I now learn, are occasioned by your misfortunes. She has often spoken to me of you, and of late more than formerly; and always in terms expressive of respect, admiration and love, not only such as every daughter should cherish, but such as no daughter can feel who does not see in her father every excellence that can adorn man's character.

Under these circumstances, if my purpose were to entrap Miss C. into an engagement, of which she might repent when too late, it might be easy to accompany this offer with a great parade of delicacy, protesting that the left hand was not to know what the right hand did, and, at the same time, to lay such a train, that, in due season, the knowledge of the fact might come to her ears. That would be my time to speak, and I am certainly more disagreeable to her than I believe myself to be, or I am mistaken as to her devotion to you, and her indifference to other men, if I should speak in vain. This is far from my wish—and God forbid that she should ever hereafter suspect me of any such design. I should deserve and meet her contempt; and if, in the mean time, she should find herself enthralled by the stratagem, scorn and abhorrence would take place of the gratitude that she had mistaken for love.

You will see that, in pursuance of these ideas, I have taken care that neither your name nor mine shall appear on the accompanying draught. I made my funds subject to the order of my agent here, and the draught is in favor of your friend Mr. Edwards, whose name I took from the advertisement of your property. Let him indorse it in blank, and let it be cashed in Baltimore. Let me also beg that neither to him, nor to any friend, however confidential, (not even to Mrs A.,) may a hint be given of that which I wish to conceal.

You will see then, my dear sir, that any security which could be contrived for the repayment of this money, would defeat my object. I wish none, and I certainly need none. When I tell you that I incur no risk, I only say what *you know* to be true.

Why may I not be partaker of the same knowledge? Why may I not act on the profound assurance of your integrity, inspired by the absolute confidence of one who knows you so well, and whose sentiments must impart their color to mine.

In conclusion, my dear sir, let me beg that you will not measure the value of this thing to me, by its importance to you. I trust it may afford you perfect relief. To me it causes not the slightest inconvenience. I shall be much more than required, if you will permit me hereafter to call myself your friend.

GEORGE HARLSTON.

Dr. Austin lost no time in communicating to his friend Edwards this most unexpected interposition of providence. "I am inclined," said he, "to accept this, because I certainly can repay the loan; and if we use dear Lucy's funds, it must be by selling her government stock at a reduced rate, which I must make good. If you, therefore, will indorse this draft, I will at once send Henry to Baltimore for the money."

Mr. Edwards was a kind man, and a sincere friend; but he was prudent and cautious; and, to the surprise of the Doctor, he did not at once reply.

"My good friend," said he at length, "there is something very pretty and very romantic in this affair, but there is also something in this mystery a little perplexing to a man of business. This draft is drawn in my favor. If I receive the money on it, I am answerable for it. If I indorse to one who receives in my place, it is the same thing. Now if the money were to remain in your hands, I should be content. In you I have all confidence. But the draft is sent to Baltimore, negotiated and cashed there, and then protested in New-York for want of funds of this drawer, in whom I can have no confidence, because I do not know who he is. Meantime I receive the money and pay it over to McScrew. What am I to say when my indorsee calls on me to refund?"

"I see it," replied the Doctor, "and I suppose I must give up all thoughts of using this draft. Be it so. We fall back on the other plan.

"By no means. The only danger I apprehend can be easily avoided. I will indorse the note in blank, and give it to Henry; but then he must not attempt to negotiate it in Baltimore. He must take it to New-York, and receive the money there, and bring it to us."

"But is there time before the day of sale?"

"I think there may be. Should it prove otherwise, I can adjourn the sale. But I should not like to do that, and Henry must set out forthwith."

It was arranged that he should do so, and in a few hours he was in the saddle, with the purpose of reaching Baltimore in time for the line of mail coaches for New-York. Having despatched him, we return to see what is passing, mean time at Washington.

"Who is Miss Bernard?" said Mrs. Austin to her sister.

"She is, as you see, a very pretty, and a very clever, and a very accomplished girl, who lives with her mother some thirty miles in the country. She has a pretty little property of her own, and, being mistress of her own actions, chooses to spend a part of every winter in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, or some such place, 'where men do congregate,' and gaiety abounds. She is mistress of all the arts of society, and therefore I like to have her in my house, when I am giving entertainments, and when I happen to have no company she is a sprightly and interesting companion. At present, she is here by invitation to meet Gertrude, who, I thought, might need a sort of fogleman, to train her in the conventional motions of the fashionable manual exercise. I think you will allow that she has got on wonderfully well, and does credit to her instructor; though, in truth, she had little to learn."

"And that little, I should think, she might have learned without being placed always beside one, whose constant endeavor it is to outshine her. To be sure she is not so pretty as Gertrude; for who is? But then she is so graceful, and so elegant, and so accomplished, and, as you say, so much a mistress of the arts of society, that she engrosses the attention of all the beaux, and no one finds time to pay any to poor Gertrude. I do not think I ever saw her superior. If you had searched the land through, you could not have found one more likely to keep my poor girl in the shade."

"Ah Kate!" said Mrs. Pendarvis, smiling, "I find a country life has not yet destroyed your taste for the tinsel and glare and artificial graces of fashionable life, and you naturally attribute the same tastes to others. But the men whose notice you would wish your daughter to secure, are the very men who vastly prefer her native grace and quiet simplicity; and in their eyes Miss Bernard is a foil to Gertrude, and the best that could have been selected."

"How was it then, that last evening all who called, even without exception, devoted themselves to Miss Bernard; and that Colonel Harlston, particularly, was so wholly engrossed by her, that he hardly spoke a word to Gertrude? Is not he one of those whose attentions are worth having?"

"Indeed he is; and he would rather hear one word from Gertrude's lips than all Miss Bernard could say or sing in a fortnight. But he found you had just arrived: he knows the prevalence of the domestic affections in her mind: he had no doubt she would rather talk to you and the Doctor even about the pigs and chickens at home, than listen to any thing he could say; and he had too much tact and good sense to put himself in the way."

"Ah! there's the rub. The great difficulty is

with Gertrude herself, to give her a taste for something better than pigs and chickens; for show and splendor;—for dress and equipage and plate and all the et ceteras that are not to be had without money. Until such a taste is formed she will still be dreaming of love in a cottage, and see no reason why a loving young couple with a cow and two sheep should not be perfectly happy."

"I am not sure," said Mrs. Pendarvis, "that the taste of Gertrude would be improved by the change you wish to effect; but, if that is your policy, you certainly cannot have a better coadjutor than Miss Bernard. She has an income of about a thousand dollars, and she spends it all very faithfully on the adornment of her own person and the little elegancies which fashion invents; all the time she professes that her tastes are simple, and that she cherishes them, because she could not afford to indulge a passion for splendor. How it might be if she were rich enough to think of any thing of the sort, she does not know. The demon does sometimes whisper, 'Laura, have a taste;' but she defies him; for how could she indulge it with her poor thousand a year. This is the way she talks, while poor, simple Gertrude sits and wonders. How long it may be before she is ashamed of being content with the fourth part of the sum, no one can say."

"Upon the whole, then," said Mrs. Austin, "I suppose the association is not so much amiss. They are, of course, much together, and, I suppose, quite intimate."

"I really do not know exactly how that is. At first, indeed, it seemed to be as pretty a case of violent and eternal friendship, at first sight, as could have been engendered between two German students. But afterwards Gertrude seemed rather shy, and I am not sure that Laura is not a little jealous."

"Jealous? On what account?"

"Of Harlston, I suspect. I am not sure that Miss Bernard would not like to secure him to herself; and for a good while she seemed to have it all her own way. She is so clever and so brilliant, and draws and plays and sings so finely, and is so much *au fait* to all the gossip of Washington, and so much at home on all the subjects of fashionable chit chat, that she has little difficulty in engrossing any one who does but wish to be amused. But of late, since Gertrude's spirits have been depressed by the news of your misfortunes, Harlston, without knowing the cause, has seemed to take the infection of her sadness, and is less disposed to be amused than to watch the lights and shadows that flit across her beautiful face."

"And Gertrude, you say, was the first to become shy. Was she jealous too?"

"Nothing like it. She has not a particle of envy or jealousy in her nature. It was really delightful to watch the play of her countenance as

she listened to Miss Bernard's displays. There she sat playing Q. in the corner, and feeling no doubt, if she thought of herself at all, that she was but a foil to set off her brilliant companion, as much entertained as a child at comedy, and appropriating to herself her full share of amusement, with as little feeling of rivalry as if Miss Bernard had been a professional *artiste*, an actress, a *cantatrice*, an *improvisatrice*, hired for the amusement of herself and her friends. With all her humility she seems to have an unconscious consciousness of her own worth, and Miss Bernard's accomplishments give her no more uneasiness than an English nobleman feels at having a footman handsomer than his master."

"Poor, foolish child! Well! they say Heaven takes care of such. But are you sure of this coolness between the two girls?"

"Indeed I am not. I try not to observe. I try to forget it, and hope they and you will do so too."

"I agree with you. I asked, because I have taken a great fancy to Miss Bernard, and I shall endeavor, by my behaviour to her, to dissipate any lurking unkindness."

Mrs. Austin was as good as her word. She paid the utmost attention to Miss Bernard. In art and address she was a full match for that young lady; and each found in the other a congeniality of taste which engendered between them as much friendship as it was in the nature of either to feel. In this, as far as it went, Miss Bernard was sincere, for she had no purpose to accomplish by means of Mrs. Austin.

With that lady the case was widely different. In her eagerness to abstract the postscript from Henry's letter to Gertrude, she did not duly consider the means by which she was to be kept in ignorance of the truth. There was the letter which Mr. Fielding was to deliver into her own hands. She might indeed be kept out of the way; but Mr. F. would go away and come again, or he might meet with her in company, and, on a hint given, she would certainly afford him an opportunity to acquit himself of his commission. Nor was this all. Henry could write by mail, and with all her vigilance she might be unable to intercept the letter. Or some accident might bring him to Washington, and one word might expose her to Gertrude. What would then remain of authority or influence over her daughter's mind? Who could doubt that she would at once take her destiny into her own hands, and throw herself into the arms of the man of her choice?

These were terrible thoughts, and Mrs. Austin saw that she could not be safe without effecting an irreparable breach between the lovers and placing a barrier between them, which should prevent any attempt at intercourse by letter or otherwise. But how was this to be effected? Did not this same dreaded communication, which was to come through Mr. Fielding, afford the means? It was worth trying.

The important morning was come, and the hour on which so much depended was at hand, when Mrs. Austin hastily entered Miss Bernard's room with a scrap of paper in her hand, on which she occasionally cast a hurried and alarmed glance. Her anxious countenance, her paleness, her hard-drawn breathing, and the eagerness of her whole manner, as she closed and bolted the door behind her, convinced Miss Bernard that she was about to be made the confidante of some important and startling secret. She had no objection to this. She never had. They who have their own purposes to serve can never know too much of the affairs of other people. Hence she was full as ready to hear as the other to communicate; and when Mrs. Austin, having hastily exclaimed "O Laura!" stopped short, and seemed to doubt whether she should proceed, the eager curiosity of Miss Bernard became too manifest to be mistaken.

"My dear Madam," said she at last, "what is the matter? What can I do to serve you? Tell me, I beseech you, and command me in all things."

For a moment these two accomplished actresses stood confronting each other, the countenance of the one plainly asking, "may I trust you?" and the other with tender reproachfulness replying, "can you doubt it?" But there was no acting in all this. The trepidation of Mrs. Austin at the hazardous step she was about to take, and the curiosity of Miss Bernard supplied to the countenance of each exactly the expression that the occasion demanded. At length Mrs. Austin found her voice, and in a deep, hoarse whisper, said, "Oh! Laura, I have just made such a discovery." Miss Bernard was all attention. "Do you know—But you must promise me never to say a word about it—Never—Never—Never as long as you live."

Miss Bernard made the required promise; and Mrs. Austin went on. "Do you know Mr. Fielding of this place? You don't. Does he know you even by sight?"

"I think not. I have heard of him as a man of business only. He is not in society."

"Well; what do you think. Gertrude you know has gone out, and I just stepped into her chamber—and look here. But no!" added she, cramming the paper into the grate, "I need not show the vile thing to you: but I will tell you all about it. The short and long of it is that this Mr. Fielding is to be here at eleven this morning to deliver a letter to her in a clandestine way. A clandestine correspondence, with God knows who, carried on through a go-between! Only to think of it! Now, my dear Laura, I suppose if the man comes and finds that she is out, he will go away and call again. Now just suppose you go into the drawing room and sit there until he comes. If he takes you for Gertrude and gives you the letter, I shall have a chance of learning something about it, when I hand it to her. How say you? Will you do it?"

Had Miss Bernard had time to think and look about her, she might have doubted both the propriety of this and the policy of interfering to defeat any plan of Gertrude's which looked to any other than Harlston. He certainly could not be the party concerned. Every day afforded him opportunities of communicating, as privately as he pleased, by letter or otherwise, whatever he had to say. But whoever it was, the possession of the secret might be of importance. "So, Miss Gertrude!" thought she. "An affair of the heart. Quite romantic of course. I suppose some 'love in a village' affair. Ah, poor Corydon! I am sadly afraid that six weeks in Washington have made a fearful change in the tastes of your Phillis. Your simple bouquets of rose and violet would cut a poor figure by the side of diamond roses and amethysts, emeralds and rubies. Perhaps I wrong her. If so, she will find means to set it right. 'Love will find out the way.' But if, as I fear, she is disposed to be false to her rustic swain, and to exchange the green meadow and the rippling brook for the white cotton field on the broad Santee, a hint of this thing to Harlston puts an end to all such hopes for ever." Such were the ideas that came thronging through the mind of Miss Bernard. The moment of action was at hand, and she had no time to reconsider them. This was just what Mrs. Austin intended. She had sent Gertrude out of the way, delayed the communication to the last moment, and presented it in the startling form of a discovery just made by herself, not doubting that, thus taken by surprise, curiosity and the love of mischief would prevail over every other feeling. It so proved, and Miss Bernard assented.

Scarcely had she taken her seat in the drawing room, before the door-bell sounded, and she heard a voice enquiring for Miss Courtney. "Ask the gentleman to walk in," said Miss Bernard in her sweetest tones, just loud enough to be heard at the door, and without waiting for the question of the servant who entered to enquire if Gertrude was at home. The gentleman did walk in accordingly; a grave, sedate looking man of thirty, precise and formal in his address, but obviously a gentleman.

"I presume I have the honor to address Miss Courtney," said he advancing, and, on a slight nod of acquiescence, handing a letter. Miss Bernard felt foolish enough to act to perfection the character she had assumed. She forgot to ask the gentleman to be seated, and sat twiddling the letter, looking first at the superscription and then at the seal with a countenance in which the lily and the rose maintained a contest for the mastery, which, to the eye of Mr. Fielding, seemed the most natural and the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Allowing time for her embarrassment to subside, he at length spoke, but only to take leave and to ask at what time he should call for an answer.

This question restored Miss Bernard to herself.

She instantly saw that to appoint any time, or to hold out encouragement to the continuance of the correspondence, would be to expose herself to detection. She had not had time to think of this before. She found herself committed to much more than she had intended, and enlisted for the campaign, to aid Mrs. Austin in keeping Gertrude and her supposed lover, from ever coming to an understanding of what had taken place. But she had gone too far to explain, and there was an abundant expression of offended pride, and of asperity in her manner, as she replied that no answer would be necessary.

Mr. Fielding was no diplomatist. He knew enough to be surprised at this stately reserve, and felt as if he ought to say something, but what, he did not know. At length seeing him about to speak, and feeling the necessity of preventing a discussion in which she was quite unprepared to bear her part, she made a strong effort, and added in a very decided tone, "I can only beg you to say, Sir, that no answer will be given."

This was enough, and with a bow much stiffer than the first, Mr. Fielding took his leave, and Miss Bernard had leisure to think of what she had done. She now saw her error. It had been no part of her plan to help to make a breach between Gertrude and her unknown lover. On the contrary, she would have been glad to see her married to any man upon earth but Harlston. All that she had wished was to be let into the secret, and to have the means of defeating the designs of Gertrude, if she should have any, on Harlston himself. She had supposed that Mrs. Austin would deliver the letter as one received during Gertrude's absence, demand a sight of it, and either reprove or encourage the affair, according to the character of the suitor. Perhaps this might be her plan yet. Impatient to know, she hastened back to her chamber where the good lady was awaiting her return. Mrs. Austin did but restrain her eagerness long enough to load her with thanks, and to cover her with caresses, when she snatched the letter and after looking at the hand and well known seal, crushed it into the fire.

"There it goes," said she, "and there is an end of that affair. Now remember, dear Laura, *nobody* is ever to hear a word of this."

"But who is it from?" asked Miss Bernard.

"How am I to know?" exclaimed the other, suddenly, but not successfully, endeavoring to discharge from her countenance all traces of the perfect acquaintance with the seal and superscription it had so clearly displayed. "How am I to know? I wish I did! I had a right to stop a clandestine correspondence. But I could not open my daughter's letter, you know."

Miss Bernard knew no such thing; and she was not deceived; and as Mrs. Austin, with renewed thanks and injunctions of secrecy, hurried from

the room, she looked after her with a feeling, not much unlike that of the cat, who, as she sat licking her singed paw, saw the monkey quietly swallow the chesnut.

Miss Bernard felt herself wronged, and, what was worse, she felt that she had been imposed on. This was a rare thing with her, and the consciousness of it brought with it a sense of disgrace. That *any one* should attempt to make a fool and a tool of *her*! and, worse still, that the attempt should succeed! It was not to be thought of. It was not to be forgiven. Miss Bernard's sagacity could not be blinded to the fact, that, in spite of all her arts, graces and accomplishments, and her constant effort to outshine Gertrude in the eyes of Harlston, she had failed to secure him to herself. This, she, of course, attributed to the attractions of Gertrude. And now the mother had succeeded in making her an instrument to remove out of the way an obstacle to the success of a plan she herself would give the world to defeat. But, with all Mrs. Austin's art and skill, Miss Bernard remembered that she had left one point unguarded. Although she was not let into the secret, Mr. Fielding knew it; and should matters ever go too far between Gertrude and Harlston, a hint to apply to Fielding for information would be enough. She had long since ascertained that he would never knowingly marry any woman capable of sacrificing Love to interest and convenience.

But how was she to conduct herself in the mean time? To say nothing of the kindness of Mrs. Pendarvis, and the importance of cherishing her valuable friendship, it was not Miss Bernard's plan to quarrel with those she hated. Nature, which gives to creatures various arms, gives to each an instinct, teaching him to resort to them. The tiger rends with his claws; the horse recalcitrates with his heels. The eagle pounces from the clouds; the serpent strikes from beneath the grass. A like instinct had taught Miss Bernard that the most fatal shaft in her quiver was her friendship. Henceforth she was therefore more the friend of Mrs. Austin and her innocent daughter than ever.

[To be continued.]