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## **Edna's Sacrifice and Other Stories**

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# Edna's Sacrifice and Other Stories

## EDNA'S SACRIFICE

It was a cold night in September. For three days the rain had fallen almost unceasingly. It had been impossible for us to get out; and no visitors had been in. Everything looked dreary enough, and we felt so, truly. Of course the stoves were not prepared for use; and this night we (that is, Nell, Floy, Aunt Edna, and myself) were huddled in the corners of the sofa and arm-chairs, wrapped in our shawls. We were at our wits' end for something to while the hours away. We had read everything that was readable; played until we fancied the piano sent forth a wail of complaint, and begged for rest; were at the backgammon board until our arms ached; and I had given imitations of celebrated actresses, until I was hoarse, and Nell declared I was in danger of being sued for scandal. What more could we do? To dispel the drowsiness that was stealing over me, I got up, walked up and down the floor, and then drew up the blind, and gazed out into the deserted street. Not a footfall to be heard, neither man's nor beast's; nothing but patter, patter, patter. At length, after standing fully fifteen minutes---oh, joyful sound!---a coming footstep, firm and quick. My first thought was that those steps would stop at our door. But, directly after, I felt that very improbable, for who was there that *would* come such a night? Papa was up north with mamma; Nell and Floy were visiting Aunt Edna and me, the only ones home, save the servants. Neither of us had as yet a lover so devoted or so demented as to come out, if he had anywhere to *stay in*.

On and past went the steps. Turning away, I drew down the blind, and said: "Some one must be ill, and that was the doctor, surely: for no one else would go out, only those from direst necessity sent."

A deep sigh escaped Aunt Edna's lips, and although partially shaded by her hand, I could see the shadow on the beautiful face had deepened.

Why my aunt had never married was a mystery to me, for she was lovable in every way, and must have been very beautiful in her youth. Thirty-six she would be next May-day, she had told me. Thirty-six seemed to me, just sixteen, a very great many years to have lived. But aunt always was young to us; and the hint of her being an old maid was always resented, very decidedly, by all her nieces.

"Aunt Edna," I said, "tell us a story---a love-story, please."

"Oh, little one, you have read *so* many! And what can I tell you more?" she answered, gently.

"Oh, aunty, I want a *true* story! Do, darling aunty, tell us your own. Tell us why you are blessing our home with your presence, instead of that of some noble man, for noble he must have been to have won your heart, and---hush-sh! Yes, yes; I know something about somebody, and I must know all. Do, please!"

I plead on. I always could do more with Aunt Edna than any one else. I was named for her, and many called me like her---"only not nearly so pretty" was always added.

At last she consented, saying:

"Dear girls, to only one before have I given my entire confidence, and that was my mother. I scarce know why I have yielded to your persuasions, little Edna, save that this night, with its gloom and rain, carries me back long years, and my heart seems to join its pleading with yours, yearning to cast forth some of its fulness, and perchance find relief by pouring into your loving heart its own sorrows. But, darling, I would not cast my shadow over your fair brow, even for a brief time."

With her hand still shading her face, Aunt Edna began:

"Just such a night as this, eighteen years ago, dear child, my fate was decided. The daughter of my mother's dearest friend had been with us about a year. Dearly we all loved the gentle child, for scarcely more than child she was---only sixteen. My mother had taken her from the cold, lifeless form of her mother into her own warm, loving heart, and she became to me as a sister. So fair and frail she was! We all watched her with the tenderest care, guarding her from all that could chill her sensitive nature or wound the already saddened heart. Lilly was her name. Oh, what a delicate white lily she was when we first brought her to our home; but after a while she was won from her sorrow, and grew into a maiden of great beauty. Still, with child-like, winning ways.

"Great wells of love were in her blue eyes---violet hue *he* called them. Often I wondered if any one's gaze would linger on my dark eyes when hers were near? Her pale golden hair was pushed off her broad forehead and fell in heavy waves far down below her graceful shoulders and over her black dress. Small delicately-formed features, a complexion so fair and clear that it seemed transparent. In her blue eyes there was always such a sad, wistful look; this, and the gentle smile that ever hovered about her lips, gave an expression of mingled sweetness and sorrow that was very touching. You may imagine now how beautiful she was.

"Her mother had passed from earth during the absence of Lilly's father. Across the ocean the sorrowful tidings were born to him. He was a naval officer. Lilly was counting the days ere she should see him. The good news had come, that soon he would be with her. At last the day arrived, but oh! what a terrible sorrow it brought. When her heart was almost bursting with joy, expecting every moment to be clasped in those dear arms---a telegraphic despatch was handed in. Eagerly she caught it, tore it open, read---and fell lifeless to the floor.

"Oh! the fearful, crushing words. We read, not of his coming to Lilly, but of his going to her, his wife, in heaven. Yes, truly an orphan the poor girl was then.

"In vain proved all efforts to restore her to consciousness. Several times, when she had before fainted, mother was the only physician needed. But that night she shook her head and said:

"'We must have a doctor, and quickly.'

"It was a terrible night. Our doctor was very remote. Your father suggested another, near by.

"Dr.-----, well, never mind his name. Your father said he had lately known him, and liked him much.

"Through the storm he came, and by his skilful treatment Lilly was soon restored to consciousness, but not to health. A low nervous fever set in, and many days we watched with fearful hearts. Ah! during those days I learned to look too eagerly for the doctor's coming. Indeed, he made his way into the hearts of all in our home. After the dreaded crisis had passed, and we knew that Lilly would be spared to us, the doctor told mother he should have to prescribe for me. I had grown pale, from confinement in the sick-room, and he must take me for a drive, that the fresh air should bring the roses back to my cheeks. Willingly mother consented. After that I often went. When Lilly was able to come down-stairs, this greatest pleasure of my life then was divided with her. One afternoon I stood on the porch with her, waiting while the doctor arranged something about the harness.

"'Oh! *how* I wish it was my time to go!' she whispered.

"'Well, darling, it shall be your time. I can go to-morrow. Run, get your hat and wraps,' I said, really glad to give any additional pleasure to this child of many sorrows.

"No, no, that would not be fair. And, Edna, don't you know that *to-morrow* I would be so sorry if I went to-day? I do not mean to be selfish, but, oh, indeed I cannot help it! I am wishing *every time* to go. Not that I care for a ride---' She hesitated, flushed, and whispered: 'I like to be with my doctor. Don't you, Edna? Oh! I wish he was my father, or brother, or cousin---just to be with us all the time, you know.'

"Just then the doctor came for me, and I had to leave her. As we drove off I looked back and kissed my hand to her, saying:

"Dear little thing! I wish she was going with us.'

"I do not,' the doctor surprised me by saying.

"I raised my eyes inquiringly to his. In those beautiful, earnest eyes I saw something that made me profoundly happy. I could not speak. After a moment he added:

"She is a beautiful, winning child, and I enjoy her company. But when with her, I feel as if it was my duty to devote myself entirely to her---in a word, to take care of her, or, I should say, to care for *her* only. And this afternoon, of all others, I do not feel like having Lilly with us.'

"That afternoon was one of the happiest of my life. Although not a word of love passed his lips. I knew it filled his heart, and was for me. He told me of his home, his relatives, his past life. Of his mother he said:

"When you know her, you will love her dearly.'

"He seemed to be sure that I should know her. And then---ah, well, I thought so too, then.

"Lilly was waiting for us when we returned. He chided her for being out so late. It was quite dark. Tears filled her eyes as she raised them to his and said:

"Don't be angry. I could not help watching. Oh, why did you stay *so* long? I thought you would never come back. I was afraid something had happened---that the horse had run away, or---'

"Angry I could not be with you, little one. But I don't want you to get sick again. Come, now, smile away your tears and fears! Your friend is safe and with you again,' the doctor answered.

"Taking her hand, he led her into the parlor.

"He had not understood the cause of her tears. Only for him she watched and wept.

"Do stay,' she plead, when her doctor was going.

"He told her he could not, then; there was another call he must make, but would return after a while.

"She counted the minutes, until she should see him again. Never concealing from any of us how dearly she loved him. She was truly as guileless as a child of six years.

"From the first of her acquaintance with him, she had declared 'her doctor' was like her father. Mother, too, admitted the resemblance was very decided.

"This it was, I think, that first made him so dear to her.

"Several times, after the doctor returned that evening, I saw he sought opportunity to speak to me, unheard by others. But Lilly was always near.

"Ah! it was better so. Better that from his *own* lips I heard not those words he would have spoken. Doubly hard would have been the trial. Oh, that night when he said, 'good-by!' He slipped in my hand a little roll of paper. As Lilly still stood at the window, watching as long as she could see him, I stole away to open the paper. Then, for a while, I forgot Lilly, aye, forgot everything, in my great happiness. He loved me! On my finger sparkled the beautiful diamond---my engagement ring---to be worn on the morrow, 'if I could return his love,' he said.

"Quickly I hid my treasures away, his note, and the ring---Lilly was coming.

"She was not yet strong, and soon tired. I helped her to get off her clothes, and as she kissed me good-night, she said:

"I wish we had a picture of him---don't you?"

"Who, dear?" I asked.

"My doctor! Who else? You tease. You *knew* well enough,' she answered, as she nestled her pretty head closer to mine.

"Soon she was sleeping and dreaming of him. Sweet dreams at first I knew they were; for soft smiles flitted over her face.

"I could not sleep. A great fear stole in upon my happiness. Did not Lilly love him too? How would she receive the news which soon must reach her? Was her love such as mine? Such as is given to but one alone? Or only as a brother did she love him? I must *know* how it was. Heaven grant that joy for one would not bring sorrow to the other, I prayed. I had not long to wait. Her dreams became troubled. Her lips quivered and trembled, and then with a cry of agony she started up.

"Gone, gone, gone!" she sobbed.

"It was many minutes ere I succeeded in calming and making her understand 'twas but a dream.

"Oh! but *so* real, so *dreadfully* real. I thought he did not care for me. That he had gone and left me, and they told me he was married!"

"Telling this, she began to sob again.

"Lilly, dear, tell me truly---tell your sister, your very best friend---how it is you love your doctor?" I asked.

"How?" she returned. 'Oh, Edna, more than all the world! He is all that I have lost and more; and if he should die, or I should lose him, I would not wish to live. I *could* not live. He loves me a little, does he not, Edna?"

"I could not reply. Just then there was a terrible struggle going on in my heart. *That* must be ended, the victory won ere I could speak. She waited for my answer and then said, eagerly:

"Oh, speak, *do!* What *are* you thinking about?"

"Pressing back the sigh---back and far down into the poor heart---I gave her the sweet, and kept the bitter part, when I could answer.

"Yes, dear, I *do* think he loves you a little now, and will, by-and-by, love you dearly. God grant he may!"

"Oh, you darling Edna! You have made me so happy!" she cried, kissing me; and still caressing me she fell asleep.

"Next morning I enclosed the ring, with only these words:

"Forgive if I cause you sorrow, and believe me your true friend. I return the ring that I am not *free* to accept."

"I intended that my reply should mislead him, when I wrote that I was not free, and thus to crush any hope that might linger in his heart. While at breakfast that morning, we received a telegram that grandma was extremely ill, and wanted me. Thus, fate seemed to forward my plans. I had thought to go away for a while, I told mother all. How her dear heart ached for me! Yet she dared not say aught against my decision. She took charge of the note for the doctor, and by noon I was on my journey. Two years passed ere I returned home. Mother wrote me but little news of either Lilly or her doctor after the first letter, telling that my note was a severe shock and great disappointment. Three or four months elapsed before grandma was strong enough for me to leave her. An opportunity at that time presented for my going to Europe. I wanted such an entire change, and gladly accepted. Frequently came letters from Lilly. For many months they were filled with doubts and anxiety; but after a while came happier and shorter ones. Ah, she had only time to be with him, and to think in his absence of his coming again.

"When I was beginning to tire of all the wonders and grandeur of the old world, and nothing would still the longing for home, the tidings came they were married, Lilly and her doctor, and gone to his Western home to take charge of the patients of his uncle, who had retired from practice. Then I hastened back, and ever since, dear girls, I have been contented, finding much happiness in trying to contribute to that of those so dear. Now, little Edna, you have my only love-story, its beginning and ending."

"But, aunty, do tell me his name," I said. "Indeed, it is not merely idle curiosity. I just feel as if I must know it---that it is for something very important. Now you need not smile. I'm very earnest, and I shall not sleep until I know. I really felt a presentiment that if I knew his name it might in some way effect the conclusion of the story."

"Well, my child, I may as well tell you. Dr. Graham it was---Percy Graham," Aunt Edna answered, low.

"Ah! did I not tell you? It was not curiosity. Listen, aunty mine. While you were away last winter, papa received a paper from St. Louis; he handed it to me, pointing to an announcement. But I will run get it. He told me to show it to you, and I forgot. I did not dream of all this."

From my scrap-book I brought the slip, and Aunt Edna read:

"DIED.---Suddenly, of heart disease, on the morning of the 15th, Lilly, wife of Doctor Percy Graham, in the 34th year of her age."

Aunt Edna remained holding the paper, without speaking, for some minutes; then, handing it back to me, she said, softly, as if talking to her friend:

"Dear Lilly! Thank heaven, I gave to *you* the *best* I had to give, and caused you nought but happiness. God is merciful! Had *he* been taken, and you left, how *could* we have comforted you?" And then, turning to me, she said: "Nearly a year it is since Lilly went to heaven. 'Tis strange I have not heard of this."

"'Tis strange from him you have not heard," I thought; "and stranger still 'twill be if he comes not when the year is over. For surely he *must* know that you are free---" But I kept my thoughts, and soon after kissed aunty good-night.

One month passed, and the year was out. And somebody was in our parlor, making arrangements to carry away Aunt Edna. I knew it was he, when he met me at the hall door, and said:

"Edna---Miss Linden! *can* it be?"

"Yes and no, sir---both---Edna Linden; but, Doctor Graham, not *your* Edna. You will find her in the parlor," I answered, saucily, glad and sorry, both, at his coming.

Ah, she welcomed him with profound joy, I know. He knew all; papa had told him. And if he loved the beautiful girl, he then worshipped that noble woman.

"Thank God! Mine at last!" I heard him say, with fervent joy, as I passed the door, an hour after.

How beautiful she was, when, a few weeks after, she became his very own. I stood beside her and drew off her glove. How happy he looked as he placed the heavy gold circlet on her finger! How proudly he bore her down the crowded church aisle!

Ah, little Lilly was no doubt his dear and cherished wife. But *this* one, 'twas plain to see was the one love of his life.

#### WHO WAS THE THIEF?

Fred Loring's toilet was at length completed, and turning from the glass, he said:

"Well, I'm off now, Nellie. Good-by."

"At last! Excuse me, Fred, but just now quietness is more desirable than your society. It is impossible to get baby to sleep while you are flying about the room. She sees you, and wants to get to you," answered Nellie.

"All right. I'll get out of the way. By-by, baby."

And kissing the little one, Fred hurried out.

Ten or fifteen minutes passed. Baby was quiet at last, almost asleep, when the door opened, and in rushed Fred again. And up started baby, with a shout of welcome. An impatient look came into Nellie's eyes, and the tone to her words:

"Oh, Fred, I had almost gotten her to sleep. And now see! And I am so tired. What has brought you back so soon?"

"Well, well, I'm sorry. But I left my revolver behind. I guess she'll soon be quiet again," Fred said, unlocking the drawer and taking out his revolver.

"Fred, I declare I never *did* see such a man. You cannot leave the house without being armed. Do you forget there is a law against carrying concealed weapons?"

"I *remember* to be on my guard, and prepared to defend myself if it be necessary. Every day we read accounts of persons being robbed, knocked down, and such like. I tell you, Nellie, *sensible* persons go armed always."

"Perhaps, Fred. But I think the nervous and suspicious persons are more likely to. Indeed, I never like to see you carrying off your revolver. I'm in constant fear of something dreadful happening."

"But never in dread of any one murdering and robbing me. Of course not!" Fred snapped forth.

"Oh, Fred! You are so quick and suspicious of every one, that my great fear is you'll hurt the wrong person some time!" said Nellie, with a really anxious look on her pretty face.

"Indeed I am not aware of ever having gotten hold of the wrong person. I think you are calling on your imagination for facts, Mrs. Loring!" Fred said angrily.

"Now, Fred, to defend myself I shall have to point to facts. Do you forget catching hold of poor old Uncle Tom, and choking him so he could not explain he was carrying the clothes to his wife to wash, instead of being a thief, as you supposed? And---"

"And will I ever forget your handing me over to a policeman, for having attempted to pick your pocket in the streetcar?" exclaimed a bright, merry-looking girl, who entered the room during Nellie's attempt to defend herself from Fred's accusation.

"Oh, Fan, don't, for mercy's sake, I cry quarter. Two at a time is more than I can stand. And besides, I had hoped that you would not have exposed that miserable mistake!" Fred said, with a reproachful look.

"I intended to keep the secret. But really, Fred, I've been almost dying to have a good laugh with Nellie over it. And to-night the opportunity was too tempting to resist."

"Mercy, Fan! If you tell Nellie, I'll never hear the last of it."

"Oh, I must. It is too late to recede. Nellie will imagine it worse, if possible, than it really is. But I'll not prolong your agony. I'll be as brief as possible," said Fannie.

And amidst the cries of "Don't! don't!" and "Yes, do, do!" Fannie began.

"The day I reached here, just as I came out of the depot, I spied my beloved and respected cousin Fred entering the street car. I hurried up, and got in immediately after him. Even if my veil had been raised I could hardly have expected him to know me, as I have changed much in five years. As it was, my face was completely hidden. The car was much crowded, many standing---I next behind Fred. I was well laden with lots of little packages, so the idea struck me to drop a few into Fred's overcoat pockets. Without discovery I put what I washed into one, and was about slipping my porte-monnaie into the other, when my hand was caught with such a grip that I screamed right out. At the same time Fred exclaimed, 'Here is a pickpocket!' And of course there was a policeman there, as none was needed. I was too frightened to speak for an instant. At length I found voice enough to say to the officer, who was making his way toward me, 'The gentleman will find he is mistaken in a moment.'

"After the first fright, I was really amused, notwithstanding the mortifying situation. By that time Fred had drawn forth my porte-monnaie. Nodding to the policeman, he said:

"An old dodge. Putting into my pocket what she has taken from some one else. Has any one here lost this?" he asked, holding up my porte-monnaie.

"No one claimed it. I managed to get off my veil then, that I had been tugging at. I had gotten a lady in the depot to tie it tightly behind, as it was blowing a perfect gale when I arrived. All eyes were on me then, of course. And the officer, not recognizing an old offender, and not a very guilty-looking young one, hesitated. I looked eagerly at Fred, to see if he would not recognize me, but he did not. There was a very embarrassing pause then, that had to be ended; so I said, not trying to restrain my smiles:

"If you will open that porte-monnaie, Mr. Loring, you will see my card. I thought my acquaintance would justify my loading you with some of my bundles. If you will notice, your other pocket is full."

"Every one waited eagerly the result. Quickly Fred did my bidding. You may imagine his look, when he exclaimed:

"Fannie Loring! Bless my soul, coz, can you ever forgive me? But how could I know you? I've not seen you since you were a child."

"There was a shout of laughter heard then, in which Fred and I joined. But Fred's was not a very hearty laugh; and I think he was glad to get out of that car, for he made me walk at least three times as far as ever you and I walk when we leave the car."

Nellie was almost convulsed with laughter, which baby seemed to enjoy very much. And Fred exclaimed:

"It was not half as bad as you have made it out, Fan. And just for a punishment for your laughing so, Nellie, I hope baby will not go to sleep for hours. I'm off now."

Merry rippling laughter followed him. And Fred ran down the stairs, and out of the house, almost hoping somebody might attempt to rob, or murder him even, so that his revolver might prove of great avail, and thus silence Nellie, who was ever talking about what she called his suspicious nature, when it was only necessary caution, he thought.

Soon baby was sleeping soundly, notwithstanding Fred's wish to the contrary. And Nellie, putting her into the crib, went to the bureau to arrange her hair.

"Why, Fred has gone without his watch!" she exclaimed. "I don't think he ever did that in his life before. I wonder he has not been back again before this!"

The hours passed swiftly by. Fannie, with her merry heart, fully compensating Nellie for Fred's absence. Eleven o'clock came before they imagined it near so late. And just then they heard the hall door close, and a moment after Fred entered the room, and in an excited voice exclaimed:

"Now, ladies, perhaps you will admit the good of carrying a revolver, when I tell you that to-night I have been robbed."

"Robbed!" exclaimed Nellie and Fannie simultaneously.

"Yes, robbed. But I did not stay so, many minutes, thanks to my revolver! Listen, and I'll tell you all about it. On my way home I turned Gray's corner into Fourteenth street. You know how dark and dismal it is about there---no lights. Well, as I turned, a fellow came rushing along, knocked against and nearly sent me down. And saying quickly, 'Excuse me, sir,' hurried on. I suspected what it was---a dodge they have when relieving a man of his watch or pocket-book. I hastened to feel for my watch. It was gone."

"Why, Fred, your watch---"

"Stop! Don't interrupt me. Wait until I've done."

The girls exchanged looks---mirthful first, anxious after.

"In a second I was after him. Presenting my revolver, I bade him hand me the watch. He resisted. I covered him with my pistol, and spoke again in a tone which convinced him I was in a dangerous mood.

"'Hand me that watch.'

"Out it came; and without taking a second look at me, he left. And thanks to my little beauty here," tapping his revolver, "I am home again, no worse off than when I started. Now, what say you?"

"Oh, Fred! Oh, my dear, what have you done? Oh, you have robbed that man of his watch! Yours is on the bureau. You left it home," Nellie cried, in a voice of real agitation.

"What? No! Surely not!" exclaimed Fred, growing very red, and starting toward the bureau.

Fannie handed to Fred his own watch, at the same time fairly shaking with the laughter she had tried so hard to suppress.

"Oh, Fred, forgive me. I'm only human; I must laugh or die."

Peal after peal came from the merry girl, who could not restrain herself, although Nellie looked so reproachfully, and Fred really angrily at her; the former saying:

"Indeed, Fannie, I'm too much frightened to laugh."

Fred was too mortified to say another word for some time. At length, turning to Fannie, who had grown a little quiet, he snappishly said:

"Pray, don't stop! I'm very happy to afford you so much amusement."

Of course Fannie began anew; and Nellie trying to stop her by looks and motions, asked:

"What shall you do, Fred?"

"It is not a matter of such vital importance that you need look so worried, Nellie. I'll go to the police head-quarters, explain the matter, and leave the watch. That will be the end of it," said Fred, trying to assume a light, careless tone.

Nellie hoped it might be the end of it; but still fearful of something unpleasant, asked:

"Is it too late to-night to go, Fred?"

"Certainly it is," Fred answered.

Seeing Nellie's face still retain its anxious and frightened expression, Fred broke out laughing himself, saying:

"You look as much frightened, Nell, as I imagine that man looked when I went for his watch."

Next morning Fred was longer than usual getting off from home, and all Nellie's urging haste seemed to have the tendency to retard instead of accelerating his motions. But at last, to her great relief, he was off. After getting a few rods from home, he drew forth the stolen watch, and found of course it had run down. Having no key to fit it, he approached a jewelry store, intending to have it wound up. He had failed to notice the very particular attention with which a policeman was regarding him. Just as he was about to enter the store, he was tapped on the shoulder. Turning, he beheld the officer, a total stranger to Fred, so he knew it was not a bit of use to explain the case to him. So to attract as little notice as possible, he walked quietly along with his not very agreeable companion until they reached the police head-quarters.

There he began his explanation. All were strange faces around him, on which he saw unmistakable signs of merriment when he said it was "a mistake." And to his immense surprise, after he had handed over the dreadful watch, and was turning to leave, he was made to understand he was a *prisoner*---the accusation, "Robbery and assault, with intent to kill!"

He sank on the bench for a moment, so overwhelmed with surprise and mortification that he could with difficulty collect his senses enough to know what to do. Just then a gentleman entered, and said to an officer near:

"I was surprised to hear you had caught the rascal so speedily. Where is the scoundrel? What does he say?"

"That it was all a *mistake!*" answered the officer, with a very significant smile. "There he is," pointing to Fred.

"Of course---the villain! And if I had been so unfortunate as not to have had a watch to hand over, he would have murdered and robbed me of what I might have of any value. The murderous rascal!---Ah! how are you, Loring? You here!" advancing and shaking Fred's hand cordially, and continuing, "Show me that cut-throat! Which is he?"

The expression on Fred's countenance may possibly be imagined, but I cannot describe it. And when, in answer to the call, "Prisoner, stand up," he arose, his friend's---the plaintiff's---surprise was stupendous for a moment; and then breaking into a hearty chuckle, he exclaimed:

"Of course *now* I know it was a mistake."

The dignity of the place was forgotten by all then, and never was such a shout of laughter heard before within those walls. But Fred could not join in it, to save him. He had too lately stood in the place of an individual bearing quite too many opprobrious epithets, to feel very light-hearted.

He returned home to relieve Nellie's mind, telling her it was all settled---she need have now no more anxiety about it. But he never told her how it was settled. One thing, however, she noticed---he was not so fond of his revolver's companionship as he used to be. And once she heard him say:

"If the law was more strenuous with regard to the carrying of concealed weapons, there would be fewer criminal indictments."

## THE GHOST

Peeping through the leaves of the vine-covered bower, and watching eagerly the path through the woods, was a beautiful little maiden. An anxious look was in her deep blue eyes, as pressing her hands over her heart, as if to stop its heavy beating, she said:

"Oh, why does he not come? How long a time! If he had good news, I know he would come quicker. Oh, I have not a mite of hope!"

The pretty lips quivered then, and she stepped back, and sank on the mossy seat.

A moment after a sound, slight as the dropping of leaves, caught her ear. She sprang up, and for an instant a bright light shone in her eyes, but quickly died away, as the slow, heavy step came nearer, bringing to sight a tall, noble-looking young man, whose face, if less stern, would have been very handsome.

Without speaking, he clasped her outstretched hand and drew her within his arms, shaking his head sadly.

"I felt it was so, or you would have come sooner," the maiden said, resting her head against his shoulder.

"I had little, if any, hope, Susie. I went this last time because you bade me to."

"What did father say, Frank?"

"Over and over the same old story of having, since your babyhood, intended you to be the wife of his friend's son. Oh, if I were wealthier, it would be all right, I know," Frank said, his dark eyes flashing.

"Don't talk so, dear, please. I do not like to hear you impute a wrong motive to my father. I will never, never listen for one moment to any words of love from George Forrester, or any other man but you, Frank. So you may be sure, if papa will not let me marry you, I will never marry at all," Susie said, her eyes full of tears, looking up to his.

"Susie, I have made three appeals to your father during the year past; each time finding him, if possible, more determined to oppose our happiness. I will *never* humiliate myself again, and he will *never* yield. Now what will you do?"

"Wait, hope and pray. I can do nothing more," Susie answered, in a tearful voice.

"Yes, Susie, darling, you can, and secure our immediate happiness. You can come with me, be my own true wife, love."

"No---no---*no*. I *cannot*. I should not secure our happiness. I should be miserable, and make you so."

"*Then* I have nothing more to hope for. He will not give you to me, and you will not come. Oh, Susie, how can you send me off? You know you are all the world to me! If I lose you, I lose everything. I am alone in the world. There are many loved ones to comfort your father, until he comes to his better nature and calls you back to his heart. Susie, am I to leave you forever?"

The beautiful dark eyes were looking into his, filled with so much love. How could she resist?

"No---no. I shall die, if you leave me---never to come again! Oh, what *am* I to do? I love you better than my own life, Frank, indeed I do! But, father---oh, how can I desert him? He loves me more than the other children. I am the oldest,

his first child, and so like what mother was. That is *why* he loves me so. And now *she* has gone, I *should* stay---"

"And break your heart and mine, too, Susie?"

"If I thought, Frank, you would not mind it very long---"

"You would give me up! And, in time, get into your father's way of thinking, and end by marrying the man he wants you to," Frank said, withdrawing his arm and turning away with a great sigh.

"Oh, Frank, how *can* you talk to me so?"

"Well, Susie, it is useless prolonging our sorrow. I had better say good-by, and go forever."

"No, no, Frank, dear love. Oh! what am I to do?"

"Be happy, my own, and make me so. Be my wife before I return to W---. Go with me. Susie, your mother loved me. I know, if here, she would plead for me."

"Yes, she loved you, and perhaps in her blessed home she will pity me, and win for me forgiveness, alike from heavenly as earthly father, if longer my heart cannot resist my love," Susie sobbed, dropping her golden head on her lover's bosom and promising all he wished.

"The last night at home," she said. "On the morrow I must go forth, to return no more, the loving, dutiful child. Should he ever consent to have me come back, I can never be again what I once was to his heart. I shall have broken the trust he held in me," Susie moaned.

Tenderly the brother and sister were ministered to, her hand resting on each little head, as their lisping voices followed hers in the evening prayer. Willie and Emma arose, their demure faces lifted to receive the good-night kiss. But Rosie, the two-and-a-half-year baby, the dying mother's sacred charge, wound her tiny arms about the elder sister, and with baby-like perversity hung on, lisping:

"Now Susu pay, too. *Pease*, Susu. Do!"

The baby plead; and Susie, raising her eyes to Rosie's, felt mother, not far away, but near, *very* near, and pleading through her child.

The sunny head was dropped again, and Susie prayed---even as Rosie had begged her. Prayed for guidance to the better way.

Three pair of little pattering feet were resting. Three rosy faces pressed the downy pillow, and Susie's evening task was done.

Gently she stole away.

"I will go to father myself, to-night. I will plead with him until he must yield," Susie said, as cautiously closing, the door of the nursery she entered her own room.

The evening was oppressive, and Susie's black dress became very uncomfortable. Flitting about, guided by the moonbeams, she sought for something of lighter texture. The mourning robe was laid aside, and a dress, white and fleecy, wrapped her slender form. The clustering ringlets were smoothed back, and rolled in a heavy coil high on the back of her head.

"Now I will go down. Father will be alone at this hour, and---" She paused, raised her sweet eyes upward, and clasping her hands she murmured, "Mother in heaven, plead for me."

Noiselessly she opened the door and glanced into the room. Her father sat with his back toward her, leaning on a table over which were scattered books and papers. In his hand he held the picture of her mother. She drew back a little, still, however, standing within the door. She dared not interrupt the sacred privacy of the hour. The rustle of her garments, light as it was, must have caught his ear, for his bowed head was raised.

"Mary! my wife! my own!" he cried, starting forward, with extended arms. "Thank God for granting me one glimpse of you again!"

Susie, awed and trembling, raised her eyes to see clothed as in life, the same sweet, gentle face, the rippling hair, caught back from the smooth, clear brow.

"Mother!" she breathed forth.

The room was lighted only by the moonbeams; but the vision was plainly seen. Another eager glance, and Susie stole away to her own room, and sank almost fainting into her mother's chair. A little while, and grown calmer, she opened her eyes, to see again, directly in front of her, the same vision.

She started forward, stretching out her arms, and calling softly, "Mother."

Nearer---nearer she drew, until, face to face, she stood beside the large mirror in front of which she had seated herself.

Unwittingly in one of her mother's dresses she had robed herself, and gathered her curls in the manner her mother was accustomed to.

"How very, very like her I am! Yes, now I know: father saw me in the mirror opposite which I stood. Well, I will not break his sweet delusion. I meant it not, Heaven knows. Oh, if mother could only come to him---in dreams, perhaps---to plead for me! I cannot desert him, I cannot; I *dare* not! But Frank---oh, how can I give him up! I will give up neither, but clinging to both loved ones, will trust to Heaven for a happy decision."

With this determination she sank to sleep, sweet and undisturbed.

Early next morning, as usual, she was in the breakfast-room, ministering to the little ones clustering around her. The father's frown had lost its accustomed sternness, as he stood regarding his eldest child. A gentle, sympathetic light was in his eyes as they rested on the sweet face grown older, much, in those days of anxious care. How matronly she looked! So patiently listening to, and answering every wish of the little ones.

At last they were all satisfied; and Susie seeing, as she thought, her father deeply interested in the morning paper, stole away to the trysting-place.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I cannot leave him, Frank. *Indeed, I never* can without his blessing resting on me. No, no!" she cried, as she saw the disappointed and stern expression of her lover's face, "I have tried, in vain, to make my mind up to it. How can I give up either? loving you both so well."

"You have trifled with me, Susie; you have broken your promise, too. You will, most likely, never see me after this morning, if I go from you. Are you determined?"

"Yes, dear, dear Frank, I am determined not to go unless father blesses and bids me go. I will trust my happiness to him, and God, who ruleth all things," Susie answered, looking very sorrowful, notwithstanding her faith.

"Then, good-by."

She raised her face, pale and pleading, to his:

"Kiss me good-by, Frank, and say, 'God bless me,' please," she whispered.

He did as she pleaded, but there was an injured air in his manner. As he parted from her, she sprang after him, crying:

"Forgive me, Frank, if I have wounded you. Know that to me it is worse. One little parting look of love, darling!"

"Oh, Susie, how can you?" He pressed her again to his heart, looked lovingly enough: but his eyes, as plain as words could, repeated Tennyson's lines:

"Trust me all in all,  
Or not at all."

And, determined to make one more appeal, he said:

"Susie, darling! love! trust me for happiness. You will never repent it. Come!"

"No, no. Go!"

He turned off quickly, angrily then; and Susie sank, sobbing, on the grass.

"My daughter!"

She raised her eyes, heavy with tears. Beside her, with a sad but kind and gentle face, her father stood. With him, a puzzled, doubtful expression on his features, her lover.

"Oh, Frank, I am so---so glad to see you again!" she cried, with as much joy beaming in her eyes as though their parting had been for years.

"Yes; as it is so very long since you saw him last!" her father said, with a pleasant smile.

"I feared it would be for years, perhaps forever," Susie said, in a low voice, anxiously regarding her father, and longing to beg an immediate explanation of her lover's return.

"My daughter, what did you intend to do after sending off this young man? Be a dutiful child, and wed as I wish you?"

"Never, never, father! I intend to be dutiful only so far as not wedding against your wishes, that is all---to leave the future to God, only praying constantly that some blessed influence may be sent to change your mind and heart," Susie answered, raising her eyes to his, filled with earnest determination.

"Your prayers must have commenced already, my child. Some influence hath surely been sent---some blessed influence, I truly believe. Yes, my child, you will wed to please your father. Here, Frank, take her. I ought to scold you for trying to coax her from me. I heard it all this morning. But I forgive you for her sake, and bless you, too, boy, for the sake of the one in heaven who loved you. There, there, daughter, don't choke me with your kisses. Take her off, Frank, and make her happy. She is a good child, and will make a true and loving wife. God bless you both, my children!"

And so ended Susie's intended elopement.

## THE TWO BROTHERS

"Ah here we are!" said pleasant voice, as the driver, having jumped from his seat, opened the carriage door.

"Yes, sir, I think so. This is the street and number---244 or 246, which did you say?"

"Pon my word, I've forgotten, and lost the card," answered the pleasant voice.

"The name, sir? I'll inquire."

"Never mind. I'll take a look at both houses, and see if I cannot decide. I'm earlier than expected, so I can look well before they come out to welcome me. Just dump my luggage down on the sidewalk, and make off for another job," said the old gentleman, handing the fare to the man, who soon after drove off.

"Well, here are two cottages alike, and very unlike, too. This one is Charley's home, I know. Why? Because it is newly painted. The fencing all in perfect order. The grounds, although very limited, are prettily fixed up. Flowers and vines---ah, I like the looks of this place! And I'm sure I'm right in fixing it in my mind as Charley's. Some don't-carish fellow lives there---loves his pipe, cigars and wine, may be, better than his home, wife and children. Dear, dear! how those blinds are suffering for a coat of paint! A few dollars would make that fence all right. How different that entrance would look with a little rustic seat like this one! I wonder that fellow does not notice how much he might improve his place, if he only did as Charley. But here comes the servant. I'll get her to let me in."

"Rather sooner than you expected me, ain't it? Folks not up yet? Just go back and open the door, my girl; let me in, and then tell Mr. Charles Mayfield that his uncle has come!"

"Oh, sir, you mistake! It is *next* door Mr. Charles Mayfield lives," answered the girl.

"Next door? No; *you* mistake, surely. My nephew Charley can't live there!"

"Yes, sir. But his---" What the girl was going to say was stopped by a jovial voice in the next door, calling out: "Uncle, here! How are you?" And a moment more the pleasant old gentleman was caught by both hands and drawn along to the next house. His nephew Charley saying: "I'm so delighted to see you! Come in!"

Into the parlor he was carried, and seated in a very comfortable arm-chair. The interior was more inviting than the outside. It told very plainly that the wife did her duty toward making everything as nice as possible; in a word, making the best of her means.

A very short time after a sweet-faced little woman entered, and was presented by Charley, saying:

"Here is your niece, uncle."

The old gentleman received her welcome greeting by a return of real affection. His heart warmed immediately to his nephew's wife. She bore the traces of beauty which had been chased away by an over-amount of care, the uncle very soon felt sure. There was an unmistakable look of weariness and anxiety in her eyes.

Very soon Nellie, as Charley called her, excused herself, and went out, saying she had a very inexperienced servant, and had to oversee and assist her in her work.

Breakfast was announced, which was one that Uncle Hiram enjoyed, notwithstanding the feeling which was uppermost in his mind, that the strong, fragrant coffee, the delicate rolls, and the steak which was cooked just as it should be, in a word, all that was so nice, was the result of Nellie's skilful hands. And she looked so tired and heated when she sat down to do the honors of her table. Again Uncle Hiram noticed that constantly her eyes wandered from the table to a door which entered the next room, which was partially opened. Her ear seemed strained to catch every sound. At length a little, feeble wail told the cause of her anxiety.

"Will you excuse me a moment, uncle?" she asked, and continued: "Our babe was quite sick all night, and I feel anxious about her."

A moment or so after Nellie withdrew, the servant came in, bringing a fresh supply of hot rolls. Then Uncle Hiram had a chance of seeing the help Nellie had with her many duties---a half-grown girl.

"Inexperienced, truly, inefficient and insufficient," said the kind old man to himself; and he made a note of that on the tablets of his heart.

Soon Nellie came back, looking much relieved, and said, smiling:

"She seems much better this morning. How these little ones fill our heart with anxiety! I was up with her all night!"

Down went another note on Uncle Hiram's tablets. Awake all night with a sick baby, and up cooking breakfast in the morning! No wonder her youth and beauty have been chased away, poor, weary, over-worked mother!

"Who lives next door, Charley?" asked his uncle, after they had withdrawn from the breakfast-room.

"Why, I have a surprise for you---Henry lives there."

"Henry! Henry who?"

"Why, Henry Mayfield, my brother."

"No! Why, the last time I heard from him he was in St. Louis."

"Well, he is here now, and has been for five months. His wife's relatives are all here. And so he having been offered a position in the same firm with me, accepted it. We agreed to keep it as a pleasant little surprise for you."

"Well, I'm glad of it."

Just as Uncle Hiram said so the object of their conversation came in.

Henry Mayfield was not the jovial, merry fellow that Charley was, and not likely to be so generally a favorite. But there was an earnestness and determination in his bearing that inspired respect immediately.

"Come, uncle! Go in with me to see my wife and little ones," said Henry, after sitting and talking a while. "We have a half hour yet before business requires us, and then, if you like, we will go down town together."

Henry's parlor, into which he ushered his uncle, was furnished better than his brother's; but still it was not so prettily arranged---the "woman's touch" was not so plainly visible. Immediately Henry's wife came in to welcome her husband's uncle.

She was a bright little woman, not near so delicately featured as Nellie; but with a youthful, well-preserved look, an easy, quiet, peaceful air about her that made Uncle Hiram feel quite sure, if he stayed her guest a month, it would not put her out a bit. If any extra care or worry came, it was not to her. Some one else's mind and hands would have to overcome any difficulties.

"Henry, dear, have our boy brought in to see his uncle," she said.

"Ah, ha!" thought Uncle Hiram, "I see---the shoulders best able to bear the burden of family cares have it. Just as it should be!"

A few moments, and the baby-boy was brought in by the nurse and presented to the uncle. Baby, like his mother, looked happy and healthy.

When they were about leaving for down town, Uncle Hiram heard Henry say:

"Ada, please order the cook to delay dinner an hour to-day. I've business which will delay me so long."

"Very well," was the smiling reply.

"A cook and a nurse. That is why Ada looks so calm, healthy and happy. *Just* as it *should* be. Poor little, patient, over-worked Nellie! I *wonder* how it is, both having equal means. I must find out what the trouble is," said Uncle Hiram to himself.

Now, Charley was not a drinking man, his uncle felt sure. He knew, indeed, that when he first grew to manhood he had vowed never to touch rum in any form.

The dinner at Charley's was better, if possible, than the breakfast. It was a real treat to the old bachelor, whose life was spent in a boarding-house, to partake of such good, healthy fare as Nellie gave him. But always he felt like partaking of it under protest. Nellie---little, weary, tired Nellie---ever filled his mind and heart. At dinner Charley brought forth his *ale*, declaring it to be "the very best in town." And after dinner his cigars, "none finer to be found," he said.

Now, Uncle Hiram could partake of both without serious disadvantage either to his health or purse. But caring very little for either, he seldom used them. During the evening several gentlemen friends came in to call on Charley's uncle, and again ale and cigars were put out.

Uncle Hiram went to calculating. Ale, fifty cents, at least, that day; sometimes less, sometimes more. Make the average half as much---twenty-five cents. Cigars always as much; frequently, as *that* day, treble the amount. In a month it would sum up, to the very lowest, fifteen dollars. And who could tell how much more? What would not that money, worse than lost, have secured for Charley's wife and children?

Rest, health, peace and length of days, most likely.

Now, Uncle Hiram knew well enough how it was Charley did not have things beautiful without and around his premises, and why Nellie's weary mind and tired hands could not have help and rest.

But, next, he must find out how it was that with Henry things were so very different.

The following day Uncle Hiram dined with Henry. Everything was excellent and well cooked; and Ada sat at the head of the table, with an easy, quiet grace, which perfectly relieved Uncle Hiram's mind from any care for her. He knew very well Ada's husband sought in every way to relieve her of all unnecessary care and anxiety. After dinner came tea and coffee---nothing more. When they retired from the table Henry said:

"Uncle, would you like a cigar or pipe? I'll get you one in a few moments, if you say so."

"And will you join me?" asked his uncle.

"I do not use either. I care not for the weed, and think it better not to cultivate a taste," answered Henry.

"You are right, my boy---and how about wine or ale?"

"Nothing of the kind, uncle."

"Total abstinence, is it, Henry?"

"Yes, sir."

"I knew you were a temperate man, as is Charley. But he takes his ale, I notice," said Uncle Hiram.

"Yes, I wish he did not; a man has no idea how such little things, as he thinks them, draw upon his purse."

"I know, I know!" said Uncle Hiram. And he no longer wondered at the difference in Charley's and Henry's style of living. And so he had a good talk with Charley, and showed him how Henry, with the same salary, could keep two servants and beautify his home, and he not be able "to keep his head above water," to use his own expression.

"Yes, my boy, the cause is just this---the difference between *temperance* and *total* abstinence. You'll try it now, will you not, for your wife's sake?" said Uncle Hiram.

"Indeed I will, sir, and with many thanks to you for opening my eyes," answered Charley, who really loved his wife, but was thoughtless, and never for a moment had considered himself at all responsible for Nellie's failing health, strength and beauty.

When Uncle Hiram's next visit was made, he saw, before he entered the house, that Charley had kept his word. And when Nellie's joyous greeting was sounding in his ear he knew then that all was "just as it should be" with Nellie, as well

as Ada. And the grateful little wife knew to whom she was indebted for the happy change, and blessed Uncle Hiram for it.

#### WHAT HE LEFT

"I know not of the truth, d'ye see,  
I tell the tale as 'twas told to me."

Mark Brownson was dying, slowly, but surely, so the physician told his wife, and advised that if he had any business to settle, it should not be delayed.

"He is sinking, and even now I see his mind is, at times, a little clouded. However, I suppose there is nothing of importance that he should consider," said the doctor.

"He has made no will," said Mrs. Brownson,

"Is that necessary? I did not know---"

"I think it is very necessary, doctor, for his children's welfare. Not that I think it at all likely there can be any contest about what Mr. Brownson has. Yet to provide against any future troubles, it would be prudent, I think."

The good doctor assented, but looked much surprised.

And well he might. No one imagined old Mark Brownson had anything to will. But he was a very eccentric man; and the economical style of his establishment was likely one of his notions.

"Are you suffering much pain now, Mark?" asked Mrs. Brownson, a few moments after, when she was seated at her husband's bedside.

"Yes, yes; give me my composing draught---the opium---anything to relieve me," answered the suffering man.

His wife obeyed, and after his groaning and restlessness had ceased, she said:

"I want to talk to you, Mark. Can you listen now?"

A nodded assent gave her permission to proceed.

"Do you not think it would be as well for you to express your wishes with regard to the disposition of your stocks and other effects? You may outlive me, Mark, and this thing not be necessary, still I think it better to attend to such business," said Mrs. Brownson, closely watching the effect her words might have on the sufferer.

She had feared possibly they might shock him severely, but depending much on the favorable influence of the opiate, she had ventured on the business she considered so important.

A look of satisfaction replaced the anxiety of a moment before. She had no longer cause for fear. Calmly Mark Brownson heard her suggestion, and said, in a feeble voice:

"What have I to will?"

"Why, dear, you forget. Your long sickness and the opium---no wonder! There is the stock in the 'Liverpool Steamship Company,' and that in the 'Australian Mining Company.' Surely you have not forgotten your large amount in our State bonds? And how much you have in 'Fire and Life Insurance stock' I cannot just remember now. However, by reference to the papers I can tell."

Again she watched her husband's face. It only expressed a rather puzzled brain, as though he was trying to remember.

"You have such papers? I cannot think," he said.

"Don't try to, dear. It is not necessary. I will just look over your papers, and make a statement; and when I read them over to you in presence of the lawyer, you can assent. You wish an equal division between myself and our daughters, I know. Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes. You are always right," murmured her husband.

"There, dear, go to sleep now. Some time when you are easy we will fix this," said Mrs. Brownson.

And the next day, at an hour when she knew her husband's mind was best prepared, a lawyer was summoned, and a statement of stocks and bonds to the amount of two hundred thousand dollars placed before him, and Mark Brownson expressed his wish to have an equal division of his effects made between his wife and two children.

The will was made, and duly signed and witnessed by two of the nearest neighbors and the only domestic, a worthy woman who had been with Mrs. Brownson for many years.

A few days more, and Mark Brownson had passed from earth.

Many wondered at the very quiet and unostentatious style of the last services for him; but the widow had said:

"In death it shall be with him as he always preferred in life."

And then when all was over, and the summer months were coming, Mrs. Brownson sold out the modest little establishment, and, with her daughters and their faithful servant, went to board by the seashore, at a very fashionable resort; but, of course, not to mingle in the gay festivities of the season, only to recruit her health, which was very much impaired by long attention to her suffering husband, and to have the girls escape the heat and dust of the city.

A few days after they were settled in their new abode, Mrs. Brownson said to her attendant:

"Margaret, you were very much surprised by hearing Mr. Brownson's will."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, indeed I was."

"Well, Margaret, I do not wish you to mention anything about it down here. Mr. Brownson, you know, never let it be known to the world. And so it must be for the present. I do not wish my daughters to be married for anything but their own good qualities. They are good and beautiful enough to marry well, without having any other inducements for suitors. Now, Margaret, you know just how I feel, and what I mean?" said the anxious mother.

"Certainly I do! And I feel as much concerned about my beautiful young ladies as you do, ma'am. Never fear but I will look out for their interest," answered the worthy woman.

And to do as she said, to the best of her understanding, Margaret set out for a walk on the beach, with some of the other servants and their escorts, the waiters from the hotel. And before the next noon it was well known what a good chance there was for two young men to win as beautiful wives as ever were seen, to say nothing of the other greater attractions.

And very soon the sisters, Maud and May, were objects of universal observation. Yet it was very difficult to get an introduction, the young gentlemen all found; for the widow kept the beautiful girls very much secluded.

Numberless were the delicate attentions paid them, in the way of bouquets, books, and so on, sent by Margaret; and several cards to Mrs. Brownson, with the request for an introduction, accompanied by references---among which came those of Vernon Wadsworth and Harry Bennett.

The first one Mrs. Brownson knew well by reputation. He was a young physician of very fine promise, and, being of one of the best families in the State, she considered him worthy of her attention. The other, she had heard since her arrival there, was the possessor of a very fair amount of worldly goods, the life-long accumulation of an old miser uncle. So, from the many aspirants, Mrs. Brownson selected these two to present to her daughters.

Just at this time, Doctor Alton, Mrs. Brownson's friend and the physician who had attended her husband, arrived at the sea-shore; and through him, without any more trouble or waiting the mother's pleasure, young Doctor Wadsworth obtained an introduction, and presented his friend, Bennett.

And although both of these young men did their best to keep back all others by various manoeuvres, many more became acquainted with the lovely sisters, who soon, much to their own surprise, became decidedly the belles of that resort.

Carefully Mrs. Brownson had guarded her secret from her girls, fearing, perhaps, it would have a prejudicial effect, changing their sweet, unassuming manner, which was one of their greatest charms; or, perhaps, for other motives best known to herself.

Although Doctor Wadsworth and young Bennett very much feared the approach of other suitors, it was quite needless, for the girls were best pleased with the first who had sought them and drawn them forth from their seclusion.

The older one, Maud, a brilliant brunette, received with undisguised pleasure the devoted attention of Harry Bennett; while gentle little May, so fair and timid, always greeted the handsome doctor by a rosy flush suffusing her beautiful face; and then, from a shy, quick glance from the eyes, that had drooped at his approach, he would see the glad light that told how welcome his coming was.

"We must win them, now, doctor; you see how much they are admired and sought here. What will it be when they are out of their mourning robes and in the gayeties of the city? This is our best chance. What say you?" asked young Bennett, a fortnight after their introduction.

"Say! That the very idea of even losing *sight* of that gentle, beautiful May for a day, fills my heart with misgiving and great anxiety. I tell you, I began this affair rather in fun---"

"You mean *after funds*, perhaps!" interrupted Bennett.

A flush suffused Doctor Wadsworth's face for an instant, and he answered:

"Well, I'll admit that is not at all objectionable; but really, now that I know May Brownson, I would not be willing to resign her to another man, even if she had not a dollar in the world."

There was an expression about Harry Bennett's mouth that looked as if his lips wanted to say: "I don't believe you"---only they did not just dare to. Harry Bennett was as much in love as he could be with any one other than himself, still he was not going to leap without looking. So, after learning a little more than he had already heard from Margaret, he was called, very urgently, to the city. After an absence of only two days he was back again, and stated to Doctor Wadsworth his knowledge of Mark Brownson's possessions. That evening Mrs. Brownson received proposals for both of her daughters.

She must consider the matter, and consult with her friends, the prudent mother thought and said to the anxious suitors.

This made them each more determined to secure the prize.

"Dear May, plead with your mother for me!" said the ardent young doctor.

"Mamma will consent after a while," answered the gentle girl.

"After a while! Why not now? I am going away next month for a long time. I cannot leave you, May. Would you wish me to?"

May turned pale at the thought, and raised her pleading eyes to her mother.

It was enough. Doctor Wadsworth had used the surest weapon. A separation was dreaded by both mother and daughter, and each for different reasons. And then it was an easier thing for Harry Bennett to obtain the mother's consent, to claim his love at the same time.

Mrs. Brownson, after giving her consent, requested a private interview with her prospective sons-in-law. The girls were sent from the room, and then Mrs. Brownson said:

"I have thought possibly, gentlemen, that a very foolish rumor may have reached your ears respecting the wealth possessed by my daughters, and that---excuse me, but I must allude to it---this may in a measure have influenced your selecting them from the many young girls here---"

"Oh, madam!" both men exclaimed simultaneously.

"If I tell you they have nothing but their pure hearts and loving natures, will you not be disappointed?"

"No, madam. How can you judge me so?" exclaimed both.

"I am glad it is so. I would not have you marry my daughters under false impressions."

"When May is mine, I shall think I have secured the most valuable fortune any man can have," said the doctor, with a really honest look in his eyes.

"When Maud is mine, I shall *know* I have secured *all* I would wish," added Harry Bennett, with rather a sly twinkle in his eyes.

And so it was agreed that they should be united there, and after a very private wedding leave for an extensive bridal tour.

"The old fox! Is she not a sly one? She thought to throw us off, I do believe. But *I* am as bright as she," said Harry Bennett, after the interview.

"Really, Bennett, that is not a very respectful way of speaking of the mother of your promised wife," replied Doctor Wadsworth.

"Well, no; you are right. But just to think of her talking so to us!" answered Harry, with an air of injured pride.

The ceremony was over. After an acquaintance of less than six weeks, Doctor Wadsworth and Harry Bennett had won their wives.

And while the brides had retired to change their dress for the travelling-suit, the happy young husbands requested to speak a moment with their mother-in-law.

"Indeed *you* must speak; I will not," said Doctor Wadsworth, in a low tone, as he closed the door, and with Bennett approached Mrs. Brownson.

After a moment's hesitation, Harry Bennett said:

"Now, Mrs. Brownson, that we have proved our sincerity and real love for your daughters, there is no reason for any longer concealment."

"About what, sir?" asked his mother-in-law.

"Come, my dear madam; this is entirely useless. You have tried and proved us. Now to business."

"Really, Mr. Bennett, I am at a loss to understand you! Will you please to be explicit?"

"Well, madam, then I must tell you that I am perfectly well aware that my wife is entitled to the one-third of two hundred thousand dollars left by her father. Now, my dear madam, we are going on a very long and expensive trip, and may need more than I have in ready money. Now, that is just the whole truth," said Harry, who had gotten over his slight embarrassment, and then spoke in a very business sort of manner.

Not so Doctor Wadsworth; he seemed very much mortified, and looked as if he wished he was away from that scene.

"Mr. Bennett, I spoke to you about this report, and told you how false it was, did I not?"

"Oh, yes, madam; but you see--"

"You still believe this, even when I again tell you that neither I nor my daughters have a dollar in the world beyond the small amount I have now from the sale of my household effects? I assure you, sir, I speak the truth," said Mrs. Brownson, in a tone and manner that would have enforced belief.

But Harry Bennett said, triumphantly:

"Madam, I have seen Mr. Brownson's will."

"*That* will, my dear sir, is not worth the paper it is written on. Mr. Brownson was out of his *head*, and *imagined* he was possessed of that sum in bonds and stock. If you can find any such possession, no one would welcome it more gladly than I. You can readily prove the truth."

Harry Bennett gazed bewildered from his mother-in-law to Doctor Wadsworth, and then said in a low voice, as if to himself:

"Caught and caged."

"And I am glad of it," exclaimed the doctor, who was truly glad of anything to end that very embarrassing interview. "Come, Bennett, we must arrange our trip to suit the extent of our purse, and be happy with the prizes we have won."

"Well, madam, I must say that the old gentleman's will *was* worth something. For I'll own up now, it helped very much to secure you *one* very nice young man for your son. I'll speak a word for him, although he has been *done up to a very Brown son!* I'm ready now, Wadsworth, and we won't shorten our trip one mile; for *I've* got a fortune, thanks to my old uncle. Yes, and *another*, I'll have to admit (there she is now), thanks to her father's will."

Mrs. Brownson could not resist a smile. She had no misgivings about her children's future happiness. If they had not already secured their husbands' affection, she knew they would soon; for who could help loving such lovely girls!