A CLOSE RELATION.

CHAPTER IX.

My step-father's behavior during my mother's tedious convalescence was more than exemplary. It neared sublimity devotion and magnanimity. His patience was illimitable; his devices for enlivening the monotony of the guarded chamber were ingenious and inexhaustible. He contrived dainty delicious meals; fed her with his own hands; brought flowers and fruits to her side; read aloud by the hour in the rich voice whose intonations were a charm against weariness, and in every glance and word and action gave evidence of profound gratitude at her return to the right self that awarded him the highest place in her heart and esteem. One might have sneered at the assiduity of this second wooing, had the effect of his policy upon the patient been oblivious. If she had loved him before, she seemed now to adore him, drawing in animation and vigor from his abundant vitality; deferring to his will in matters great and small, with what struck me sometimes as eager servility.

To her children she was affectionate, appreciative of the trifling services we were permitted to offer her, and solicitous lest our long confinement in her room might be responsible for the change she could not but observe in our looks. Yet, even while she remarked upon this, or talked of winter plans for the household, she would break off in the middle of a sentence with a flush of almost painful pleasure at the sound of her husband's step or voice, and, after his appearance, had eyes, ears, and thoughts for him alone. She never appeared quite content unless he were by her, her head upon his bosom, or her hand locked in his.

For what was she trying to atone to him? I vexed myself uselessly with the problem, as with the mystery of his exclusion from her chamber until she had implored and obtained Don's forgiveness. She never named Don in her husband's presence, or seemed to think of him. Occasionally and casually she asked me if he were well and what he was doing. I replied as if I saw him daily. I had not spoken with him since the day he came to see her.

Knowing me as she did, and the strength of convictions founded upon principles learned from herself, could she imagine that the exchange of words between the son of the murdered woman and herself could affect the damning fact that severed the victim's child from hers? In her anxiety to make up to her wedded lord for possible damage done his reputation by dutiful acquiescence in his decree, to win him to forgetfulness of their joint and disastrous blunder, had she no thought for two lives that acquiescence and that blunder had wrecked?

I had no one with whom to discuss the haunting problems. To no one could I have propounded them except to the man with whom I dared not allow myself to confer. He had not protested against what I had assured him was my ultimatum, nor had he called upon my mother or myself. Not that he furnished food for gossip by shunning the house. In defiance of popular opinion as formulated in "Our Society Column," he took Elsie to walk or drive every fine day.

I made but one stipulation when he wrote a note to me asking permission "to perform this brotherly office to the child, whose languor and growing thinness had excited his uneasiness, as he was sure they must mine." I thanked him in my reply for his solicitude, and gratefully accepted the offer of what would delight Elsie and soon bring back her lost bloom. I begged, however, that no reference should be made to the changed relations between him and myself. She must know everything before long, but I would not grieve her while she was so far from well. To carry out the pious concealment, I used to go to the drawing-room window to see her off, receiving Don's bow with the kiss she tossed back to me as they drove or walked away.

My heart had no other sustenance than these chance glimpses, beyond my little sister's affections. I stood forlorn and almost forgotten on the outside of the fenced garden of my mother's heart. Since what "our special correspondent" still alluded to once in a while as the "late scandal in best circles," I held myself haughtily aloof from village intimates. Mrs. Wilcox and Kate had gone to a New York hotel for a couple of months and in their absence calls of friendliness and ceremony became fewer and fewer. Mrs. Robb had forced her way in twice, and seen no one except Dr. Wentworth. At the third visit, paid after his installation as nurse, she was civilly informed at the door that "all the family were engaged." It was an impolitic measure, but what mattered that? We were a marked household. We had been "talked about;" our private affairs had "got into the papers." The Mapleton elite had always had stifled scruples concerning the reception into full and regular fellowship in their order of a woman who could write "M.D." after her name and had actually practised her profession to maintain herself and younger child. It was odd, if "all was right" in her first marriage that Dr. Salisbury's will should have settled a considerable and specific sum upon his first-born and left the widow and baby unprovided for. Under the shield of Dr. Wentworth's name and character, his wife could have lived down unpleasant rumors had she been content to deport herself as a gentlewoman should. By overruling her husband's better judgment in her thirst for unfeminine pursuits, she had ruined herself and injured him. "C.A.R." led a lively crusade against women doctors, in which half the papers in the country took part. Thanks to this agitation, the nine-days' wonder was debated for twenty-seven—and more. People looked up at our house in passing, and a sketch of Donald Upton at his mother's grave illustrated one of a series of newspaper letters upon "our suburban cemetries."

These were the circumstances under which Don choose to advertise his continued connection with us by the only means left to him. He rarely showed himself in our streets unaccompanied by Elsie. She had not returned to school. Without consulting my mother, I assumed the responsibility of keeping her at home. She should not be ostracized or baited by supercilious and inquisitive classmates. I gave up the most of the forenoon to teaching her. The afternoons she spent with Don. The evenings after her early bedtime were passed by me in solitude made heavier by those "happier things."

As Elsie regained her former looks, I at strength, appetite, and interest in existence. So apathetic did I become that nothing hurt me much or long. There was dull satisfaction in the belief that I had lost susceptibility to pain.

From this delusion I was aroused as by an earthquake. One November afternoon, so raw that I had doubted for a time the propriety of allowing Elsie to go walking with her usual escort, and wound my own fur boa about her throat, I lingered at the window through which I had watched the pedestrians until they were lost to sight at a remote turn of their route. Elsie had danced down the walk to the gate to meet Don, having been on the lookout for him. Her small face and head seemed to move with difficulty in the grey fluffiness from which they arose when she waved her farewell. The sparkle of eyes and smile reminded me of a planet twinkling out of a cloud. A fair and winsome thing was this one possession of mine, and I was never so entirely satisfied as to her safe-keeping and happiness as when she was thus accompanied. A hard pain assailed my heart, and a tightness my throat, at the anticipation of her distress when the truth should be unfolded to her. It was singular that she remained so long utterly unsuspicious of a rupture that involved much to her and much more to me whom she ardently loved.

"I beg your pardon," said my step-father's voice at my elbow. He smiled slightly and not agreeably at my start; there was exaggerated respect in the inclination of his lofty head before me,—lorn, and esteemed by few, and by none less than by himself.

"Can you spare me a few minutes?" he inquired, ceremoniously.

I had nothing to do, and nobody knew this better than he.

I sat down, and waited for him to begin. Ours were elegant parlors, and they used to be cosily home-like. The arrangement of the furniture was not altered, yet as I glanced listlessly around me they had the look of a body out of which the spirit had fled. Chairs and sofas were stiffer for my knowledge that they had not been sat in for days; the walls were dead because it had been so long since they threw back merry sounds.

It might have been an accidental choice of positions that brought Dr. Wentworth's back to the light while I faced the windows looking down the street. The row of elms massed along the vista were like clumps of dun mist, so fine and thick was the lace-work of naked twigs. The highway was black with wet, and fitful passions of wind carried hurrying flocks of dead leaves before them. The clouds were not heavy, but they were a continuous curtain, and drawn closely down behind the hills. The scene was lightless; the room felt chilly when Dr. Wentworth began to speak:

"You may anticipate the tenor of my communication; so I need not waste time in prefatory remarks. As matters stand, you must see that it would not be expedient or pleasant that we should continue to live in Mapleton. Did not your mother's health require a change of residence, the attitude of the community with regard to her demands it, and imperatively. We—she and I—have therefore decided to sail for Europe early in January, even before then, should she be strong enough for the voyage. Elsie would naturally accompany us. You, being of age and mistress of a sufficient fortune, must use your own pleasure as to going or staying. Should you prefer to go, there will be no difficulty in letting this house furnished. If, as your mother inclines to believe, you should object to becoming one of the party, she suggests that Mr. Donald Upton's wish would probably be to hasten your marriage. I offer no advice, or even opinion, on the subject."

He had not thrown away a word. The dilemma, so nonchalantly stated, so horrible to me, was before me. Mapleton of late had been dreary and inclement to our shorn fold, but it was home, and Don was in it. I might never speak to him again, or touch his hand, but we breathed the same air; there were blessed whiles in which our paths crossed one another, when the sight of him was vouchsafed to my weary eyes, and Elsie's prattle of him kept my heart from starvation. And the alternative,—brutally set forth if my tormentor suspected the truth, brought forth in indifference as brutal if he were ignorant,—how was I to exclude it from the discussion? how break off here and now all talk of hastening what was never to be?

My lips were stiff and cold; my voice died in my throat in the first effort to articulate.

"I beg your pardon," said my step-father again, in dry civility.

"How long will you probably remain abroad?"

He shrugged his shapely shoulders.

"That will depend upon health and inclination. We shall not revisit Mapleton for several years, and may decide to spend those years on the other side. Your mother remarked this afternoon that if you were already married and settled here, and desired particularly to have your sister with you, she might be prevailed upon to leave her in your charge. Unless placed in a foreign boarding-school, a child of that age gets little good from going abroad. That is a matter that can be settled later. It is contingent, of course, upon your action and Mr. Upton's."

For an instant fancy slipped the leash of reason, and leaped forward joyously toward the picture conjured up by his last utterances. A house and home of my own,—Don's house and mine,—with Elsie to have and to hold, and the ocean between us and the man who had robbed me of everything else of worth! The clouds opened above my head and let heaven's boundless glory through.

Gloom and chill had wrapped me close before I attempted to reply.

"You have taken me so entirely by surprise that I must have time for deliberation," rising to end what I could not have endured for another instant. "I will think the matter over, and give you my answer to-morrow."

He too, had arisen.

"As you wish," coldly. "I must, however, stipulate that you do not force discussion of an agitating topic upon your mother. She is unequal to it."

"I had not thought of it," I said, in even more freezing brevity.

"That is well. I am relieved that you show her this much consideration."

He looked out of the window, evidently with a single eye to the chances of storm, breathing an air of Schubert between lips pursed for whistling, and betook himself leisurely to his wife's sitting-room. She was sufficiently recovered to leave her bedchamber during the day.

It did not occur to me then, nor for long afterward, that he had used her name unjustifiably in the communication which he implied she had empowered him to make. To this hour I am ignorant how much falsehood was woven into the web of fact, but sober reflection suggests doubts that would then have been balm to my wounded spirit.

I was afraid of myself; afraid of the desperation of loneliness that enveloped and suffocated me; afraid of the wild impulses surging upon one another, icy waves, bitter as brine, stinging like hail. Hardly knowing what I did, or why, except that the air of the house bought with my father's money, the house in which Elsie had been born, and from which this man, my mother's husband, had the right to thrust me into the street, was intolerable, I snatched from the hall-rack a shawl, and got myself from the shelter of the roof that covered him and the mother who had forsaken her first-born. Like one pursued, I paced up one garden-alley and down another, unmindful that the fall of night brought with it fine, cold rain, until I saw Elsie's shadow moving restlessly about my room, appearing upon and passing from the curtains of the illuminated windows.

"I have been looking everywhere for you!" she cried, when I had dragged myself up to her. "I thought you were lost. Fie! fie! what a naughty girl to stay out of doors until she is wet to the skin and all the curl out of her pretty hair! Oh, I had the loveliest walk! Sit down, and I'll tell you all about it."

She pulled off my wet swathings, rubbed my damp cheeks with her warm hands, and, pushing me into a chair, perched herself upon my knee. Her eyes shone; dimples danced about her mouth. How much good Don had done her! God bless him! oh, God bless him! for the most loyal friend, the most gallant champion, oppressed innocence ever found.

I caught my darling to my heart, and kissed her over and over. I had to tell her, sometime. It could no longer be kept, now that we were going away forever. For this was the resolution I had taken in my restless tramp in the dripping shrubbery. My mother did not care what became of either of us, so long as her husband accompanied her, but for all that, we ought to go with her. There was nothing else to do. Separation would stir up further scandal compromising her, and we had no other protector,—Elsie and I. My heart bled slow drops as I summoned strength to say what would bring back the old, unchildlike worry to the dear face, the piteous anxiety to her eyes. Yet, if I let pass this opportunity, Dr. Wentworth might consider it obligatory upon him to break to her the news of our banishment, and her artless questioning would precipitate the rest of the revelation.

I began in assumed carelessness, winding and burnishing upon my finger a stray tress of her hair, which was the color of a chestnut fully grown and ripened in the sunshine.

"I have heard something this afternoon, dear,—something that surprised and shocked me,"—quickening speech as the remembered shadow stole into place. "Doctor says mamma must go abroad. She may not come back for a long time."

She laid her arms about my neck and her face upon my shoulder.

"Will it cure her, Sydney?" in a low, awed tone.

"Oh, yes, I think so, little one. She is out of danger now, and the change will probably restore her entirely."

Elsie was silent. I feared she was weeping, and when she spoke the cheerful tone took me by surprise:

"I can't leave you, you know, sister. You can't do without me since our great trouble came. And you ought not to leave Don. He never needed you half so badly before. You are all he has. So I've been thinking that you had better marry him and we three will go on living here. Or, would you go to Don's house?"

A needle pierced my soul with each naive sentence. I could not temporize longer.

"Elsie! listen to me. Maybe I ought to have told you before, but I dreaded to undeceive you. Don and I will never be married. Don't ask me why. And don't make it harder for me than it is now. And don't let this make you unhappy if you can help it."

She did not cry out, or tremble; only sat bolt upright, eyes shining out of a clear face from which every drop of blood had retreated. For perhaps two minutes she was perfectly still; then the great, luminous eyes came around to rest upon mine. Her mind was made up. Her accents were resolute. When "the midget" looked and spoke in that fashion, fire and water could not stay her.

"I must ask you, Sydney! Don loves you so that it would be wicked not to marry him. Why, sister! he has nobody but you that belongs to him, now that his mother is dead."

Her mouth worked, but she would not give in until her protest was ended. "I've noticed that you didn't see much of him lately, but I supposed you wrote to one another every day, and 'twasn't strange that it should make papa feel bad to meet him just now. I thought he stayed away on that account, and that when mamma came downstairs Don would be here again, just as usual."

She was feeling her way, inch by inch. The perception of this and her glance over her shoulder at the door gave me the idea that she longed to say something confidential, yet which she fancied I might not approve. She must not learn to be afraid of me. We were, hereafter, to be all in all to one another.

"What is it love?" I queried. "Speak out all that is in your wise little head."

She shook it soberly, and put a hand to each temple.

"It isn't wise, but there is so much in it that it aches sometimes, especially since you told me never to speak again of what I can't help thinking of all the time."

"After this, say what you please," said I, mournfully. "Nothing can hurt me. And if it did, this dear head must not be left to ache if I can help it. It isn't good for my baby to think of things she can't talk out to me."

The soberness was not lightened, but she was encouraged. Her voice was little more than a whisper; she glanced again at the door.

"I have known all the time what made mamma ill, why it excited her to have papa in the room until she could see Don and explain all about it and ask him to forgive papa. For it was a fearful thing, Sydney, that it should have been given when she was sure it ought not to be."

I had nearly silenced her peremptorily at that. The torture was like the fall of hot lead upon ear and heart. I held back the passionate impulse, and let her go on. I would keep my word to her She must not learn to fear my impetuous moods and quick tongue. After all, she was only what I had called her,—my baby, thinking and speaking with childish inconsequence.

"You see I was right there when it happened. A telegram had come for mamma, and I took it to Mrs. Upton's, and Rosalie called mamma out of Mrs. Upton's bedroom to get it. I picked up the telegram afterward from the floor where she had thrown it. It was from Dr. Barker, and this was what it said: 'Letter received. Don't run the risk.' I tore it up into little pieces. Mamma was unconscious, and I thought nobody else had a right to it. When she read it she pressed her lips together tight. You know how she looks when she is very determined. Then she sat down at Mrs. Upton's desk and began to fill up a telegraph-blank. It didn't seem to suit her, and she tore it up and began another. She looked very pale and serious, and I was wondering what had happened to worry her, when all of a sudden I smelled chloroform. You know there is no mistaking the smell. Mamma must have noticed it too, for she jumped up and dashed right past me through the hall to Mrs. Upton's bedroom. I ran after her,—I was so frightened,—and I suppose she forgot all about me. Mrs. Upton was lying on the lounge, and papa was holding a handkerchief to her face. He had a bottle in his other hand. Mamma flew right at him, and snatched the bottle, and threw it across the room. Then she fell on her knees by the lounge and began to fan Mrs. Upton, and said, as I never heard her speak before, 'My God, Raymond! what have you done?' Then Miss West came running in from the other room, and I felt I ought not to stay. And the next thing I heard—you know the rest, Sydney!"

My head was so light and the room spun so rapidly about me that I could summon no words. The frozen quietude deceived the narrator. It was not for nothing that the wise head had been thinking all these weeks. The low, steady tone resumed the tale, when I did not reply:

"I would have told you everything that day, you recollect, but you said, 'We must never speak to one another again of what has happened.' And I thought that you must understand how mamma felt. She loved Mrs. Upton so dearly, and she just worships papa. And although what was done was an accident he must have known that she was opposed to it, or he wouldn't have given the chloroform when she was not in the room. I think the reason it made her worse to see him when she was so ill was that it brought everything back to her. And, afterward, when she was better, she was very sorry for him, and sorry she had seemed angry. She is trying to make up to him now, all the time, and to comfort him. He must suffer dreadfully when he thinks what he did."

"Suffer!" ejaculation burst forth with impassioned energy that alarmed her. "Suffer! when he has let everybody think that she did it,—not he! Oh the hypocrite! the double-eyed, heartless, cruel hypocrite! And all this time I, like a fool——"

I tore at my throat, where something choked the words and strangled me to blindness.

"Sydney!" the great gray eyes wide with horrified amazement, "did you think—could you, or anybody, believe that our mother had killed Don's mother? Oh, my poor dear! what you have had to bear, and nobody to help you or tell anything better!"

She wrapped my head in her arms, patting and stroking it, sobbing and cooing as over something grievously hurt. Suddenly she let me go, and jumped up, face and figure alive with excitement.

"And that was why you said you never could marry Don? Did you tell him?"

The change to sternness would have amused me at another time. It actually cowed me instead. The mistake that had been so disastrous seemed now culpably inexcusable.

"Don't blame me, Elsie!" I pleaded, humbly. "Miss West told me how it had happened, and everything helped me to believe her. I have been very, very unhappy!"

She compressed her lips, marched across the floor and put out her hand to the bell-knob, arrested the motion, and turned to me.

"May I have your phaeton, Sydney? and may John drive me? I must see Don to-night, or I couldn't sleep a wink. He mustn't be left to believe this one minute longer."

"Do what you please, dear."

I was crying outright now, with the soft abundance of a spring shower. Rocks and ice were gone; there were the awakening of life and the stirring of growth under the warmed waters. She did not ring, and my tears melted her sternness. She came over to me, and again took my head into her embrace.

"I didn't mean to be unkind, Sydney. I was just thinking of Don, and how he didn't get comfort when he needed it most, and how he loves you, and all that. Don't you suppose I understand why he is so good to me? Just because I am your sister. He is very lonely, Sydney."

I had no answer.

"If you had seen him in his home, as I have, —alone and sad,—missing his mother everywhere, and with your picture—the one taken in your gray-and-silver luncheon-gown—on his table, side by side with hers, and sighing as he looks at them, you'd feel just as I do, only more, don't you know, Sydney!" with a tremendous muster of courage. "Won't you let me order the close carriage—it's raining, you see—and go with me, this minute, to see him?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Types are not used in printing Persian newspapers. The "copy" is given to an expert penman, who writes it out neatly. The various articles are then arranged in page form, and lithography multiplies the copies.

During a recent performance of Carmen at Berne, the members of the orchestra, having a grievance with a newly-appointed conductor, organised a general strike and laid down their instruments. After some delay a pianoforte was brought forward, and the last act of the opera was given with pianoforte accompaniment only.

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HONG KONG IN A BAD WAY.

Mr. W. T. Taylor Talks of the Result of the India Silver Question.

Mr. W T. Taylor, a director of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, was in Toronto the other day. Speaking on the India silver question to a reporter he said that the people of India had been short-sighted when they had advocated the suspension of free coinage. The effect of the suspicion would be that the rupee would become scarce, and as a consequence would in time increase in value. But appreciation of the rupee so brought about would have the same effect upon prices in India as the appreciation of gold had upon prices in England. It would cause greater quantities of produce to be afforded in exchange for the rupee, which meant a further decline in prices and further cheapening of the value of labor. Capital would benefit by this, as now currency in India was established upon a gold basis. Silver would be used in India only for the purpose of adornment, and the rupee would perform the functions of a shilling. The question, however, had

ONE FAVORABLE SIDE.

Demonetising silver in India, which suspension of free coinage of the rupee amounts to, would increase the gold value of the rupee, and reduce the interest India has to pay England on her gold debt. Therefore taxation could be reduced. The rupee being depreciated in value, the price of commodities would decline, and laborers could only convert the surplus product of their labor into a lesser quantity of coin, thus having less to give in exchange for reduced taxation and the necessaries or luxuries they desired. Produce being cheaper, the material for manufacture would be cheaper, and manufactures would also decline, and if the theory that high prices denote prosperity holds good the reverse ought to occur when prices are low and demonetization of silver in India be an unmixed evil. To remove India by a stroke of the pen from the number of silver consuming countries would be to throw one-fourth more silver on the markets of the world, and reduce the price at once to 33 pence per ounce, or by depreciating silver to that extent, it would make gold 34 per cent. more difficult to obtain, by causing a new decline in prices of commodities, measured in gold, of 25 per cent.

HONG KONG A FINANCIAL WRECK.

Concluding, Mr. Taylor said: "The result of the change is the entire suspension of trade between India and China. Just fancy a drop of some 30 rupees in every $100. Is it not awful? Some of the leading merchants and bankers of Hong Kong wired to Lord Lansdowne, Governor-General of India, asking him not to allow the ordinance to go through, stating as a reason the ruination of the Indian trade. The reply was in the form of a private telegram to the Governor of Hong Kong, giving him to understand that the ordinance had already been passed and as he feared not likely to be repealed either."

A Book on Manitoba.

After the terribly trenchant literary impressions of a flying visit to Manitoba which have lately made the intending emigrant pause, a record of experiences in that lone land of illimitable expectation, entitled "Sunny Manitoba: Its Peoples and its Industries," by Alfred O. Legge (T. Fisher Unwin), is at least welcome as a relief. The author, if not absolutely disinterested in his confident views, since his visit to the colony was to his two sons settled on prairie farms, is no visionary enthusiast or advertising agent, but a keen, practical man of business, who takes stock of all he sees, and sums up results in figures. He is far from blinking the hardships of a settler, the self-denial and self-sacrifice which are involved in constant hard work and constant isolation, the risks and uncertainties of cultivating a new soil and getting the produce to market, the dreariness of living far from any civilized society, the long periods when sunny is exchanged for icy, and labor is waiting for its fruits. The one simple lesson to be learnt from these useful and evidently trustworthy pages is that all depends on the fitness of the emigrant who casts in his lot with a colony of pioneers. Youth, energy, determination, a capacity to spurn delight, and to be independent of social intercourse—all these qualifications are indispensable, not only to success in such a venture, but to enduring it in the prospect of far-off reward. It is not a venture for blase cynics who are sick of the artificial pursuit of old world societies, but for younger men of unspoilt and untainted life, of vigorous temperament and fresh feelings, who prefer an out-of-door and open-air existence to all the pleasures of civilized societies and crowded cities.—[London Daily Telegraph.

Another Walking Tour.

Visitor: "What name are you going to give the baby?"

Mother: "I don't know; I have been trying to decide all day which of the many its father bestowed on it last night would be most suitable."

Bushmen and negroes possess a more prominent and narrow chest than the white races, whose chest is broader and flatter.

Dew has a preference for some colors. It is said that while a yellow board attracts dew, a red or black one beside it will be perfectly dry.