

# FOR THE THIRD TIME.

## CHAPTER VIII.

Facing the falling snow and the bitter blast, with the sturdy defiance of strong, young manhood, Dr. John Sterling plunged his homeward way through the drifts, whistling cheerily a Christmas anthem. The red light from the curtained windows of his home flared out brightly atwart the fluttering flakes.

"No place like home," thought Dr. John, "particularly on a stormy winter night, and after a hard day's work. I hope none of my patients will be so unreasonable as to call me out again in this tempest. My good mother has about given me up for lost I dare say."

He opened the door with his latch-key, and stamped the snow off his boots and overcoat. The parlor door opened, and his mother's pale and anxious face looked out.

"You, John! How late you are! You must be nearly frozen and famished."

"Both, mother; and ready to do wonders among your Christmas dainties. But, what's the matter? Have you seen a ghost, that you wear that scared face?"

"Something very much like it, John," his mother said gravely; "come in. Oh, you will do as you are! Sit down here and get warm. Did you meet any one on your way coming home?"

"Did I meet any one? And this Christmas eve! There's a question! Did I meet whom, mother?"

"Amy Earle."

"Mrs. Latour! My dear mother, what would bring an invalid out on such a night?"

"Misery—madness, perhaps. She has been here."

"Mother!"

"It is quite true; she left not a quarter of an hour ago. She came like a ghost, and vanished like one."

"Alone?"

"Alone, and on foot. Was ever such madness heard of! The tyrant was away, for a wonder, dining at Major Mallory's, and the imprisoned slave broke her bars and came here."

"Good Heavens! on such a night! It is enough, with her constitution, to give her death!"

"I don't think that we need to lament that, if it be so. Death is sometimes a merciful relief. I would rather see her at rest in her coffin than that villain's wife."

"Mother, you exaggerate, I think. 'Nothing that I can repeat—all was incoherent and wild. She wished she was dead; it was too late for mutual help; she was not his wife; she had sworn to keep his secret, and dare not break it. And then she broke out with a wild storm of hysterical sobbing and said she would betray herself if she lingered longer, but she was already out of sight. John, I think misery is turning her brain.'"

"Heaven forbid!" said her son. He had turned very pale, and sat looking into the glowing coals.

"Mother, I must go over to Blackwood Grange to-night."

"Impossible, John, in this storm."

"The storm will not hurt me, mother; and I would brave ten thousand such storms for poor Amy's sake. How do you know what may have befallen her on such a night. I will go now at once."

"Not until after supper," said his mother, resolutely. "I will not hear of it, John. Here, draw up your chair; it is quite ready, and quite spoiled by waiting."

Dr. Sterling obeyed. He had been hungry enough a moment before, but now he munched his toast and drank his tea mechanically. Pale and moody he sat. What if that little, frail creature had never reached home? What if she should find her white and cold among the pitiless snowdrifts? He pushed away his cup and plate, and arose.

"Already?" said Mrs. Sterling, reproachfully, "and you said you were hungry."

"I cannot eat, mother. Good Heavens! she may be lying frozen to death by the wayside while I loiter here. Poor child! Poor Amy! I wish Victor Latour had frozen to an icicle in the winter's storm, the night I first brought him to Blackwood Grange."

He seized his overcoat savagely, and put it on. Thrusting his hands into his pockets, in search of his fur glove, he brought forth a letter.

"Hello! I quite forgot this. A letter for you, mother."

He threw the letter in her lap. Mrs. Sterling eyed the superscription in somewhat great surprise.

"A woman's hand, and an unknown one to me. Postmarked Framingham. Why, John, that is the Lancashire village where Miss Dorothy Hardenbrook died. Whom can it be from?"

"You had better open it and see."

Mrs. Sterling opened the envelope and drew forth a closely written sheet. As she unfolded it a card fell out upon the carpet. Her son stooped and picked it up.

"A card de visite! It can't be a love letter with the gentleman's picture inclosed therein. Why—"

He stopped and stared. The picture was not a gentleman's. It was a vignette, the dark face of a young girl, more than common beauty. Two great, dark eyes lit up a handsome gypsy face—a bold, bright, dauntless face that could not fail to impress.

"Where have I seen this woman?" he thought. "It is a face not easily forgotten. Those big black eyes; that determined chin; that square, brown brow; that compressed mouth. Great Heavens! it is the face of Victor Latour!"

John Sterling absolutely recoiled from the picture and his own discovery. But in an instant he had recovered.

"It cannot be Victor Latour, of course. But if Victor Latour had a twin sister on earth, this is her portrait."

He turned the picture over. On the back was written, in a bold, decided hand: "Truly yours, Isabel Vance, Framingham, May 4, 18—"

"Isabel Vance! Isabel Vance!" repeated the young doctor. "I have heard that name before, too. Ah! I recollect. Isabel Vance was the young lady Miss Hardenbrook disinherited. What does she mean by sending her picture here, and what does she mean also, by being the living image of Amy Earle's villainous husband?"

He was interrupted by his mother. Mrs. Sterling rose up very pale, and placed the letter in his hands.

"Read that, John. It is a dying woman's warning, but I fear it comes to us too late."

John took the letter and looked just at the signature. It was not "Isabel Vance," but "Ellen Rosseter," and the letter ran thus:

Mrs. Sterling—Madam, Although personally a stranger to you, I know that you are the guardian and nearest female friend of Miss Amy Earle, of Blackwood Grange, the young lady to whom Dorothy Hardenbrook left her fortune. It is on Amy Earle's account that I write this letter.

I am a woman lying on my death-bed, and before you receive this I shall be in my grave. Accept it as a voice from the grave—a voice raised to warn your ward. Pray Heaven it come not too late.

Dorothy Hardenbrook had adopted a young relative, a Miss Isabel Vance, with the resolution of making her her heiress some years before she died. She took this Isabel Vance off the stage, for she was a play actor, and shut her up in the house at Framingham. She was very severe with her, and the girl needed it, for she was bold, and full of headstrong and unscrupulous. She was engaged to a young man she had known in the city, Mr. George Wildair, and he used to follow her secretly and meet her in the village. Miss Hardenbrook hated him, and forbade Isabel seeing him on the pain of disinheriting her. Isabel promised and disobeyed her, and again and again, by night and by stealth, Miss Hardenbrook discovered it, and the result was she disinherited Isabel, and left her fortune to Amy Earle.

Isabel's troubles came all at once, as troubles do come. Mr. Wildair jilted her immediately—it was her fortune he wanted, not herself. He jilted her, and she left the village and disappeared. If ever woman looked possessed of a demon, Isabel Vance did the last time I saw her. I knew then, and I know she has done it.

The next I heard of Mr. George Wildair he was engaged to Miss Earle; the next I heard he had been foully murdered the night before his wedding. Madam, Isabel Vance did that deed. I am dying, and I say it that Isabel Vance shot her false lover just as surely as I shall be judged.

I have not seen her since. I don't know what has become of her; but I do know that that is not likely to be her first and last crime. She will wreak her vengeance on Miss Earle, too, if you do not take care. She is subtle as a serpent, cunning as a fox, and unscrupulous enough and daring enough for any deed under heaven. I send you her picture, that you may recognize her if you ever meet her, and there is a specimen of her handwriting on that poor, thin face.

"My pale little Amy! You are whiter than the drifts outside this stormy night. Thank Heaven, I find you here safe! What madness, for you, Amy, to face this winter storm!"

She covered her face with her hands, and tearful sobs shook her from head to foot.

"I was so miserable, so lonely, so desolate, so forsaken, so heart-broken, Oh, John! You don't know. You can't know! I am most wretched, creature in all this wide earth."

"Victor Latour is a villain, a cold-blooded tyrant and villain; but it is not too late to save you from him, my Amy. I think I know the secret of his life—the secret he made you swear to keep."

She looked up at him in a blank, speechless terror.

"It is impossible," she said slowly. "No creature on this earth knows it but himself and me, and I have not broken my oath."

"We will see," said Dr. John. "You would be glad to have your chains broken, would you not? To be freed from this horrible union?"

"Glad! Her whole face lit up at the thought. 'It would be new life—it would be heaven on earth. But it is impossible; I am his wife; I cannot desert him for what is his misfortune, not his fault. No human law would give me a divorce for an infirmity he cannot help.'"

Dr. John stared at her bewildered. What did she mean? "His wife!" infirmity he could not help! Surely, they were at cross purposes. Surely, they were at cross purposes. The secret he knew or thought he knew, was not the secret she had sworn to keep. Was his wild supposition only a wild delusion after all?

"Where is Mr. Latour?" he asked presently.

"At Major Mallory's, he has not yet returned. I expect him every moment, and John, don't be angry, please—but I had rather he did not find you here."

"I shall not remain long," replied the doctor, quietly. "But before I go, Amy, have you any letters or notes of Mr. Latour's in the house? I have a particular reason for wishing to identify his writing."

Amy looked at him in surprise. "Victor's writing? Why, John?"

"I will tell you presently. Oblige me in this matter, if you can."

"What do you mean to do?" she asked.

"She opened a volume on a table near, and produced a copy of manuscript verses. It was Tennyson's 'Break, Break, Break,' beautifully written; and Dr. John started at sight of the faultless chirography, as if it had been a death's-head. It was the handwriting of Isabel Vance."

"You will permit me to retain this, Amy. Thank Heaven! Your freedom is near at hand!"

He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. Amy gazed at him in wonder—he was pale even to the lips. He started up to go, holding out his hand.

"Good by, Amy, and good night. Keep up a good heart; I think your troubles are almost over."

Amy's answer was a low cry of terror. Her eyes were fixed upon the doorway in a wild, dilated stare. Dr. John wheeled round and confronted Victor Latour.

"Give me this picture. I will go at once to Blackwood and endeavor to see Amy. Heaven grant she may have reached home in safety. Once there, I will know what to do. Don't sit up for me, mother, I may return late."

"As if I could sleep. And John, for Heaven's sake, take care of that wretch. If Victor Latour or Isabel Vance suspects that you know the secret of her life, your life will not be worth an hour's purchase. You will be found like poor George Wildair."

"I am afraid of Victor Latour," said Dr. John, coolly; "forewarned is forearmed; good-by, mother; I beg you will not sit up for me."

Dr. Sterling mounted his nag and set off. As may be imagined, the young doctor's reflections were not of the most lively description as he rode along through the night air. He could not help feeling that he had twice lost the heiress, through his own over-scrupulous sense of honor; but he was not at all certain that he would be able to win and wear her after all.

He had a sort of misgiving within himself that, even should he be successful in rescuing Amy from the thrall of Victor Latour, after all the romance with which her life had been invested, she would consider a union with him too prosaic and commonplace.

His was one of those strong, deep, and self-sacrificing natures which will do what conscience dictates, but he was not at all certain that he would be able to win and wear her after all.

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# Sash and Door Factory.

Having Completed our New Factory we are now prepared to FILL ALL ORDERS PROMPTLY.

We keep in Stock a large quantity of Sash, Doors, Mouldings, Flooring and the different Kinds of Dressed Lumber for outside sheeting.

Our Stock of DRY LUMBER is very Large so that all orders can be filled.

Lumber, Shingles and Lath always In Stock. M. G. & J. McKECHNIE.

## YOUNG FOLKS.

THAT'S THE WAY.

Just a little every day,  
That's the way!  
Seeds in darkness swell and grow,  
Tiny blades push through the snow,  
Never any flower of May  
Leaps to blossom in a day,  
Leaps to blossom in a burst,  
Slowly—slowly—at the first,  
That's the way!  
Just a little every day,  
That's the way!  
Children learn to read and write,  
Bit by bit, and mile by mile,  
Never any one, I say,  
Leaps to knowledge and its power,  
Slowly—slowly—hour by hour,  
That's the way!  
Just a little every day,  
—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

A MYSTERY SOLVED.

Harold Ames was proud and happy when Mr. Jones, the great newspaper agent, took him on as one of his boys. Not a moment late was he with any of the papers, and the wages were a quarter more than in his last place. Every one of those quarters should be put aside to buy mother the new dress she needed. Harold's mother was a widow, and he was her only child.

Five weeks had Harold kept his place, and five quarters rattled in his money box—the rest of the money he always handed over to his mother to buy his food and clothes—when a terrible trial befell the boy. Subscribers complained that their papers were not left regularly, and one man even sent word, that though paid for, his paper had not come for a whole week past. Of course, Harold was sent for and reprimanded, but he could only say, earnestly, "Please, sir, I always did leave the papers at every house."

And the answer was, "Don't make matters worse by telling a lie."

He was not dismissed, but was to have a week's grace.

Poor Harold! Tears of indignation welled into his eyes. As to the missing papers, he knew nothing about them. It was a mystery, and it was a mystery that continued. He left the papers regularly in Mortimer street, yet again people called at the office and said they had never got them. At the end of the week the boy was called up and dismissed.

In vain Harold's mother pleaded for her child, a good boy, with a good character for honesty wherever he had been in a place; it was of no use.

Poor Harold was sobbing bitterly at home, when Mr. S., the photographer round the corner, knocked at the door to ask Mrs. Ames to send his wash home, little earlier. He was surprised to see Harry in tears, and asked the reason. Mrs. Ames explained, "Look here," the young man said, "I'm full of mysteries; I'll take the box," and the photographer laughed. "Cheer up," he said to Harry. "Come and work for me, and we'll find out this side."

He saw Harry, knew him for a good boy.

A few days later Mr. S. called at the newspaper office.

"Harry's gone regularly since you dismissed young Ames," he asked.

"Not a bit of it. Worse complaints than ever," was the reply.

"A mystery," said Mr. S., and went away.

Next day he got up very early and walked up and down Mortimer street. Harry's successor was dropping the morning papers on every doorstep. Mr. S. read against the portrait of No. 1, an excited, keeping an eye on the who street. Then he went home, chugging and staring hard at No. 8, when the door stood open to air the breeze. You could do that in this quiet street.

He asked Harry if No. 8 had ever complained of his papers coming irregularly, but Harry shook his head.

"No, it was too ill," he said. "They thought he was dying last week. The girl told me so."

"They keep a cat?" he asked.

Harry stared. "They keep a dog," he said. "A jolly one, it can do heaps of things."

"Is too clever by half," said Mr. S. "Come with me, my boy. You and I will go and ask how No. 8 is."

ways off the doorstep and lays it in the little smoking room; but this two weeks past we've none of us thought of the paper, or even gone into the room, we've been so dreadfully anxious about poor