

He had just left the house when Willie's screaming reached a higher pitch than ever, and I hurried up stairs in a rage, determined to exercise my authority at once, to show the child such an annoyance was unbearable. Pushing open the door of the room where Martha gave him his meals, I beheld a scene that fully accounted for his cries. The nurse held both his wrists in a cruel grasp, and was beating him unmercifully about the head.

"Say I'm tipsy again, you rascal!" said she in thick stupid tones. "You'll tell your pa I was tipsy all night, will you, when I was rolling in agony with the spasms? I have a mind to kill you, I have—and I will, too, if you go to tale-bearing to your pa!"

I wrenched the child from her hold, and confronted the astonished woman. My fear of intoxication was completely overpowered by my indignation, and I spoke calmly and decisively.

"Go to bed, Martha, you are unfit for your duties to-day. When you are better, I shall see you again."

Her angry gaze changed slowly into a dull stare as she perceived my firm expression, and she sank into an arm chair where I knew she would sleep off the effects of her over-indulgence. I slipped the door-key into my pocket, and retreated, in my excitement, carrying Willie as easily as an infant. Frank's nurse looked thoroughly surprised when I entered her domain with my step-son sobbing hysterically in my arms; but my recital did not astonish her.

"I had no idea it was as bad as that, ma'am," said the nurse, "for Martha keeps herself to herself, and seldom allows her fellow-servants inside her rooms; but we all suspected she drank, for we smelt spirits often enough."

"But why did nobody tell me?" I asked, crying myself as the nurse gently revealed the blue marks on Willie's shoulders. "This child has been barbarously treated."

"Well, ma'am, we don't think it our place to carry tales so long as you were satisfied. Many a time have I told Martha that Master Willie ought not to cry so much, but she always said that she had your permission to punish him as she chose when he was troublesome."

I felt the reproach her words conveyed to my conscience, and I knew it was deserved.

"Get him some breakfast, nurse," said I; "the things were only half laid on the table, and he has had nothing this morning. Now, Willie, I want to know all about Martha—come, tell mamma everything."

"She hasn't been quite so bad before," replied the little fellow, looking up into my face, "but she is always sipping some stuff from a bottle in her pocket, and it makes her so cross. Last night she was angry because I was in here playing with baby, and she sent me to bed without supper. She said that I took tales to the other servants, and that I had no business here; she told me you wouldn't have me touch baby because I was only his step-brother, and I was in his way, and you'd be glad if I was dead—but that's a story, isn't it?"

He fastened upon me his great earnest blue eyes, just like my husband's. I was crying fast—crying away all my unnatural hardness—and for answer I stooped down and kissed him.

"I knew it was a story," said Willie. "I do like you to nurse me, mamma; it feels like grannie."

"Did Martha dress you this morning, Master Willie? asked nurse, returning with some bread-and-milk and a little minced chicken.

"No, she sat up in the chair all night. She was asleep there this morning when I went in to see if breakfast was ready. I had dressed myself, and I woke her up and told her so. I began to cry, and said she was tipsy when she stared so oddly at me, and then she hit me because I tried to get away to tell papa."

"Master told me I was never to interfere with Martha, but just attend to baby," said nurse indignantly, "else I'd have found out directly why he was screaming. Never mind, Master Willie; it's all right now."

"Nurse," suggested I, "I think we could have Master Willie's little bed in here. I wish you could undertake both the children, or, at least try it for a time. I can rely on you, and of course your wages would be altered. He would not be much in your way."

"I am quite agreeable, ma'am," said nurse. "Baby has taken wonderfully to Master Willie, and he always does what I tell him; but I can't have that naughty cough in my nursery, sir, I tell you."

"I don't cough for fun, nurse, declared Willie. "I'll try to keep quiet—I will indeed."

"He has a nasty hacking cough at nights," said nurse to me, when Willie, with the tears all dried, was playing bo-peep with baby in the *berceau*. "It goes right through you, ma'am. I doubt if he's long for this world after all."

"What a foolish idea!" said I hastily looking at the white face and slender frame, and wondering, with a sudden flash of horror, if my lack of love was thus to be punished by Heaven. The womanly yearnings crushed hitherto by jealousy, broke down every barrier then. I was myself at last, and my heart opened to take in my husband's child.

I longed to see and speak to Kendal again, and looked forward anxiously to his return. I was sadly disappointed when Mr. Tudor came to tell me that my husband, who shared his chambers, had been summoned to Exeter on legal business and might be detained some days. He had sent a list of certain requisites, and these I packed at once and despatched to the station to

follow him. I could not bring myself to write one line of all that I felt.

Mr. Tudor soon relieved my disquietude as to dealing with Martha. After a brief interview between them, in which he acted for Kendal, she quietly accepted a month's money in lieu of notice, and bestowed herself and her belongings in a cab, with a few threats and impertinences concerning myself and her late situation which highly amused the cabman.

"She's gone!" shouted Willie, clapping his thin hands for joy. "Won't I have a good time now, mamma?"

After this Willie's health did not seem to improve, and, broken-hearted, I realised one morning, as the rising sun was parting the gray clouds in the east, that all my care for my patient was in vain, a slight attack of pleurisy, anxiously watched by myself and a West-end physician I had summoned, had taken a fatal turn on the previous evening, and we had telegraphed directly to his father, who had preceded directly to Ireland from Exeter.

Closer my boy clung to me with all his feeble strength. Baby was crying in the nursery, missing my presence there; but even his voice could not draw me from that bed-side. I would have died myself to save my other child, cut off in the very blossom of his days—a victim perhaps to the neglect which had left his warning cough unattended to. Unspeakably dear had Kendal's son become to me of late; his innocent lips had prattled to me of better things than my careless thoughts had hitherto heeded.

One evening footsteps came hurrying upstairs, and I was quickly pushed aside by my husband's hand. I knew what his first-born was to him as I noticed his evident distress. His emotion pained the child, who was placid himself with the shadow of coming peace.

"Doctor Steane, tell me there is hope—there must be hope!" appealed my husband to the physician, who stood at the foot of the bed.

"I'm not afraid, papa dear," said Willie faintly, as Doctor Steane sadly shook his head.

"But I cannot—I cannot let you go, my poor little boy!"

A solemn silence fell over us, broken only by my husband's sobs; my own heart was too full to find relief in tears. I started convulsively when at the last there came a great cry. "My mamma!" and the little arms were stretched towards me. How could I ever wilfully put away my boy's tenderness? Just then I would at any cost have purchased a renewal of our term of love.

The rest is all to me as a dream—a vision of frightened faces, morning shadows superseding the candlelight, and a little figure calm as the flowers on which the sun was rising—an indistinct memory of stifled sobs, agitated whispers, baby cries, and through it all a boy's clear voice faintly recalling his daily prayer—

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child."

I knew I was forgiven as I stood in the stillness of the solemn room and tenderly looked my last at him who would so soon be removed from our sight. The heavenly calm of little Willie's face spoke peace to my troubled soul; the love that had given him rest had pardon too for me. I could not bear to remain there long; one mother's kiss I gave him—a parting kiss that refused to part—and then I left him as before, with the pure white roses strewn around him and the lilies on his breast. And my husband, who had followed me in unperceived, took me in his arms with a fondness that had a new element in it.

"Dear love," said he, pressing his lips to mine, "I have learnt all now; and what remains untold I read in his eyes that morning as he looked upon you. Heaven reward you, my Millicent!"

I put down my head upon his shoulder and cried there for the first time since our sorrow—cried out all the feelings I had no words to tell.

THE HEIRLOOM.

The pearl cross was an heirloom. Etta wore it the first time I ever saw her, and I noticed its beauty as it rested upon a knot of deep blue ribbons at her throat. Ribbons and pearls both suited her fair complexion, deep golden hair, and brown eyes, soft as a fawn's.

I think I loved Henrietta Raymond the first hour in which I met her at a small party my Aunt Hilda gave in honour of my return from a long business trip in Western cities. When the party was over Aunt Hilda told me that Miss Raymond was the niece of a new-comer in our village, a retired clergyman, who had taken a house very near our own.

Had she been a great heiress or a very fine lady, I might never have drawn her into my heart of hearts, as I did very soon. But she was a loving girl, possessing no worldly wealth, and we met on terms of perfect social equality.

I was an orphan, who owed education, care, everything to Aunt Hilda, who had an income so very narrow that it must have cost her many acts of self-denial to support me. But at the time I met Etta Raymond I had obtained a good situation in a commercial house in New York, and was putting all my spare funds into Aunt Hilda's keeping for her own comfort.

I had been absent more than a year on business for the firm, and was enjoying a vacation of a month's duration, when I met, wooed and won Henrietta Raymond. I courted her with all my heart; and when she acknowledged she loved me, my cup of happiness was full.

Her uncle, Mr. Raymond, when I placed my wordly prospects before him, was averse to an immediate marriage, but gave his hearty consent to our engagement. How the time speeded away, and how much of it we spent side by side in that happy summer!

A year passed, during which I was retained closely at my post in the counting-house, having responsibilities and duties that kept me far into the night. As summer drew near, I was troubled by frequent attacks of vertigo, that I looked forward to my month's vacation as a much needed rest as well as pleasure. To my great disappointment it was postponed until September, and I was really ill when at last I packed my trunk and took the train for home. Before I saw Etta I was prostrated by an attack of fever that threatened my life, depriving me of consciousness for weeks. When I recovered there fell upon me a blow that caused a dangerous relapse. I was blind. Our only doctor said hopelessly, incurably blind.

It was impossible for many bitter months for me to feel resigned or patient. I prayed to die, rather than to live in my youth and strength a burden upon a weak and aged woman. My gifts to Aunt Hilda were melting away fast under medical expenses, and there was only her own small income for our support.

But for Etta, I believe I should have taken my own life in these dark, despairing days. Yet she was a very angel of comfort. She refused to accept my offered release from her engagement, and actually proposed an immediate marriage and emigration to New York, where she was sure she could find work. Oh, my darling! how my heart wrapped you close in those dark days, when all other hope or joy seemed stricken from my life. Every day as I sat in our tiny parlor, helpless and idle, Etta came to me, pressing her soft lips upon my blind eyes, and whispering words of comfort.

She read to me, talked to me, sang and played upon Aunt Hilda's old-fashioned piano all my favourite airs. If the weather was fine we walked out, Etta leading me to retired spots.

But I mourned for my future! What was life to be to me? I must learn some new pursuit to win bread, or depend upon charity. I was well again and strong, and every drop of my young blood was in revolt at my enforced idleness.

At Christmas time, Mr. Raymond's only son came from Chicago for a visit. I had heard of Albert Raymond from Aunt Hilda. From his mother he had inherited a fortune, and he had loved his cousin Etta. Because of her refusal to be his wife he had gone to Chicago, where he was adding to his heritage by successful land speculations.

I was prepared to be jealous of Albert Raymond, for Etta always spoke highly of him, giving him warm sisterly affection. But after he came, though he was cordially pleasant with me, I hated him. Before he had been home a week I knew that he and Etta had some secret between them. I could grope my way by that time to several of the neighbouring houses, and was often Etta's visitor, as she had been mine when I was getting well.

More than once, coming across the garden, I could hear Etta and Albert conversing in an animated, eager tone, to stop abruptly the moment I appeared, or awkwardly to introduce general subjects I was sure were not the subjects of the original conversation. A visitor came from New York to Mr. Raymond's, a friend of Albert's; and Etta insisted upon my inviting him to my aunt's house.

He was a gruff-spoken man, and talked incessantly of my affliction. Knowing how I shrank from any conversation, from any sympathy upon this subject, Etta had always delicately led all such talk away from it. But, to my surprise, she encouraged this stranger, and fairly wrung from me every symptom, both pending and during my illness.

When he went away, she accompanied him home, though I offered to escort her over a little later.

It was a week after this, and Albert had been away, when he returned suddenly. Coming into the room, he said, "Etta, it will be all right."

Then seeing me, I am sure, he made some awkward explanation about money investments. But Etta grew very silent, and soon after I heard a pencil over paper. Albert was writing! A few minutes later he left the room, and very soon Etta asked me to excuse her for a moment, and followed him. I groped my way to the table, where I was sure I had heard Albert writing. Nothing there! I felt about, till a small piece of paper was found close beside Etta's chair. She had trusted to my blindness for its remaining undiscovered.

I was half mad with jealous pain, and I somehow got to Mr. Raymond's study.

"Will you read that for me?" I asked.

Without other answer, he read:

"I must speak to you. Will wait in the summer-house."

"Thank you," I said.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The wrong note. I will find the other."

I went away then, to the summer-house, softly as a thief, guarding my steps on the frozen ground. They were there, and I could hear Albert's voice. As I came near, I heard Etta—"Ah, Albert, I will love you all my life for this!"

She was crying too. I could tell that by her broken voice.

I turned away and went home. It was a cold day, and I was utterly miserable. Aunt Hilda insisted upon nursing me, and I submitted,

brooding over my secret pain, seeking no sympathy.

It was but natural Etta should turn from the blind lover, who was but a disappointment, to the handsome young man of fortune who had loved her so long. I would try to give her up, not in anger, but tenderly.

But I could not. Albert returned to Chicago, and every day Etta became dearer to me. She was the light of my life. She gave me every hour she could spare from her duties to her uncle and his house, and she spoke of our future as surely to be passed together. I had no courage to tell her I suspected her secret, and only in my lonely hours did I dwell upon the remembrance of Albert's visit.

The long winter wore away, and early spring was gone, and when May blossoms were bursting Etta came one morning to me.

"Do you remember Doctor Sanderson?" she asked.

"Your cousin's friend?"

"Yes. He is a great oculist."

My heart seemed to stand still.

"He came from New York solely to see you, and he warned us that we must give you no exciting hope for some months. Perfect tranquillity, he told us, was the great hope for the recovery of your sight."

"Recovery of my sight!" I cried. "He thinks that possible?"

"He thinks it more than possible. If you improved in strength as you have done all the winter, he was certain he could successfully operate this month."

I could not speak. Very gently Etta told me of her cousin's kindness. He had gone to the city solely to find this doctor, who was no more his friend than he was the friend of any other patient. He had brought him to see me, and then burdened my Etta with his secret instructions. Even Mr. Raymond and Aunt Hilda were ignorant of this loving conspiracy.

It humiliated me to think of the part I had taken, the unworthy construction I had placed upon Etta's outburst of gratitude. But she should never know I had doubted her, even for an hour.

"Tell me," I said, "when this doctor will come again?"

"He is here, waiting to see you."

He came in soon after, and there was no reluctance then in my answers to his searching questions. He examined my eyes closely, and gave me a promise of sight in less than two months.

And he kept his word. After the operation he gave strict directions for bandaging and confinement in a dark room, till, at the end of six long weeks, he came again, and let me see once more the blessed daylight and Etta's face.

From that hour I gained hope and courage again, and when my eyes were perfectly restored returned to New York. I was expressly forbidden to resume my old duties, but the firm gave me a position as salesman and a good salary.

Etta waited another year for me, when my great-uncle left me a legacy that enabled me to marry, having a sure income.

It was not until we had been married over a year that Etta asked me one day if I could spare her seven hundred dollars.

"Certainly," I replied.

"Do you wonder what I want of so much money?" she asked.

I did not wonder, for we had no secrets in our life, and my wife usually told me where she spent her money.

"I will tell you," she said. "I want to buy back my pearl cross."

"You sold that?" I cried. "I thought you valued that above all your possessions!"

"But not above your eyesight! Dr. Sanderson was paid \$500 for the operation, not the \$50 you supposed."

"Etta!"

"That was part of our secret. Albert would have given me the money, but I would not let you owe your sight to any one save me. So he took my cross, and sold it for \$700 here in New York. The man who bought it agreed to keep it for a time for me, and to-day Albert told me he could get it again."

I shall always think the cross had never been out of Albert's possession, and he was too delicate to give it again to Etta. But he was in New York on a wedding tour, about to sail for Europe, and he gave his cousin the opportunity to redeem the heirloom.

My wife wears the pearl cross whenever she is in gala dress, and I never see it upon her fair throat but my heart swells in loving gratitude to the faithful woman who sacrificed it, the dearest treasure she owned, for me, to restore to me the lost blessing of sight.

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