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From the Lady's Book.

THE BLIND GIRL'S STORY.

By Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz.

[Continued from page 37.]

Once during the absence of Alice I went into her chamber for a book I had lent her, which contained a passage I wished to recal. I took up several others, which lay upon the table. There was one which belonged to my husband, and in it was a piece of folded paper, embalmed with flowers, like some holy relic. It was not sealed—it was open—it was a medical prescription, written by Clinton, thus tenderly, romantically, preserved. On another half torn sheet were some broken lines, breathing passion and despair. They were in the hand-writing of Alice, and apparently original, without address or signature, but it was easy for my excited imagination to supply them. Poor victim of passion—by the side of this record of all my fears was the composing draught, prepared to check the consumptive cough—the elixir to sustain the failing principles of vitality. How is it that we dare to kindle an unhallowed flame, even on the ashes of decaying mortality. I left the chamber, and retired to my own. I knew not in what manner to act. I endeavoured to reflect on what I ought to do. Alice and myself could not live long under the same roof, yet how could I bid her depart, or betray her to my husband? I could not believe such feeling could be excited in her without sufficient encouragement. I laid myself down on the bed, and wished I might never rise again. I closed my eyes, and prayed that the dark fillet of night might rest on them again and forevermore. My cheeks burned as with consuming fire but it was in my heart. When Clinton returned, not finding me in the drawing-room, he sought me in my own chamber. He seemed really alarmed at my situation. He forgot all his former constraint, and hung over me with a tenderness and anxiety that might have proved to me how dear I was. He sat by me, holding my hand, and uttering every endearing expression affection could suggest. Melted by his caresses, I yearned to unbosom to him my whole heart—my pride, my jealousy was subdued. I endeavoured to speak, but the words died on my tongue. Confused images flitted across my brain—then came a dreary blank. For weeks I lay on that bed of sickness, unconscious of every thing around me. My recovery was for a long time doubtful—but when I at last opened my languid eyes, they rested on the face of my husband, who had kept his unwearyed vigils by my pillow, and still he held my feeble hand in his, as if he had never unloosed his clasp. He looked pale and wan, but a ray of divine joy flashed from his eye as he met my glance of recognition.

Humbled and chastened by this visitation from heaven, renovated by the warm and gracious influence exerted for my restoration, animated by new-born hope, I rose from my sick bed. The vulture had unloosed its fangs, and the dove once more returned to its nest. I could even pity the misguided girl who had caused me so much unhappiness. I treated her with a kindness, of late very unwonted—but she evidently shunned my companionship, and in proportion as my spirits rose from the weight that had crushed them to the dust, hers became depressed and fitful. Let me hurry on—I linger too long on feelings. Few events have marked my brief history, yet some have left traces that all the waves of time can never wash out.

It was Sunday—it was the first time I had attended church since my illness. My husband accompanied me, while Alice, as usual, remained at home. The preacher was eloquent—the music sweet and solemn—the aspirations of faith warm and kindling. I had never before felt such

a glow of gratitude and trust; and while my mind was in this state of devout abstraction, Clinton whispered to me that he was obliged to withdraw a short time, to visit a patient who was dangerously sick—"but I will return," said he, "to accompany you home." My thoughts were brought back to earth by this interruption, and wandered from the evangelical eloquence of the pulpit. The services were unusually long, and my head began to ache from the effort of listening. I experienced the lingering effect of sickness, and feeling that dimness of sight come over me, which was a never-failing symptom of a malady of the brain, I left the church, and returned home, without waiting for the coming of my husband. When I crossed the threshold, my spirit was free from a shadow of suspicion. I had been in an exalted mood—I felt as if I had been sitting under the outspread wings of the cherubim, and had brought away with me some faint reflection of the celestial glory. I was conscious of being in a high state of nervous excitement. The reaction produced by the unexpected scene that presented itself, was, in consequence, more terrible. There, on a sofa, half supported in the arms of my husband, whose hand she was grasping with a kind of convulsive energy, her hair unbound and wet, and exhaling the odorous essence with which it had been just bathed, sat Alice, and the words that passed her lips, as I entered, at first unperceived by them, were these—"Never, never—she hates me—she must ever hate me." I stood transfixed—the expression of my countenance must have been awful, for they looked as if confronted by an avenging spirit. Alice actually shrieked, and her pale features writhed, as the scroll, when the scorching blaze comes near it. My resolution was instantaneous. I waited not for explanations—the scene to my mind admitted none. The sudden withdrawal of my husband from church, upon the pretence of an errand of duty, the singular agitation of Alice—all that I saw and heard, filled me with the most maddening emotions—all the ties of wedded love seemed broken and withered, at once, like the withes that bound the awakening giant. "Clinton," exclaimed I, "you have deceived me—but it is for the last time." Before he could reply, or arrest my motions, I was gone. The carriage was still at the door. "Drive me to my father's, directly," was all I could utter, and it was done.

Swiftly the carriage rolled on—I thought I heard my name borne after me on the wind, but I looked not behind. I felt strong in the conviction of my wrongs. It would have been weakness to have wept. My scorn of such duplicity lifted me above mere sorrow. It was in the gloom of twilight when I reached my father's door. I rushed into the drawing-room, and found myself in the arms of my brother. "Cecilia, my sister! what brings you here." He was alarmed at my sudden entrance, and through the dusky shade he could discover the wild flashing of my eyes, the disorder of my whole appearance. The presence of human sympathy softened the sternness of my despair. Tears gushed violently forth. I tried to explain to him my wretchedness and its cause, but could only exclaim, "Clinton, Alice, cruel, deliberate deceivers!" Henry bit his lip, and ground his teeth, till their ivory was tinged with blood, but he made no comments. He spoke then with his usual calmness, and urged me to retire to my chamber, and compose myself before my father's return. He almost carried me there in his arms, soothing and comforting me. He called for an attendant, again whispered the duty and necessity for self-control, then left me, promising a speedy return. I watched for the footsteps of Henry, but hour after hour passed away, and he returned not. I asked the servants where he had gone? They knew not. I asked myself, and something

told me, in an awful voice—"Gone, to avenge thee." The moment this idea flashed into my mind, I felt as if I were a murderess. I would convince myself of the truth. I knew my brother's chamber—thither I ran, and drawing back the bed curtains, looked for the silver mounted pistols that always hung over the bed's head. They were gone—and a coat dashed hastily on, the counterpane, a pocket-book fallen on the carpet, all denoted a hurried departure on some fatal errand. The agony I had previously suffered was light to what pierced me now. To follow him was my only impulse. I rushed out of the house—it was a late hour in the evening—there was no moon in the sky, and I felt the dampness of the falling dew, as I flew, with uncovered head, like an unblessed spirit, through the darkness. My brain began to be thronged with wild images. It seemed to me, legions of dark forms were impeding my steps, "Oh! let me pass," cried I, "it is my husband and brother I have slain. Let me pass," continued I, shrieking, for an arm of flesh and blood was thrown around me, and held me struggling. "Gracious heavens, it is the voice of my Cecilia!" It was my father that spoke. I remembered that I recognized him, and that was all. My cries were changed to cries of madness, I was borne back raving. The malady that had so recently brought me to the door of the grave, had renewed its attack with increased malignancy. My brain had been too much weakened to bear the tension of its agony. For long months I was confined within my chamber walls, sometimes tossing in delirious anguish, at others lying in marble unconsciousness, an image of the death they prayed might soon release me from my sufferings. They prayed that I might die, rather than be doomed to a living death. But I lived—lived to know the ruin I had wrought.

My father was a man of majestic personage, and time had scarcely touched his raven locks. His hair was now profusely silvered, and there were lines on his brow which age never furrowed. It was long before I learned all that had transpired during this fearful chasm in my existence, but gradually the truth was revealed: All that I was at first told, was, that my husband and brother lived—then, when it was supposed I had sufficient strength to bear the agitation, this letter from my husband was given me.

"Cecilia, how shall I address you? I will not reproach you, for you have had too bitter a lesson. I would fain have seen you before my departure, but you decline the interview, and perhaps it is well. Should I live to return—Oh! Cecilia, what wretchedness have you brought upon us all! If your alienated heart does not turn from any memento of me, you will read these lines, and I know you will believe them. I have been, as it were, to the very threshold of the presence-chamber of the King of Kings, and am just emerging from the shadows of approaching death. This is the first effort of my feeble hand. Most rash and misjudging woman what have you done? How madly have I doted on you, how blindly have I worshipped, yet all the devotion of my life, my truth, love and integrity, weighed nothing in the balance with one moment's mystery. I leave my vindication to Alice. She will not deceive you. She will tell you that never did the heart of man throb with a more undivided passion for another than mine for you. She will tell you—but what avails it. You have cast me from you, unvalued and untrusted. Your poor, unhappy brother! his avenging hand sought my life—the life of him who he believed had betrayed his sister's happiness, the wretch almost unworthy of a brave man's resentment. In wresting the weapon from his frenzied grasp, I received an almost deadly wound. His wrath was slaked in my blood.