

and a slight hint of her failing health, aroused the tenderness of her absent lover, and Horace at length decided to delay no longer his return. It was very difficult for the successful merchant to check the tide of fortune as it rolled its treasures at his feet, but when his better nature had once been aroused, he was not to be turned from his purpose by motives of interest; and, hurrying through the necessary arrangements, Horace Medwin bade farewell for ever to the land where ten of the best years of his life had been passed. With that singular inconsistency so common in human nature, the patience with which he had borne the servitude of business, and which would probably have enabled to wear out another year, had not his affections been excited, now utterly deserted him. A lifetime of anxiety seemed to be concentrated in the tedious six months which intervened ere his ship touched the shores of his native land; and when his foot once more pressed the soil, he felt as if he could have knelt and kissed it as holy ground.

It was the dull gray dawn of morning, when Horace landed from his long imprisonment, and, impatient of all further delay, he hurried onward to that quarter of the city where he expected to find Helen. He had informed her of his embarkation, and he fancied that she would, even at that early hour, be awaiting him, since she must have doubtless heard of the arrival of the ship. But when he reached her abode, and beheld it closed as if every inmate was still buried in slumber, he was ashamed of his boyish eagerness, and turning from the door ere his foot touched the threshold, paced the empty street until such a time as he could reasonably hope to be admitted.—Was it presentiment of evil that sent such a chill to his heart as he turned his back upon that humble dwelling, where he believed his sweet Helen now slept amid pleasant dreams which were soon to have so fair a realization?

With a fervour of impatience which he could scarce control, he paced the neighbouring streets until gradually the din of busy life awoke around him, and the closed casements of the humbler dwellings opened their sleepy eyes to the light of the risen sun. As he approached for the hundredth time the spot where all his hopes now centred, he caught sight of a slipshod housemaid who had just unclosed the barred portal of Helen's abode.—Hurrying forward, he addressed a brief question to the girl. The answer was as brief, but its effect was terrific. With a cry such as none but a strong man, in the very death-throes

of his hopes could utter, he sprang forward, and passing the frightened woman with the rapidity of lightning, bounded up the narrow staircase. A closed door impeded his frantic progress, and flinging it widely open, he stood suddenly as if awe-struck within the apartment.

The room wore the desolate and dreary appearance which the light of morning ever brings to the scene of a weary vigil. A coarse-looking woman, who had evidently been not unmindful of her own comfort, sat sleeping in an arm-chair at the fire, while a ray of sunshine darting through a crack in the unopened shutter, almost extinguished the sickly glimmer of the night-taper which burned dimly on the littered table. Horace saw all these things with that singular acuteness of vision which excessive excitement sometimes awakens, but as his eye turned from the figure of the sleeper it fell on a rigid and sheeted form extended on the uncurtained couch. One step brought him to its side, and with wild haste he flung aside the covering that concealed the ghastly face of the dead. Surely those pinched and yellow features were utterly unknown to him,—it could not be his Helen that he looked upon.—His own heart answered the vain hope, and with a groan which seemed to rive his very soul he fell senseless beside the cold remains of her who had loved him so vainly and so constantly. He had come one day too late!

Sorrow does not always kill, and Horace lived in loneliness of heart until years had bowed his stately form and whitened his temples with the blossoms of the grave. But life had lost its charm for him. He was surrounded with all the appliances of wealth, but he found no sympathy or companionship in the world; and a deep and abiding sense of self-reproach was his perpetual torment. Willingly now would he have given all his hard-earned fortune could it but have brought the breath of life to those pallid lips and the light of day to those dim eyes of her who had worn out her life in sighing; yet it was his torture to be compelled to feel that had he been content with half his present wealth, Helen might now be the sharer of his heart and home. What cared he now for the gold and gems upon the brim of the chalice, since death had mingled wormwood with the draught it held? He had learned the bitter lesson which experience teaches, and found, when too late, that he who, in obedience to the dictates of a false world, silences the purer instincts of his nature, but garners up for his future years a harvest of disappointment and remorse.