

[Written for *The Family Circle*.]

## Wounded Hearts.

A TALE OF PASSION AND PAIN FROM REAL LIFE.

BY JOE LAWNBROOK.

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### CHAPTER XV.

THAT evening with Nellie Elson passed swiftly indeed, and as we were standing by the outer door preparatory to my departure, a servant came from Mrs. Elson announcing that that lady had arisen from her bed and desired to see me in the library.

I was puzzled and stood for an instant looking inquiringly at Nellie, when suddenly the front door opened and Werbletree's hand was laid upon my shoulder. Turning around, I gazed in surprise on Arthur Drammel and Charles Sweeman. Werbletree had caught the messenger's last words, and as he pressed his huge fingers on my shoulder, he said, "I will go in your stead;" and without giving me time to object, had I wished, he passed along after the servant who led the way to the library thinking it was I who followed. Sweeman looked at me then at Arthur with a daring, defiant look, and then at the walls and ceiling as an imprisoned lion might look at the bars of its cage.

Oppressive silence and wonderment ensued. Nellie looked at me half frightened, and with a vacant, inquiring stare. I could only return as vacant a look; for all was as strange to me as if I had been suddenly transported to an enchanted land. Oh how long that few minutes seemed! Why had Werbletree come? How had he brought both Arthur Drammel and Charles Sweeman? Surely there would be a revelation now. I felt dizzy with wonderment. A heavy darkness seemed to press around me. I felt a cold shiver coming over me, and then I sank down in the chair weak and exhausted, but still sensible of what was going on around me. I saw Sweeman eye me now more sympathetically and as he turned to Arthur Drammel an expression came over his face that would call forth pity from the most hard hearted. I read in that look the deep emotion of conflicting passions, where the baser nature is striving for victory over one's moral principles. When the absurdity of his situation dawned upon him and the real ground of his conduct and his terrible severity came up before him, the veil of prejudice was torn off and his real nature triumphed.

His rigid gaze rested for some time on Arthur Drammel, and at last a relaxation of his whole face showed the humbler, better side of his nature.

Suddenly I saw them all move along the hall, and a glance from Nellie, who had been watching me all the time, told that I was expected to go too. As I arose I saw Werbletree disappear into the library at the farther end of the hall and concluded he must have beckoned for us.

We moved down slowly and reaching the library door a curious spectacle met our gaze.

There stood Richard Werbletree, his head bent submissively down with all appearance of being in the presence of the dead, and straight before him sat, in a rocking chair, Mrs. Elson, white with rage, glancing furiously at the man who stood there so humbly and penitent-looking, and yet who knew full well that he was increasing her anger every minute.

Charles Sweeman entered the room last, and as he came in the woman raised from her chair and glared at him.

"Am I in my own house, to be—"

The words came brokenly from her lips, and her voice failed before she finished the sentence "he sank back in her chair again and swooned.

Oh what anxious moments passed to me then! What had brought us all together there. Everyone almost that I was really directly interested about. When I think about it now, it seems to me like a last act in a drama.

Was it to be a tragedy? I feared it might; but my brain was too confused to think definitely about it then.

Under Werbletree's care Mrs. Elson revived, and looked up frightenedly and wildly. I could not bear to look at her quivering lips; the very air in the room seemed oppressive? I felt too weak to stand, and I sank down on a chair which stood by me.

She had no sooner revived than she again sank senseless back.

My excited interest alone supported me or my weakness would have caused me to have fallen senseless to the floor. I watched, however, for Mrs. Elson's recovery which was long in coming. At length she revived, and as she looked at Charles Sweeman now his calm and humble look even enraged her.

After a while she spoke in a low voice to him. Her first words I could not hear.

Soon I heard her say something about to-morrow and concluded that she wished him to wait, and talk to her then. This conclusion I found to be correct, and I saw that she must be taken to lie down; but Werbletree's sharp eye had seen this too, and he had soon summoned a servant, who took her weak mistress away.

"And that," thought I, "must end my expectation, for to-night at least I must still remain curious."

But no; that night was yet to reveal to me the facts of a matter which I deemed as important as my life.

### CHAPTER XVI.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,

And fondly broods with wisest care;

Time but th' impression deeper makes,

As streams their channels deeper wear.

O Mary! dear, departed shade!

Where is thy place of blissful rest?

Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

—Burns.

WE all stayed that night at Hazelgrove with as little ceremony as though we were the proprietors. But there were other things to occupy our attention besides mere ceremony. Real earnest thought and action looks beyond mere form.

I sought the open air when I got a chance and wandered alone along the hazel walk, when suddenly among the bushes I saw Werbletree. Now my anxious curiosity was aroused from its smothered state, and I hurried eagerly to him.

"Do quiet my curiosity," I exclaimed, impatiently, as I neared him.

He looked up with that same quiet, submissive calmness in his face that I had noticed in the library.

"Be calm, Joe," he said, with affectionate warmth, "I am as anxious to tell you as you are to listen. I only hesitate for your own sake."

I felt a glow of pleasure sweep over me. This was the first pure recognition of friendship I had received from Richard Werbletree. I felt it in his manner and his speech.

"But be calm; my revelations may be too much for you."

"I think not," I responded, forcing a calmness in my voice.

"Well, sit here," he said, as we approached a rustic seat on the clear lawn. And I quietly sat by his side in the moonlight as he went on.

"I will tell you about your brother first, as that most concerns you. He is living, and knows exactly how matters stand regarding you. He has been disposed to leave you in possession of the estate, though he is not rich himself. But learning that you are very desirous of finding him in order, with your own lips, to convey the message of his father's forgiveness, he desires to become known to you. He also longs for the friendship which you would bestow on a brother."

"He deserves it richly," I involuntarily exclaimed.

"Have you never thought, among your acquaintances, who might be your brother?"

"Do I know him already, then? Is there anyone who would be so kind, so noble, of my acquaintances, as to act thus? I can't think who it is except—except—"