

UNDER THE EVENING LAMP.

AN OLD, OLD QUESTION.

A spirit that from earth had just departed
Lingered a moment on its upward way,
And, looking back, saw, as though broken-hearted,
Its friends and kindred weeping o'er its clay.

"It seems they loved me dearly. Had I known it
My life had been much happier," it said.
"Why only at our parting, have they shown it—
Their fondest kisses keeping for the dead?"

Harper's Magazine

UNTO THE PERFECT DAY.

(Conclusion.)

Grandmother Gray was wet and cold; he took off her shawl with his own hands, drew up his own great chair before the fire, bade me bring her slippers while he knelt upon the hearth to remove the damp shoes, laughing and joking until I began to wonder if indeed I had seen that spasm of agony so short a while before, or was I dreaming that Uncle Silas had committed some dreadful act that my grandfather had declared he would never forgive.

Only once while he mixed for her a cup of ginger tea, I saw him grow white about the lips, and I knew he was thinking of that terrible secret hidden away in the drawer of the table.

But my grandmother had studied his moods too long not to understand their changes.

When he had made her warm and comfortable she placed her hand on his, as it rested upon his knee, and said she:—

"Now, Eben, tell me all about it."

"About what, Eunice?" said he.

"Whatever it is you are trying to hide, dear," she said; but despite her insistence, my grandmother went to sleep that night ignorant of the shadow hanging over her home.

When I awoke the next morning the farm bell that hung just beside the back door was clanging so fiercely that it startled me. One! two! three! four! that was Uncle Caesar's bell. Uncle Caesar's duty was to wait upon my grandparents; the bell summoned him the third time before I could get into my clothes and go down.

The dreadful secret had been told. I knew it before I came upon them in the dining-room where my grandfather stood, white and stern, the fatal letter in his hand, just beneath a great portrait of his wife, painted in her sweet youth when she first became Eunice Gray. She, the original, *was on her knees*, praying pleading, weeping, clinging to him, beseeching him.

"Oh, Eben no," I heard her say, "take back, oh my husband, take back those awful words."

He lifted his hand, the letter in it.

"Never!" said he, "shall he cross my threshold. No *that* shall call himself my son. He may go, go where thieves are safe! *He is no son of mine.*"

She rose up and went out. I glanced at her face, old, and white, and set, and then at the portrait upon the wall.

Could *that* ever have been the likeness of my grandmother?

With eyes too full for seeing I followed her out of the room. She walked straight to the bell and reached for the rope. Four strokes from the iron clapper and old Caesar came limping across the lawn.

"Fetch my horse to the block at once," she said, "and tell James to saddle the bay filly and get ready to follow me to Lebanon."

"What are you going to do, Eunice?" my grandfather demanded, more sternly than I had ever heard him speak to her. She replied as she pinned her shawl about her shoulders:—

"I am going to my boy."

Fifteen minutes later she rode out at the big gate, and I heard the clatter of her horse's hoofs striking the white "pike" as she rode away to Uncle Silas, followed by black James on the bay filly.

Robbed his room-mate, so the letter said of Uncle Silas, though it begged piteously for mercy, an arrest of judgment until they should know all the facts in the case.

Grandfather Gray walked the floor for an hour, that stern, hard look upon his proud old face which I felt

sure would never soften toward the son who had shattered his proudest possession—his good name.

"My boy a thief!" he murmured, "my blood, the best of old Virginia, circulation in the veins of a *thief* and not turn to fire? The son of Ebenezer Gray, one of the cleanest names in Tennessee, a common *rogue*?"

He stopped just beneath the great portrait, "No Eunice, no, no, never, sweet wife of my young manhood—" the sweet eyes of Eunice Gray beamed tenderly upon him from the painted canvas. Slowly his uplifted hand dropped to his side, and—

"Robert," said he, turning to me, "ring the bell for Caesar."

When the old negro limped to the door, Grandfather Gray, booted and spurred, stood before the portrait, the hard look gone from his face, and in its stead an expression of such gentle sorrow I could scarcely believe it was the same face that had been lifted but ten minutes before to my grandmother's picture.

"Caesar," he said, "I want my horse at once."

"Hit's at de door, marster!" was the answer. Old Caesar had waited longer than usual this time, but the order was given at last, and ten minutes later my grandfather was riding away toward Lebanon after my grandmother.

It was nearly midnight when they returned, and when I saw him lift her tenderly in his arms and place her on the sofa, gently soothing her grief which came to me in a sound of low weeping, I crept away to bed, knowing the trip to Lebanon had not been without sorrow.

The next day I learned that my grandfather had repaid the money and that Uncle Silas had gone West. It was his own wish to go, and from that time on he was a very different man. His escape had been so narrow, his gratitude so great. Letters came regularly now, and were no longer hidden away till morning, but were opened with eager and affectionate impatience while the reading of them always left happy tears in the eyes of my old grandparents.

One day they sat together before the fire, nodding and half-dreaming in the cheery warmth, while I, in my cosy corner, was following the fortunes of Don Quixote. Suddenly my grandfather looked up, sighed softly, and placed his hand upon grandmother's lightly folded upon her knees.

"Eunice," said he "I was sitting here thinking that when our time comes to go—"

"Yes?"

"Why, I think you will have to go first, wife."

"Eben!"

"Yes," my grandfather continued, "else I fear I should miss the road, without your light to shine back upon it. I was sitting here thinking of our life together, dear; and in every sorrow, every trial that has marked the way, it is you who have led. I have only followed in the path you have taken. So I say in this last journey, wife, you will have to go first to light me safely home."

My grandmother's slender fingers closed about the old hand lying upon her own.

"I think, dear," said she, "the journeys will not be very far apart."

Yet it was he who went first; dear, proud-hearted old Grandfather Gray. It was one soft day in October, when the leaves were drifting down, and the mists of the gentle Indian summer lay on the Tennessean hills. Grandmother came in front the garden, a spray of white chrysanthemums in her hand. Grandfather was sitting before the west window, the curtains drawn back, the sunlight on his hair, and his eyes fixed upon the distant hills.

"Eben," I heard my grandmother call softly. There was no reply. "Asleep, Eben?" and going to his side she playfully brushed his cheek with the white chrysanthemum blossoms.

The next moment she gave a low cry and sank upon her knees sobbing, "Not first; O Eben, Eben, not before *me*!"

But it was indeed so; he had gone first; the next day the sweet old-fashioned chrysanthemum lay upon his grave in the burying-ground beyond the browning meadow.

She faded quickly when he was gone. Uncle Silas, married now, begged her to come to him, but she refused, saying only, "The time is so short, dear, let me spend it