

He laid his unwounded hand upon her arm, not very gently, if the truth must be told. The gentle manner was not in a gentle mood that morning.

"You shall not go until you hear me," he exclaimed. "Shirley, if you don't stop!"

"You'll what?" she retorted.

"Shirley, your father was my friend. By the memory of your father, grant me this one favor. It is the last request I may ever make of you."

The train stopped, gathered up its passengers, and went on, and Shirley was not among them. She let the way into the railway waiting room.

"Well, what is it you wish to say to me?" she asked. Her manner was as indifferent as if the last night had never been.

"I cannot tell you here," he said.

"Here or not at all," she answered. "Don't ask me to go back to that wretched house."

"So be it then," he replied. He had hoped—the Lord knows what he had hoped. It was true all was over now, all the possibilities he had dreamed of in that brief, mad hour of the night before. Was that a century ago, in some other state of existence?

There was nothing for him now. That Shirley only knew his history, only could understand how he had struggled against fate, she might be not. He was a little less suffering for then both. If he could have her alone, and tell her, she would be gentler. Nay, he might even hope to be forgiven at last. But she had willed it that he should speak to her here, and speak he would.

So there, in the wretched waiting room, he narrated his miserable story, not abating one jot. He told her of the love of his two boys, how strangely he had loved them, how he had searched the world over for them. He told her, too, of the devilish suspicion that had been set afoot by his wife's mother, and how at last men turned against him.

"Whenever my name was heard," he said, "what vile slanders followed me, till it drove me to desperation. I went away where no one knew me. I changed my name, I tried to find some peace. I was wrong. I should have stayed there, in that very spot, and faced my enemies, and lived it down, though I died of starvation."

"Yes, that is what you should have done," said Shirley.

"But I did not. There was no one to turn to. I had no friend. I did not know. I came to Linwood. In your happy home I met your father—and you. It was like paradise to me, after the life I had known. He drew me to you first, by your intellectual gifts, greater than I had believed could be in a woman. You liked me, but you looked at me with your light, heaven-born eyes, you loved me, before I knew it, heaven forgive me! I loved you. How I loved you, even then!"

"Yes, you deceived me," said Shirley, mournfully. "I would have died for you, and you deceived me."

"I could not tell you that horrible story—how could I! If you had known it, you, too, might have turned against me. That was exactly what I could bear. I read that in an open book, Shirley, you, the soul of purity and truth. You could not have despised your feelings if you had tried. I read that you were beginning to care for me. I knew it, and the knowledge was very sweet to me. Forgive me, Shirley, that I tell you of it now."

"I can forgive anything in a friend. I think, but want of frankness," she replied in a dull tone.

He winced a little, and was silent. Presently he went on:

"I thought when I came to Linwood that I had overcome the weakness the passionate use of my blood. So I had—so I would have been if I had never seen you. All was under my feet. I thought that I had found my life in my life. I ran away. Only that I was weak; only that I feared to trust myself. In all else I was honest to you, dear eyes and tell you—I can be forgiven for being human, Shirley!"

He paused. She did not speak. She was heart to the soul. He continued, speaking in low, hurried tones:

"Ever since I left you, there is not a day or a night that I have not thought of you. I have dreamed what life might have been to me had I been free. At it was you have been like a star to me. I have been true to you in every word and thought. I have driven to keep myself pure and high in thought, to make my life helpful to others. Then, if ever the time was when I should be free, though it were fifty years, I could look honestly into your dear eyes and tell you—I have come to lay my heart at your feet. And so I would have done."

Then there was silence. Nothing broke it save the ticking of the clock in the little station. At last the master said:

"I am going now, Shirley. Good-by."

She held out her hand; it was death cold.

"I think you have broken my heart," she said. "But I forgive you."

That was their parting.

surviving kind. Be a rational, sensible human being. Rely on your brains for happiness, instead of your emotions. Since the world began, there have always been Byrons to tell the race that man's love is of man's life a part, his woman's whole existence. Women have been told this so often that they begin to think it is a credit to them to break their hearts, so as to display their superior emotional nature. It's rubbish, Shirley. Women make two-thirds of their unhappiness themselves, through sentimental nonsense. It is not their fault, either, so much. The non-sense has been educated into them, and must be educated out. They must learn self-control. The coming woman will repress her abnormal emotional development, and put it back into its right place. Then women will no longer be more unhappy than men. Shirley, it would trouble me to the latest day of my life if I thought my daughter would be one of those uncontrolled, emotional women.

Shirley laughed. "Do I look like that, papa?" she said.

"No; thank God!" her father replied, fervently.

"But what a solemn sermon you have preached on me now!"

"Very well, daughter, lay it away for a rainy Sunday, and then read it," he answered.

Had the rainy Sunday come? Was this what her father meant? Now, after all, had she, Shirley, rebelled through ages of mothers that same fatal emotional development her father had warned her against? Was she going to let it wreck her life? Had she scorned herself? And yet—

It was a strange psychological experience Shirley passed through at this time. It was such a rude upsetting of all the ways of thought to which she had been accustomed. The father and the ideal to which she had clung all her life, had been torn out by the roots. Nights of sleeplessness followed. Days of her mental conflict, till at last she found herself in an odd state of physical exhaustion and mental exaltation.

In the depths of her grief, the most laughable incidents she had known, the most comical stories she had heard, came up before her with perverse persistency, and mocked her like fiends. Weird faces followed her, and watched her in the darkness, and finally in the daylight. They were genuine physical images; she saw them plainly with her waking eyes, in her light senses. There would have been described the dress they wore, the color of their hair. The same images haunted her day after day. This one had the identical peculiarities of dress, that one grined at her with his hideous grin in the same way each time. Shirley recognized these figures as the hallucination of disordered nerves, she reasoned about them to herself in cold blood, and yet they kept wholly shut up within herself. No living creature knew of this abnormal development that shook her because of "abnormal development of the emotional temperament," as she called it to herself, smiling grimly. No living creature knew she had met Mr. Morrison again. And nobody found it out.

If her father had been living there would have been help for her. He was the one friend of her life who would have understood and sympathized with her. But her father was lying in the Carstone graveyard up there on the top of the hill, and Shirley was alone. There was no help for her. She must fight it out alone!

Linwood child who would have killed a bird would have been a daring criminal indeed.

The teaching here his good fruits in due season. Bright winged creatures—the red and blue bird and the yellow bird—darted in and out among the leafy trees and played, as much as home as if they had been in their native forest, as indeed they were not far from being. The little winged singers opened air-throats and thrilled with melody in the very heart of Linwood.

So the wrath of the Lord was averted, and the village was visited no more with epidemics of sickness. Out of the pestilence arose healthfulness, beauty and refinement. Linwood became noted far and wide as a model village.

City people who sighed for rural life were attracted hither in numbers. They brought with them additional wealth, intelligence and taste. The town increased in population. From being what we first knew it, Linwood became the ideal, beautiful city town.

And it was Shirley, the inspiring and suggestive, who was at the bottom of it all—Shirley, God bless her! the people said.

CHAPTER XV.
THE SILK COLONY.

So at last, as always, though contentedly working and thinking for others, calmness of soul came to Shirley.

Was her heart broken? Well, there was much left in it still.

It was her hard fate to be tied in this little village. Linwood it was to be, for good or ill. She recognized her fate and made the best of it. At length she became more warmly interested than she could have believed in things about her.

The village improvement scheme was only a part of her long life. From long habits of thought her mind still followed the old ideas of her unwritten poem. She found no calm, no time to begin the poem; it must wait till she was all again. But meantime, following the one golden thread of thought, she unconsciously turned to women.

During the fever Shirley had found among the villagers a poverty and an unhappiness that interested her. Persons who have the sense of respectability, however small, instinctively put the best foot forward. Behind many of these street garb a hungry stomach and howls in secret.

The specter of sickness attacked the household and shook out the hidden specter in plain sight. Shirley perceived constantly a bareness of the commonest comforts, a lack even of articles of food that was painful to her. It was the case alike among the overworked farm hands and the village wretches. Poverty she herself knew, she thought. But it was that independent poverty which has fertility of resource, the poverty which whets the edge of struggle and aspiration. From this kind of poverty every-thing that is worth having in the world comes.

But these women! The larger part of the silk thread of the universe would be such small business as that!

"No, by thunder!" exclaimed Jim Sweet. Then Shirley got her doctor and her medicines and went home. The sickness raged in earnest. It took off Hughie Carter and Kate. Mrs. Simons was left a widow. The gossip said her husband was just too lazy to fight the fever, and so gave up and died. For Shirley even hope for an unmarried girl. As for Mrs. Freuchy, Mrs. Carstone's nurse. At last it fastened the grisly death upon that tough old Christian, Deacon Durham himself. It took his ancient bones, it scorched his cold inward. It raged in his veins and his body. Finally here was the wrath of the Lord kindled against the righteous. It wasn't the fact falling, not at all.

There were weeping and desolation and terror in Linwood. Shirley worked night and day, tending the sick and holding the well in all ways in her power. Three persons were a self-constituted committee of relief. One was the Presbyterian minister, the doctor and Shirley. After the first two the girl came next in authority, by virtue of being the teacher, but partly, but especially by virtue of being Shirley. These three worked together with a will, their help, ignorant villagers instinctively looked to them to do their thinking for them and to add them in their distress. And the three had their hands full.

Shirley's sermon had sunk into the minds of the two who heard it. After the pestilence ended the sermon returned fresh to them. They thought of it and talked. It was strange, but they had never noticed how unshiny the common—such camping ground of geese and pigs—was before.

These were the three lights of Linwood, the Presbyterian minister, the doctor and Shirley, laid their heads together. A Village Improvement Society, with a list of "A. S. P." was formed. Shirley was secretary.

When the town dignitaries came to consult about what should be done with their weeds, their unclean streets, their goose ponds, and, above all, their low mud houses, the common, they found that their girl secretary knew more than they all put together. It was Shirley who had had about drainage and tree-planting and landscape gardening. She had her father to thank for that again. She had heard him talk of all this many a time. His books he had read were still there.

When the dry weather of late summer set in the Village Improvement people began their work with enthusiasm. The enthusiasm did not lag after the first year, either.

Processes are tedious. They are exceedingly unromantic, therefore not proper for a novel. We skip them, and go on to results. The hideous common became Linwood park, a shining of beauty. The ground was leveled and filled with solid sweet earth. The most unwhimsical and unwholesome spots of all, was changed by the magical power of brains and fingers into an exquisite tiny park, the pearl and soul of the park.

Beautiful evergreen and hard wood forest trees were planted, and clumps of blossoming shrubs. Winding walks were dotted. Here and there the green was made with beds of brilliant flowers.

The Improvement Society with a big list of names did not stop its missionary labors at the park. It invaded the village. The riotous road was read to the pigs and geese, and they reared the highways and the byways at their own sweet will no more. The streets were drained, straightened and laid out regularly. Sidewalks and streets were neatly paved, and in time kept eighty and clean. The patches of weeds in front of the Linwood houses disappeared and their place was taken by brilliant patches of grass and flowering plants. Seedlings from the woods were set out in the town, and in time these became noble avenues of trees. Shirley reared her brain and her father's bones, and rededicated great natural vices and beautiful flowering trees.

The Improvement Society proclaimed loud and long the doctrine of money to the hicks, and the Presbyterian minister preached about it from his pulpit. Shirley preached sermons about it in her school. How the hicks made the landscape beautiful, how they gladdened the earth with their songs, how they were man's best friend in killing insects that destroyed the fruits and grains for his food, was dinned into all their minds. This gospel was proclaimed alike from the pulpit and the school house till that

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