

so much information, he skilfully parried or rudely repelled all questions. The child seemed a sad annoyance to him, and it was certain, if actions could speak, that he regretted more that the infant lived than that its mother died. When the babe's new friend—a childless and widowed woman—timidly put forward her claim, as if she feared so great a boon would be denied her who should have clasped the infant to his breast could ill conceal his joy at parting with it; and any one less humane and tender of heart than the newly bereaved mother would have discerned in his pleasure something more than the mere joy he professed that his dear little infant was so well provided for. If he was little curious to learn anything respecting her who adopted the child he resigned, she was well content that nothing should be known of him. It was a pardonable feeling that led her to consider the child as scarcely less than a direct gift from heaven to her lonely heart, and she was anxious to forget all in connection with little Bertha, except that the cherub came to fill a void in her being, even before she was fairly conscious that such a void existed. Thus was her sorrow disarmed, and thus were her whole affections transferred to the orphan, so that an orphan she ceased to be almost before the name had been given her.

So she grew—cheerful and happy; but when were cheerfulness and happiness ever left alone? Never, certainly, since the first intermeddler in the business of others came into the world. Bertha was wandering in the village grave-yard, as she dearly loved to do, and as every child has a passion for doing. There is something very beautiful in it. As our first parents wandered in Eden, unconscious of death, so do little children seem to play amid the tombs in the garden of graves, all unconscious that death has entered the world. If, untaught by silly nurses to attach terror and gloom to the quiet silence of the spot, they find in it a place for their gambols, which is chiefly remarkable for furnishing quaint and singularly interesting reading upon its head-stones and tablets, when they are weary. And what are, then, infant gambols but life in epitome? What is life itself but a game of hide-and-seek with the grim archer, which sooner or later must be ended by a stumble, not over the grave, like the child's fall but into it? Silly as children, but not so innocent, are those who trifle their lives through, without a thought of the inevitable close.

"Strange that you, of all children, can play here," said a woman that looked over the wall. Bertha looked up, all wonder, her fair face mocking the chubby angel in the stone against which she leaned, and her bright eye sparkling with half-awo-stricken curiosity. Her face glowing with ruddy health; and her hair, beautiful in its negligent curls, danced upon her shoulders in the light air that played, like her (and she no less innocently than that), amid the graves. The picture of trusting happiness—what could have been the woman's thoughts who mused it? Bertha at length said, "Mother told me I might."

"Your mother? Heigh-ho!" And with a long-drawn sigh and lugubrious shake of the head, she added, "Your mother sleeps under your feet."

Bertha, horror-stricken, looked down, as if the grave were yawning beneath, and withdrew from the spot, trembling with puzzled terror, ejaculating, "My mother!"

The woman was gone. Little Bertha hurried home, and ran from room to room till she found her whom only she knew as mother; and burying her face in that bosom which had so dearly cherished her, cried as if her little heart would break.

"She told me you were dead—*asleep*," sobbed Bertha; "but here you are, and I will never, never leave you a minute again!"

CHAPTER III.

It was a calm and beautiful sunset. The fragrance of the early summer flowers came into the open windows with a weight almost oppressive. The foliage sparkled as if gemmed with diamonds—and each leaf bent under their weight.

The earth had been refreshed with a summer shower, and the slanting rays of the sun twinkled, not only in the rain drops on the leaves, but shone in the tears which trembled on Bertha's eyelids. Mother and child had been weeping, but were calm, for as rain to the thirsty earth, so are tears to the weary spirit.

"But you are my mother for all that!" exclaimed Bertha, with a tremulous voice. The answer was a long and ardent embrace. No words were spoken—none were needed. Mrs. Malcolm had been telling her ward and more than daughter the sad melancholy story how her mother had died. For the hint thrown out by the meddling woman had made such a communication necessary. Perhaps it was well that the child should know the truth. If now no more she loved her kind friend with the blind affection of instinct, her heart every day expanded more and more with gratitude to her who, when in death her mother forsok her, had been prompted by Heaven to take her up.

Poor Bertha! She was old enough to think, and what a world of care that age brings with it! Her cheerful sunny hours were clouded.—She knew that children have fathers as well as mothers, until death comes in to sunder the parental tie. Hitherto, when her widowed protector had spoken of Mr. Malcolm, she had listened, attentively and affectionately, as to the memory of her father. But this, she perceived, could no longer be. If we were usually in the habit of giving children credit for the faculties they possess, and the observations they make, Mrs. Malcolm might have divined Bertha's thoughts, and would have been silent and guarded on that subject. She was the reverse. The establishment of a confidence between her and Bertha led her to speak often of her own lost child whom Bertha had succeeded, and of her husband, whose loss had been her first sorrow. When she kissed Bertha's forehead, and fondly said, "You fill the place of both my child and its father," Bertha sighed. She did not speak—but she longed to ask, "Who was my father?" How much may a thoughtless word inflict—and how little did the curious, officious woman who clouded Bertha's paradise suspect, as she saw her growing more pale from day to day, that it was to her own foolish tongue the charge was due. She only said to her gossips, "That child grows weakly, like her mother, and I shouldn't wonder if she went the same way, some day." The marvel is that she did not say so to Bertha's self. So indeed she would have done, but Bertha avoided her as an evil genius.

CHAPTER IV.

A plain, upright slab marked where Bertha's mother rested, and on it was inscribed the single name *EMMELINE*. It was all that Mrs. Malcolm knew of the departed—all that she once thought she wished to know. Now she would have given worlds to know more, for while she did not suspect the true cause of her dear child's uneasiness, she fancied that if she could tell her anything of one parent, that Bertha would not think of the other. How strangely selfish is woman's love for her children! strange at the first thought, and yet it is natural. She who bears them in sorrows more than they, may be pardoned for the delusion that she alone fills their whole hearts.

Near the mother of Bertha, a lesser mound marked where Mrs. Malcolm's infant slept.—How wonderful the double ties which thus linked the dead to the dead, the living to the living, and all, living and dead, thus in one band!

As autumn with its black winds advanced, they felt that these visits soon must close. One day, as with this presentiment they tarried longer than usual, they perceived a stranger enter the grounds. This, though not very common, was still not remarkable. Thoughtful travellers—and it is strange that there can be any other—never omit to visit the places where the dead sleep, for there is mirrored, in the manner of their bestowal, the character of the living.

But when, as Mrs. Malcolm and Bertha were

about to withdraw, they saw the stranger pause near them, the widow was astonished—shall we confess it—almost alarmed. He had passed hurriedly and with a look of unsatisfied curiosity everywhere else; he had passed indifferently the marks of posthumous pride and the relics of antiquity; he had possessed no eye for what we deemed the *notables of the place*; but now having reached the grave of Emmeline, he stood as if spell-bound. For a moment or two he gazed at the headstone as an object which he recognised as the companion of his, then this and the fabric of his dreams; then bowing his head upon it, his whole frame shook with unexpressed emotion.

Mrs. Malcolm was scarcely less affected. She divined all, and for an instant was half tempted to chide Heaven for what seemed to her another bereavement. A thousand thoughts intruded upon her troubled mind. Once she started to draw the child away from an unnatural parent who could thus neglect her, but started at Bertha's half resistance, she desisted. The father raised his head and seemed a moment annoyed, as if he now for the first time, perceived that there had been witness of his sorrow.

Mrs. Malcolm pointed to Bertha. The stranger looked a moment, then clasping her to his heart, said, "Her mother's second self! But they told me she left no child!"

The mystery is easily solved. The father of the stranger, cold, covetous, and ambitious, had frowned upon a union in which the parties consulted no counsellors but their hearts. The young husband, scarcely out of his minority, was driven abroad in a state of half exile, half dependence.—The young wife was grudgingly assisted, and that only on condition that she should bury herself in some village where the parents of her husband should not be offended with the sight of one whose presence reminded them that their child had consulted his own happiness rather than their pride. The rest the reader knows already. If she sinned, bitterly did she suffer. Nor did the father, ere summoned to his account, escape—for the pride which tramples on another rends its own heart.

If this narrative be not strictly true, it is less wonderful than many truths. The remainder we leave to the reader's fancy, for it will not always do to unite in a fiction the lights and shadows which come so abruptly together in real life.—But as some aid to the imagination, we will merely say that a little girl, very like Bertha, popped out from behind the breakfast-room door, on Friday the first of January, 1847, and cried, "A happy New Year, father and mother—now I've caught you both!"

H. H. W.

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