

teamster, wrapped and muffled, stamping on the floor as if to make all aware of his arrival. He looked around to see if his passengers were ready. Had he been the driver of a hearse come to remove some beloved form forever from our sight, we could not have felt a greater sinking of the heart. Had we seen such a vehicle at the door with its great black plumes, we could scarcely have had a touch of keener sorrow. How was it that those we cared for so much appeared at the moment to be so indifferent. They had already left the apartment. We could not speak a word to the man who had just come in to take them away in the darkness—for it was yet far from the dawn. There he stood on the bright hearth like some dreadful apparition—how unlike Santa Claus!—now holding his great hands over the fire, as if to hide its light from us; now stamping again and again, knocking off flakes of snow and pieces of ice on the burning logs, as if to extinguish them, and leave us to cold and discomfort and to the unfeeling wintry blast.

Our foreboding thoughts had not time to form themselves into a definite shape before John and William came in, just ready to start. They evidently had things so arranged that they could get away without a long leave-taking. My father was already seated in the sleigh. There were but few words spoken. There was a hurried embrace—oh how my poor mother would have clung to her son!—and out they went into the wintry gloom on that Christmas morning. The driver cracked his whip. The bells gave an ominous ring again. The sleigh started off quickly, and just then a gust laden with snow particles blew out the lamp which I held at the door, and, before it was lighted again, the sound of the bells could be but faintly heard and those upon whom our hearts were fixed had left us, perhaps forever.

CHAPTER II.

Gone!—I never felt the terribly intense meaning of that word until then. Gone, but when to return? Gone, but not on a holiday excursion at Christmas time, not on an errand of peace and good will towards fellow creatures, for it then

shocked me to think of it, they had almost thoughtlessly left us to engage, if required, in actual hostilities against men towards whom they could not have had any personal grudge, any cause for spite, much less any possible reason for such a feeling as hatred. When, if ever, would they be likely to return? If sent on to meet their so-called enemies what might not be the result? Off they went, I feel alas, how thoughtlessly, to enter the dread arena of deadly strife just with as much indifference as if they had but started out to play a game of cricket. From what I had already heard and read of this dreadful war, I could imagine a thousand fearful things which might happen to them as had happened to so many others, to many who had never anticipated disaster.

The grey dawn at last appeared. We sat silently around the fire each engaged with thoughts which completely banished sleep. There was now a wild storm outside and though we could not yet see the drifting snow-clouds we could hear their dash against the windows as they swept along. And then the almost ceaseless waving of the forest trees caused a wailing, monotonous sound like the suppressed roar of ocean waves at a distance. The lingering gloom, the rough blasts, the rushing gale, and the moaning of the woods, were the precursors of the most melancholy Christmas I ever knew.

The daylight came at last. I think we scarcely welcomed it. The deep snow-drifts on the ground, and the dull leaden sky overhead, seemed to be as cheerless as our own hearts. My poor mother was greatly down cast, and after a little time I prevailed on her to go to her room and try to rest for a few hours. Anna had been dozing for the last few minutes on the sofa. I gently laid a shawl over her, and then, after having added a little fuel to the fire, I stole away to my own apartment, and there in the solitude of that dreadful morning, and while the wind was still turbulent outside. I could control my feelings no longer, I could not think, I could not pray, but with throbbing heart, with trembling limbs, and with grasped hands I sat on the side of my bed and wept.

I must have slept. The house was yet