

As I could not bear to sleep in that town, where the shadow of the jail fell on my revived memory, I drove to the town where I had served my apprenticeship, and put up at the hotel. That night my dream came back to me with all its vividness; but this time it was my sweet Mary, holding out a child, which seemed to be my brother, and imploring me to take him and protect him.

I rose early and sallied out to find if there were any traces of my old employer to be found. On the streets, I met one of those early birds who know the whole history of the place and are willing to tell it, and who turn out early to get their morning drink. From this town directory, I learned that my old employer was dead, that strangers had his business, and his family was scattered, not one member of it having remained in the town. Having no other business, I took an early train for the city of Buffalo. Arriving there, I left my baggage at the station, and went directly to my old boarding place. The old lady came to the door, and when she saw me, she could not speak for emotion. She wrung my hand, and after I had got seated, and she became calmer, she told me her sad story.

After I left, Mary was very unhappy for a long time. The young man who had sought her hand in marriage had left the city and did not return for four years. Then he renewed his visits to the house and again asked her to marry him. It was a long time before she finally consented, and then had kept the marriage back as long as possible. "About two years ago," said the old lady, "they were married. It was more than a year afterward when she had a son, a dear child. Her husband seemed very kind to her at first, but grew very indifferent and hard to please later on. A few days after her baby was born, word came that there was a writ out against him in the city of Troy, for bigamy, and he left at once. They never caught him, and he will never dare return."

"You see," continued the old lady, "it was during those four years he was away that he married, and afterward disagreed with his wife and deserted her. He returned here and made up with my poor child to break her heart and destroy her life. Well, she never rose from her bed, but sunk lower and lower, and I had to bring her here and take of her. The doctor says she has consumption; but I know it is her poor heart that is broken. Then, to make matters worse, my husband fell in the mill three years ago, and broke his hip, and has not been able to do a stroke of work since, and if it had not been for a bit of accident insurance money I don't know what we would have done. Now, we are just at the end of our means, and have decided to mortgage our little home. I expect the valuator here to-day to look at it."

When the old lady had got through with her sad tale she wept like a child. After she became calmer, she asked me if I would like to go to Mary's room. I replied, "I most certainly would like to see her."

We went to the room together and found the crippled father there nursing the child. When Mary saw me she was almost overcome with excitement and delight.

I stayed with them for several days, while I disposed of the property which I still owned in the city. Mary grew brighter, and the nurse who was employed to help the mother after I came back, prepared many little dainties to tempt her appetite; but we all felt her journey to the other world would soon commence.

My business in the city was done, and I was sitting in Mary's room one beautiful evening nursing Mary's child, who had taken quite a fancy to me. Mary lay in her bed watching us;

the hectic flush on her wan cheek. My heart was full of pity for her, and I remembered my dream. Looking up, I said to her, "Mary dear, give me this boy." The big tears started from her eyes, her lips trembled and for a time she could not speak, then she said: "Yes my love, my only love, take him, care for him, keep him, love him for the sake of the love you had for his poor wretched mother, and may God bless you."

The agitation had been too much for the weak body. I called the nurse and we all did what we could. Mary revived and lingered until the next evening. I never left her bedside; but held her hand most of the time. As the light of day went out her spirit went to its rest.

I was the only mourner at Mary's grave. While standing there beside that tomb I breathed a promise to her spirit and her God, to do my duty towards her child.

Two days after the funeral I left Buffalo to return to Cleveland, from whence I determined to go to Chicago and start-in business again. Before going, I paid enough in advance for the keep of the boy—Harry—to prevent the wolf from approaching his grandmother's door for a good many days. Mary's mother was greatly pleased to be made the nurse and guardian of her grandchild.

CHAPTER III.

THE city of Chicago at that time was developing very rapidly. I soon secured rooms to suit my quiet, retired habits, and opened an office for the transaction of business. During the next eleven years I trafficked and speculated in lands and other properties, and amassed a large fortune. I was not oppressive or hard; but I never broke my habits of retirement, I was never seen at a social gathering, and never visited at a friend's house. I was determined never to allow myself to be drawn into any trap, or even on to the ground where there was the possibility of a trap being laid. The memory of poor Mary with her great love for me and her broken heart, was enough for me for the remainder of my life. The duty I owed to her boy was charge enough, and I determined not to allow either my love for her or her boy to be divided.

During all this time I had kept myself fully instructed as to the development of my youthful charge. His grandmother, whose husband had been dead for five or six years, had discharged her duty faithfully, and he was growing into an interesting youth, well advanced in his studies, and I felt proud of him; but, her health was failing, and, as it was evident she could not much longer take charge of him, I decided to send him to a boarding-school kept by a retired clergyman, where boys of his age were prepared for college.

I effected this change none too soon, for the old lady's strength gave out shortly afterwards, and after lingering several months, she died.

I sold everything that I owned in the city of Chicago, and invested most of my means in stocks. During the next four years I visited many countries and saw much of the world. Amongst other places, I went to England, and advertised in nearly every paper in the country for information regarding my aunt or brother, but got no reply. At the end of that time I returned home and placed Harry at college in an eastern city. He had always stood at the head of his classes and was noted for good behavior and kindness of disposition. He grew to calling me father, which gratified me exceedingly. He seemed delighted when I visited him, and manifested genuine affection for me. He had his mother's features, and was a handsome, well-built young fellow.

While he was in college I stayed near him, and made my