

# **The Darlington's**

by  
Timothy Shay Arthur, 1851

A lady, past the prime of life, sat thoughtful, as twilight fell duskily around her, in a room furnished with great elegance. That her thoughts were far from being pleasant, the sober, even sad expression of her countenance too clearly testified. She was dressed in deep mourning. A faint sigh parted her lips as she looked up, on hearing the door of the room in which she was sitting open. The person who entered, a tall and beautiful girl, also in mourning, came and sat down by her side, and leaned her head, with a pensive, troubled air, down upon her shoulder.

“We must decide upon *something*, Edith, and that with as little delay as possible,” said the elder of the two ladies, soon after the younger one entered. This was said in a tone of great despondency.

“Upon what shall we decide, mother?” and the young lady raised her head from its reclining position, and looked earnestly into the eyes of her parent.

“We must decide to do something by which the family can be sustained. Your father’s death has left us, unfortunately and unexpectedly, as you already know, with scarcely a thousand dollars beyond the furniture of this house — instead of an independence which we supposed him to possess. His death was sad and afflictive enough — more than it seemed I could bear. But to have *this* added!”

The voice of the speaker sank into a low moan, and was lost in a stifled sob.

“But what can we do, mother?” asked Edith, in an earnest tone, after pausing long enough for her mother to regain the control of her feelings.

“I have thought of but one thing that is at all respectable,” replied the mother.

“What is that?”

“Taking boarders.”

“Why, mother!” ejaculated Edith, evincing great surprise, “how can you think of such a thing?”

“Because driven to do so by the force of necessity.”

“Taking boarders! Keeping a boarding-house! Surely we have not come to this!”

An expression of distress blended with the look of astonishment in Edith’s face.

“There is nothing disgraceful in keeping a boarding-house,” returned the mother. “A great many very respectable ladies have been compelled to resort to it as a means of supporting their families.”

“But to think of it, mother! To think of your keeping a boarding-house! I cannot bear it.”

“Is there anything else that can be done, Edith?”

“Don’t ask me such a question.”

“If, then, you cannot think for me, you must try and think with me, my child. Something will have to be done to create an income. In less than twelve months, every dollar I have will be expended; and then what are we to do? *Now*, Edith, is the time for us to look at the matter earnestly, and to determine the course we will take. There is no use to look away from it. A good house in a central situation, large enough for the purpose, can no doubt be obtained; and I think there will be no difficulty about our getting boarders enough to fill it. The income or profit from these will enable us still to live comfortably, and keep Edward and Ellen at school.”

“It is hard,” was the only remark Edith made to this.

“It is hard, my daughter; very hard! I have thought and thought about it until my whole mind has been thrown into confusion. But it will not do to *think* forever; there must be *action*. Can I see poverty stealing in upon my children, and sit and fold my hands supinely? No! And to you, Edith, my oldest child, I look for aid and for counsel. Stand up bravely by my side.”

“And you are in earnest in all this?” said Edith, whose mind seemed hardly able to realize the truth of their position. From her earliest days, all the blessings that money could procure had been freely scattered

around her feet. As she grew up and advanced towards womanhood, she had moved in the most fashionable circles, and there acquired the habit of *estimating people according to their wealth and social standing*, rather than by qualities of mind and character. In her view, it appeared *degrading* in a woman to enter upon any kind of employment for money; and with the keeper of a boarding-house, particularly, she had always associated something low, vulgar, and ungenteel. At the thought of her mother's engaging in such an occupation, when the suggestion was made, her mind instantly revolted. It appeared to her as if *disgrace* would be the inevitable consequence.

"And you are in earnest in all this?" was an expression mingling her clear conviction of the truth of what at first appeared so strange a proposition, and her astonishment that the necessities of their situation were such as to drive them to so humiliating a resource.

"Deeply in earnest," was the mother's reply.

"We are left alone in the world. He who cared for us and provided for us so liberally has been taken away, and we have nowhere to look for aid but to the resources that are in ourselves. These well applied, will give us, I feel strongly assured, all that we need. The thing to decide is, *what* we ought to do. If we choose aright, all will doubtless come out right. To choose aright is, therefore, of the first importance; and to do this, we must not allow distorting suggestions nor the appeals of a false pride to influence our minds in the least. You are my oldest child, Edith; and, as such, I cannot but look upon you as, to some extent, jointly with me, the guardian of your younger brothers and sisters. True, Miriam is of age, and Henry nearly so; but still you are the eldest — your mind is more matured, and in your judgment I have the most confidence. Try and forget, Edith, all but the fact that, unless we make an exertion, one home for all cannot be retained. Are you willing that we should be scattered like leaves in the autumn wind? No! you would consider that one of the greatest calamities that could befall us — an evil to prevent which we should use every effort in our power. Do you, not see this clearly?"

"I do, mother," was replied by Edith in a more rational tone of voice than that in which she had yet spoken.

"To open a store of any kind would involve five times the exposure of a boarding-house; and, moreover, I know nothing of business."

"Keeping a store? Oh, no! we couldn't do that. Think of the dreadful exposure!"

"But in taking boarders we only increase our family, and all goes on as usual. To my mind, it is the most genteel thing that we can do. Our style of living will be the same; our waiter and all our servants will be retained. In fact, to the eye there will be little change, and the world need never know how greatly reduced our circumstances have become."

This mode of argument tended to reconcile Edith to taking boarders. Something, she saw, had to be done. Opening a store was felt to be out of the question; and as to commencing a school, the thought was repulsed at the very first suggestion.

A few friends were consulted on the subject, and all agreed that the best thing for the widow to do was to take boarders. Each one could point to some lady who had commenced the business with far less ability to make boarders comfortable, and who had yet got along very well. It was conceded on all hands that it was a very genteel business, and that some of the first ladies had been compelled to resort to it, without being any the less respected. Almost everyone to whom the matter was referred spoke in favor of the thing, and but a single individual suggested difficulty; but what he said was not permitted to have much weight. This individual was a brother of the widow, who had always been looked upon as rather eccentric. He was a bachelor and without fortune, merely enjoying a moderate income as book-keeper in the office of an insurance company. But more of him hereafter.

Mrs. Darlington, the widow we have just introduced to the reader, had five children. *Edith*, the oldest daughter, was twenty-two years of age at the time of her father's death; and *Henry*, the oldest son, just twenty. Next to Henry was *Miriam*, eighteen years old. The ages of the two youngest children, *Ellen* and *Edward*, were ten and eight.

Mr. Darlington, while living, was a lawyer of distinguished ability, and his talents and reputation at the Philadelphia bar enabled him to accumulate a handsome fortune. Upon this he had lived for some years in a style of great elegance. About a year before his death, he had been induced to enter into some *financial speculation* that promised great results; but he found, when too late to retreat, that he had been greatly deceived. Heavy losses soon followed. In a struggle to recover himself, he became still further involved; and, before the expiration of a twelvemonth, saw everything falling from under him. The trouble brought on by this, was the real cause of his death, which was sudden, and resulted from inflammation and congestion of the brain.

*Henry* Darlington, the oldest son, was a young man of promising talents. He remained at college until a few months before his father's death, when he returned home and commenced the study of law, in which he felt ambitious to distinguish himself.

*Edith*, the oldest daughter, possessed a fine mind, which had been well educated. She had some *false views of life*, natural to her position; but, apart from this, was a girl of sound sense and *great force of character*. Thus far in life she had not encountered circumstances of a nature calculated to *develop* what was in her. The time for that, however, was approaching.

*Miriam*, her sister, was a quiet, gentle, retiring, almost timid girl. She went into company with reluctance, and then always shrunk as far from observation as it was possible to get; but, like most quiet, retiring people, there were deep places in her mind and heart. She thought and felt more than was supposed. All who knew *Miriam*, loved her. Of the younger children we need not here speak.

Mrs. Darlington knew comparatively nothing of the world beyond her own social circle. She was, perhaps, as little fit for doing what she proposed to do, as a woman could well be. She had no habits of economy, and had never in her life been called upon to make calculations of expense in household matters. There was a tendency to *generosity* rather than *selfishness* in her character, and she rarely thought evil of anyone. But all that she was need not here be set forth, for it will appear as our narrative progresses.

Mr. Hiram Ellis, the brother of Mrs. Darlington to whom brief allusion has been made, was not a great favorite in the family — although Mr. Darlington understood his good qualities, and very highly respected him — because he had not much that was appealing in his external appearance, and was thought to be a little eccentric. Moreover, he was not rich — merely holding the place of book-keeper in an insurance office, at a moderate salary. But as he had never married, and had only himself to support, his income supplied amply all his needs, and left him a small annual surplus.

After the death of Mr. Darlington, he visited his sister much more frequently than before. Of the exact condition of her affairs, he was much better acquainted than she supposed. The anxiety which she felt, some months after her husband's death, when the result of the settlement of his estate became known, led her to be rather more communicative. After determining to open a boarding-house, she said to him, on the occasion of his visiting her one evening —

“As it is *necessary* for me to do something, Hiram, I have concluded to move to a better location, and take a few boarders.”

“Don't do any such thing, Margaret,” her brother made answer. “Taking boarders! It's the last thing of which a woman should think.”

“Why do you say that, Hiram?” asked Mrs. Darlington, evincing no little surprise at this unexpected reply.

“Because I think that a woman who has a living to make, can hardly try a more doubtful experiment. Not one in ten ever succeeds in making a profit.”

“But why, Hiram? Why? I’m sure a great many ladies get a living in that way.”

“What *you* will never do, Margaret, mark my words for it. It takes a woman of *shrewdness, caution, and knowledge of the world*, and one thoroughly versed in *household economy*, to get along in this pursuit. Even if you possessed all these prerequisites to success, you have just the family that ought not to come in contact with anybody and everybody who find their way into boarding-houses.”

“I must do *something*, Hiram,” said Mrs. Darlington, evincing impatience at the opposition of her brother.

“I perfectly agree with you in that, Margaret,” replied Mr. Ellis. “The only doubt is as to your choice of occupation. You think that your best plan will be to take boarders; while I think you could not fall upon a worse experiment.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Have I not just said?”

“What?”

“Why, that, in the first place, it takes a woman of great shrewdness, caution, and knowledge of the world, and one thoroughly versed in household economy, to succeed in the business.”

“I’m not a fool, Hiram!” exclaimed Mrs. Darlington, losing her self-command.

“Perhaps you may alter your opinion on that head some time within the next twelve months,” coolly returned Mr. Ellis, rising and beginning to button up his coat.

“Such language to me, at this time, is cruel!” said Mrs. Darlington, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

“No,” calmly replied her brother, “not cruel, but *kind*. I wish to save you from worse trouble.”

“What else can I do?” asked the widow, removing the handkerchief from her face.

“Many things, I was going to say,” returned Mr. Ellis. “But, in truth, the choice of employment is not very great. Still, something with a fairer promise than taking boarders may be found.”

“If you can point me to some better way, brother,” said Mrs. Darlington, “I shall feel greatly indebted to you.”

“Almost anything is better. Suppose you and Edith were to open a *school*. Both of you are well — “

“Open a school!” exclaimed Mrs. Darlington, interrupting her brother, and exhibiting most profound astonishment. “I open a school! I didn’t think you would take advantage of my grief and misfortune to offer me an insult!”

Mr. Ellis buttoned the top button of his coat nervously, as his sister said this, and, partly turning himself towards the door, said —

“Teaching school is a far more useful, and, if you will, more respectable employment, than keeping a boarding-house. This you ought to see at a glance. As a teacher, you would be a *minister of truth to the mind*, and have it in your power to bend from evil and lead to good the young immortals committed to your care; while, as a boarding-house keeper, you would merely furnish food for the natural body — a use below what you are capable of rendering to society.”

But Mrs. Darlington was in no state of mind to feel the force of such an argument. From the thought of a *school*, she shrunk as from something *degrading*, and turned from it with displeasure.

“Don’t mention such a thing to me,” said she fretfully, “I will not listen to the proposition.”

“Oh, well, Margaret, as you please,” replied her brother, now moving towards the door. “When you ask my advice, I will give it according to my best judgment, and with a sincere desire for your good. If, however, it conflicts with your views, reject it; but, in simple justice to me, do so in a better spirit than you manifest on the present occasion. Good evening!”

Mrs. Darlington was too much disturbed in mind to make a reply, and Mr. Hiram Ellis left the room without any attempt on the part of his sister to detain him. On both sides there had been the indulgence of rather more impatience and intolerance than was commendable.

In due time, Mrs. Darlington moved to a house in Arch Street, the annual rent of which was six hundred dollars, and there began her *experiment*. The expense of a removal, and the cost of the additional chamber furniture required, exhausted about two hundred dollars of the widow’s slender stock of money, and caused her to feel a little troubled when she noticed the diminution.

She began her new business with two boarders, a gentleman and his wife by the name of Grimes, who had entered her house on the recommendation of a friend. They were to pay her the sum of eight dollars a week. A young man named Barling, clerk in a wholesale Market Street house, came next; and he introduced, soon after, a friend of his, a clerk in the same store, named Mason. They were room-mates, and paid three dollars and a half each. Three or four weeks elapsed before any further additions were made; then an advertisement brought several applications. One was from a gentleman who wanted two rooms for himself and wife, a nurse and four children. He wanted the second story front and back chambers, furnished, and was not willing to pay over sixteen dollars, although his oldest child was twelve and his youngest four years of age — *seven good eaters* and two of the best rooms in the house for sixteen dollars!

Mrs. Darlington demurred. The man said —

“Very well, ma’am,” in a tone of indifference. “I can find plenty of accommodations quite as good as yours for the price I offer. It’s all I pay now.” Poor Mrs. Darlington sighed. She had but fifteen dollars yet in the house — that is, boarders who paid this amount weekly — and the rent alone amounted to twelve dollars. Sixteen dollars, she argued with herself, as she sat with her eyes upon the floor, would make a great difference in her income; would, in fact, meet all the expenses of the house. Two good rooms would still remain, and all that she received for these would be so much clear profit. Such was the hurried conclusion of Mrs. Darlington’s mind.

“I suppose I will have to take you,” said she, lifting her eyes to the man’s hard features. “But those rooms ought to bring me twenty-four dollars.”

“Sixteen is the utmost I will pay,” replied the man. In fact, I did think of offering only fourteen dollars. “But the rooms are fine, and I like them. Sixteen is a liberal price. Your terms are considerably above the ordinary range.”

The widow *sighed* again.

If the man heard this sound, it did not touch a single chord of feeling.

“Then it is understood that I am to have your rooms at sixteen dollars?” said he.

“Yes, sir. I will take you for that.”

“Very well. My name is Scragg. We will be ready to come in on Monday next. You can have all prepared for us?”

“Yes, sir.”

Scarcely had Mr. Scragg departed, when a gentleman called to know if Mrs. Darlington had a vacant front room in the second story.

“I had this morning; but it is taken,” replied the widow.

“Ah! I’m sorry for that.”

“Will not a third story front room suit you?” “No. My wife is not in very good health, and wishes a second story room. We pay twelve dollars a week, and would even give more, if necessary, to obtain just the accommodations we like. The situation of your house pleases me. I’m sorry that I happen to be too late.”

“Will you look at the room?” said Mrs. Darlington, into whose mind came the desire to break the bad bargain she had just made.

“If you please,” returned the man.

And both went up to the large and beautifully furnished chambers.

“Just the thing!” said the man, as he looked around, much pleased with the appearance of everything. “But I understood you to say that it was taken.”

“Why, yes,” replied Mrs. Darlington, “I did partly engage it this morning; but, no doubt, I can arrange with the family to take the two rooms above, which will suit them just as well.”

“If you can” —

“There’ll be no difficulty, I presume. You’ll pay twelve dollars a week?”

“Yes.”

“Only yourself and your wife?”

“That’s all.”

“Very well, sir; you can have the room.”

“It’s a bargain, then. My name is Ring. Our week is up today where we are; and, if it is agreeable, we will become your guests tomorrow.”

“Perfectly agreeable, Mr. Ring.”

The gentleman bowed politely and retired.

Now Mrs. Darlington did not feel very comfortable when she reflected on what she had done. The rooms in the second story were positively engaged to Mr. Scragg, and now one of them was as positively engaged to Mr. Ring. The face of Mr. Scragg she remembered very well. It was a hard, sinister face, just such a one as we rarely forget because of the disagreeable impression it makes. As it came up distinctly before the eyes of her mind, she was oppressed with a sense of coming trouble. Nor did she feel altogether satisfied with what she had done — satisfied in her own *conscience*.

On the next morning, Mr. and Mrs. Ring came and took possession of the room previously engaged to Mr. Scragg. They were pleasant people, and made a good first impression.

As day after day glided past, Mrs. Darlington felt more and more uneasy about Mr. Scragg, with whom, she had a decided presentiment that there would be trouble. Had she known where to find him, she would have sent him a note, saying that she had changed her mind about the rooms, and could not let him have them. But she was ignorant of his address; and the only thing left for her was to wait until he came on Monday, and then get over the difficulty in the best way possible. She and Edith had talked over the matter frequently, and had come to the determination to offer Mr. Scragg the two chambers in the third story for fourteen dollars.

On Monday morning, Mrs. Darlington was nervous. This was the day on which Mr. Scragg and family were to arrive, and she felt that there would be *trouble*.

Mr. Ring, and the other gentlemen boarders, left soon after breakfast. About ten o’clock, the door-bell rang. Mrs. Darlington was in her room at the time changing her dress. Thinking that this might be the announcement of Mr. Scragg’s arrival, she hurried through her dressing in order to get down to the parlor

as quickly as possible to meet him and the difficulty that was to be encountered; but before she was in a condition to be seen, she heard a man's voice on the stairs, saying —

“Walk up, my dear. The rooms on the second floor are ours.”

Then came the noise of many feet in the passage, and the din of children's voices. Mr. Scragg and his family had arrived.

Mrs. Ring was sitting with the morning paper in her hand, when her door was flung widely open, and a strange man stepped boldly in, saying, as he did so, to the lady who followed him —

“This is one of the chambers.”

Mrs. Ring arose, bowed, and looked at the *intruders* with surprise and embarrassment. Just then, four rude children bounded into the room, spreading themselves around it, and making themselves perfectly at home.

“There is some mistake, I presume,” said Mrs. Scragg, on perceiving a lady in the room, whose manner said plainly enough that they were out of their place.

“Oh no! no mistake at all,” replied Scragg.

“These are the two rooms I engaged.”

Just then Mrs. Darlington entered, in manifest excitement.

“Walk down into the parlor, if you please,” said she.

“These are our rooms,” said Scragg, showing no inclination to vacate the premises.

“Be kind enough to walk down into the parlor,” repeated Mrs. Darlington, whose sense of propriety was outraged by the man's conduct, and who felt a corresponding degree of indignation.

With some show of reluctance, this invitation was acceded to, and Mr. Scragg went muttering down the stairs, followed by his brood. The moment he left the chamber, the door was shut and locked by Mrs. Ring, who was a good deal frightened by so unexpected an intrusion.

“What am I to understand by this, madam?” said Mr. Scragg, fiercely, as soon as they had all reached the parlor, planting his hands upon his hips as he spoke, drawing himself up, and looking at Mrs. Darlington with a lowering countenance.

“Take a seat, madam,” said Mrs. Darlington, addressing the man's wife in a tone of forced composure. She was struggling for self-possession.

The lady sat down.

“Will you be good enough to explain the meaning of all this, madam?” repeated Mr. Scragg.

“The meaning is simply,” replied Mrs. Darlington, “that I have let the front room in the second story to a gentleman and his wife for twelve dollars a week.”

“The deuse you have!” said Mr. Scragg, with a particular exhibition of gentlemanly indignation.

“And pray, madam, didn't you let both the rooms in the second story to me for sixteen dollars?”

“I did; but — “

“Oh, very well. That's all I wish to know about it. The rooms were rented to me, and from that day became mine. Please to inform the lady and her husband that I am here with my family, and desire them to vacate the chambers as quickly as possible. I'm a man that knows his rights, and, knowing, always maintains them.”

“You cannot have the rooms, sir. That is out of the question,” said Mrs. Darlington, looking both distressed and indignant.

“And I tell you that I will have them!” replied Scragg, angrily.

“Peter! Peter! Don't act so,” now interposed Mrs. Scragg. “There's no use in it.”



“Isn’t there, indeed? We’ll see. Madam” — he addressed Mrs. Darlington — “will you be kind enough to inform the lady and gentleman who now occupy one of *our* rooms — “

“Mr. Scragg!” said Mrs. Darlington, in whose fainting heart his outrageous conduct had awakened something of the right spirit — “Mr. Scragg, I wish you to understand, once for all, that the front room is taken and now occupied, and that you *cannot* have it.”

“Madam!”

“It’s no use for you to waste words, sir! What I say I mean. I have other rooms in the house very nearly as good, and am willing to take you for something less in consideration of this disappointment. If that will meet your views, well; if not, let us have no more words on the subject.”

There was a certain something in Mrs. Darlington’s tone of voice that Scragg understood to mean a *fixed purpose*. Moreover, his mind caught at the idea of getting boarded for something less than sixteen dollars a week.

“Where are the rooms?” he asked gruffly.

“The third story chambers.”

“Front?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t want to go to the third story.”

“Very well. Then you can have the back chamber downstairs, and the front chamber above.”

“What will be your charge?”

“Fourteen dollars.”

“That will do, Peter,” said Mrs. Scragg. “Two dollars a week is considerable abatement.”

“It’s something, of course. But I don’t like this off and on kind of business. When I make an agreement, I’m up to the mark, and expect the same from everybody else. Will you let my wife see the rooms, madam?”

“Certainly,” replied Mrs. Darlington, and moved towards the door. Mrs. Scragg followed, and so did all the juvenile Scraggs — springing up the stairs with the agility of apes and the noise of a dozen rude schoolboys.

The rooms suited Mrs. Scragg very well — at least such was her report to her husband — and, after some further rudeness on the part of Mr. Scragg, and an effort to beat Mrs. Darlington down to twelve dollars a week, were taken, and forthwith occupied.

Mrs. Darlington was a woman of refinement herself, and had been used to the society of *refined* people. She was, naturally enough, shocked at the *coarseness* and *brutality* of Mr. Scragg, and, before an hour went by, in despair at the unmannerly rudeness of the children, the oldest a stout, vulgar-looking boy, who went racing and rummaging about the house from the garret to the cellar. For a long time after her exciting interview with Mr. Scragg, she sat weeping and trembling in her own room, with Edith by her side, who sought earnestly to *comfort* and *encourage* her.

“Oh, Edith!” she sobbed, “to think that we should be humbled to this!”

“*Necessity* has forced us into our present unhappy position, mother,” replied Edith. “Let us meet its difficulties with as brave hearts as possible.”

“I shall never be able to treat that dreadful man with even common civility,” said Mrs. Darlington.

“We have accepted him as our guest, mother, and it will be our duty to make all as pleasant and comfortable as possible. We will have to bear much, I see — much beyond what I had anticipated.”

Mrs. Darlington sighed deeply as she replied —

“Yes, yes, Edith. Ah, the thought makes me miserable!”

“No more of that sweet drawing together in our own dear home circle,” remarked Edith, sadly.

“Henceforth we are to bear the constant presence and *intrusion* of strangers, with whom we have few or no sentiments in common. We open our house and take in the *ignorant*, the *selfish*, the *vulgar*, and feed them for a certain price! Does not the thought bring a feeling of painful humiliation? What can pay for all this? Ah me! The anticipation had in it not a glimpse of what we have found in our brief experience. Except Mr. and Mrs. Ring, there isn’t a lady nor gentleman in the house. That Mason is so rudely familiar that I cannot bear to come near him. He’s making himself quite intimate with Henry already, and I don’t like to see it.”

“Nor do I,” replied Mrs. Darlington. “Henry’s been out with him twice to the *theater* already.”

“I’m afraid of his *influence* over Henry. He’s not the kind of a companion he ought to choose,” said Edith. “And then Mr. Barling is with Miriam in the parlor almost every evening. He asks her to sing, and she says she doesn’t like to refuse.”

The mother sighed deeply. While they were conversing, a servant came to their room to say that Mr. Ring was in the parlor, and wished to speak with Mrs. Darlington. It was late in the afternoon of the day on which the Scraggs had made their appearance.

With a presentiment of trouble, Mrs. Darlington went down to the parlor.

“Madam,” said Mr. Ring, as soon as she entered, speaking in a firm voice, “I find that my wife has been grossly insulted by a fellow whose family you have taken into your house. Now they must leave here, or we will, and that immediately!”

“I regret extremely,” replied Mrs. Darlington, “the unpleasant occurrence to which you allude; but I do not see how it is possible for me to turn these people out of the house.”

“Very well, ma’am. Suit yourself about that. You can choose between us. Both can’t remain.”

“If I were to tell this Mr. Scragg to seek another boarding-house, he would insult me,” said Mrs. Darlington.

“Strange that you would take *such* a fellow into your house!”

“My rooms were vacant, and I had to fill them.”

“Better to have let them remain vacant. But this is neither here nor there. If this fellow remains — then we go.”

And go they did on the next day. Mrs. Darlington was afraid to approach Mr. Scragg on the subject. Had she done so, she would have received nothing but abuse.

Two weeks afterward, the room vacated by Mr. and Mrs. Ring was taken by a tall, fine-looking man, who wore a pair of handsome whiskers and dressed elegantly. He gave his name as Burton, and agreed to pay eight dollars. Mrs. Darlington liked him very much. There was a certain *style* about him that evidenced good breeding and a knowledge of the world. What his business was, he did not say. He was usually in the house as late as ten o’clock in the morning, and rarely came in before twelve at night.

Soon after Mr. Burton became a member of Mrs. Darlington’s household, he began to show particular attentions to *Miriam*, who was in her nineteenth year, and was, as we have said, a gentle, timid, shrinking girl. Though she did not encourage, she would not reject the attentions of the polite and elegant stranger, who had so much that was agreeable to say, that she insensibly acquired a kind of bias in his favor.

As now constituted, the family of Mrs. Darlington was not so pleasant and harmonious as could have been desired. Mr. Scragg had already succeeded in making himself so disagreeable to the other boarders, that they were scarcely civil to him; and Mrs. Grimes, who was quite gracious with Mrs. Scragg at first, no longer spoke to her. They had fallen out about some trifle, quarreled, and then cut each other’s acquaintance. When the breakfast, dinner, or tea bell rang, and the boarders assembled at the table, there

was generally, at first, an *embarrassing silence*. Scragg looked like a bull-dog waiting for an occasion to bark; Mrs. Scragg sat with her lips closely compressed and her head partly turned away, so as to keep her eyes out of the line of vision with Mrs. Grimes's face; while Mrs. Grimes gave an occasional glance of *contempt* towards the lady with whom she had had a "tiff."

Barling and Mason, observing all this, and enjoying it, were generally the first to break the reigning silence; and this was usually done by addressing some remark to Scragg, for no other reason, it seemed, than to hear his *growling reply*. Usually, they succeeded in drawing him into an argument, when they would goad him until he became angry; a species of *irritation* in which they never suffered themselves to indulge. As for Mr. Grimes, he was a man of few words. When spoken to, he would reply; but he never made conversation. The only man who really behaved like a gentleman was Mr. Burton; and the contrast seen in him naturally biased the family in his favor.

The first three months' experience in taking boarders was enough to make the heart of Mrs. Darlington sick. All domestic comfort was gone. From early morning until late at night, she toiled harder than any servant in the house; and, with all, had a mind pressed down with care and anxiety. Three times during this period she had been obliged to change her cook, yet, for all, scarcely a day passed that she did not set badly cooked food before her guests. Sometimes certain of the boarders *complained*, and it generally happened that *rudeness* accompanied the complaint. The sense of pain that attended this was always most acute, for it was accompanied by deep humiliation and a feeling of helplessness. Moreover, during these first three months, Mr. and Mrs. Grimes had left the house without paying their board for five weeks, thus throwing her into a loss of forty dollars.

At the beginning of this experiment, after completing the furniture of her house, Mrs. Darlington had about three hundred dollars. When the quarter's bill for rent was paid, she had only a hundred and fifty dollars left. Thus, instead of making anything by boarders, so far, she had sunk a hundred and fifty dollars! This fact disheartened her dreadfully.

Then, the effect upon almost every member of her family had been bad. Harry was no longer the thoughtful affectionate, innocent-minded young man of former days. Mason and Barling had introduced him into *mirthful company*, and, fascinated with a new and more exciting kind of life, he was fast forming associations and acquiring habits of a dangerous character. It was rare that he spent an evening at home; and, instead of being of any assistance to his mother, was constantly making demands on her for money. The pain all this occasioned Mrs. Darlington was of the most distressing character.

Since the children of Mr. and Mrs. Scragg came into the house, Edward and Ellen, who had heretofore been under the constant care and instruction of their mother, left almost entirely to themselves, associated constantly with these children, and learned from them to be *rude, vulgar*, and, in some things, even *wicked*.

And *Miriam* had become apparently so much interested in Mr. Burton, who was constantly attentive to her, that both Mrs. Darlington and Edith became anxious on her account. Burton was entire stranger to them all, and there were many things about him that appeared strange, if not wrong.

So much for the experiment of taking boarders, after the lapse of a single quarter of a year.

About this time a lady and gentleman, named Marion, called and engaged boarding for themselves and three children. In Mrs. Marion there was something that won the heart at first sight, and her children were as lovely and attractive as herself; but towards her husband there was a feeling of instant repulsion. Not that he was coarse or rude in his exterior — that was polished; but there were a sensualism and *lack of principle* about him that could be felt.

They had been in the house only a week or two, when their oldest child, a beautiful boy, was taken ill. He had fever, and complained of distress in his back and pain in his head. The mother appeared anxious, but the father treated the matter lightly, and said he would be well again in a few hours.

"I think you'd better call in a doctor," Mrs. Darlington heard the mother say, as her husband stood at the chamber door ready to go away.

"Nonsense, Jane," he replied. "You are easily frightened. There's nothing serious the matter."

"I'm afraid of scarlet fever, Henry," was answered to this.

"Fiddlesticks! You're always afraid of something," was lightly and unkindly returned.

Mrs. Marion said no more, and her husband went away. About half an hour afterwards, as Mrs. Darlington sat in her room, there was a light tap at her door, which was immediately opened, and Mrs. Marion stepped in. Her face was pale, and it was some moments before her quivering lips could articulate.

"Won't you come up and look at my Willy?" she at length said, in a tremulous voice.

"Certainly, ma'am," replied Mrs. Darlington, rising immediately. "What do you think ails your little boy?"

"I don't know, ma'am; but I'm afraid of scarlet fever — that dreadful disease."

Mrs. Darlington went up to the chamber of Mrs. Marion. On the bed lay Willy, his face flushed with fever, and his eyes wearing a glassy luster.

"Do you feel sick, my dear?" asked Mrs. Darlington, as she laid her hand on his burning forehead.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the child.

"Where are you sick?"

"My head aches."

"Is your throat sore?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very sore?"

"It hurts me so that I can hardly swallow."

"What do you think ails him?" asked the mother, in anxious tones.

"It's hard to say, Mrs. Marion; but, if it were my case, I would send for a doctor. Who is your physician?"

"Dr. Cooper."

"If you would like to have him called in, I will send the waiter to his office."

Mrs. Marion looked troubled and alarmed.

"My husband doesn't think it anything serious," said she. "I wanted him to go for the doctor."

"Take my advice, and send for a physician," replied Mrs. Darlington.

"If you will send for Dr. Cooper, I will feel greatly obliged," said Mrs. Marion.

The doctor was sent for immediately. He did not come for two hours, in which time Willy had grown much worse. He looked serious, and answered all questions evasively. After writing a prescription, he gave a few directions, and said he would call again in the evening. At his second visit, he found his patient much worse; and, on the following morning, pronounced it a case of *scarlatina*.

Already, Willy had made a friend in every member of Mrs. Darlington's family, and the announcement of his dangerous illness was received with acute pain. Miriam took her place beside Mrs. Marion in the sick chamber, all her sympathies alive, and all her fears awakened; and Edith and her mother gave every attention that their other duties in the household would permit.

Rapidly did the disease, which had fixed itself upon the delicate frame of the child, run its fatal course. On the fourth day he *died* in the arms of his almost frantic mother.

Though Mrs. Marion had been only a short time in the house, yet she had already deeply interested the feelings of Mrs. Darlington and her two eldest daughters, who suffered with her in the affliction almost as severely as if they had themselves experienced a bereavement; and this added to the weight, already painfully oppressive, that rested upon them.

The nearer contact into which the family of Mrs. Darlington and the bereaved mother were brought by this affliction, discovered to the former many things that strengthened the repugnance first felt towards Mr. Marion, and awakened still livelier sympathies for his suffering wife.

One evening, a week after the body of the child was borne out by the mourners and laid to moulder in its kindred dust, the voice of Mr. Marion was heard in loud, angry tones. He was alone with his wife in their chamber. This chamber was next to that of Edith and Miriam, where they, at the time, happened to be. What he said they could not make out; but they distinctly heard the voice of Mrs. Marion, and the words —

“Oh, Henry! don’t! don’t!” uttered in tones the most agonizing. They also heard the words, “For the sake of our dear, dear Willy!” used in some appeal.

Both Edith and Miriam were terribly frightened, and sat panting and looking at each other with pale faces.

All now became silent. Not a sound could be heard in the chamber save an occasional low sob. For half an hour this silence continued. Then the door of the chamber was opened, and Mr. Marion went downstairs. The closing of the front door announced his departure from the house. Edith and her sister sat listening for some minutes after Mr. Marion had left, but not a movement could they perceive in the adjoining chamber.

“Strange! What can it mean?” at length said Miriam, in a husky whisper. Edith breathed heavily to relieve the pressure on her bosom, but made no answer.

“He didn’t strike her?” said Miriam, her face growing paler as she made this suggestion.

The moment this was uttered, Edith arose quickly and moved towards the door.

“Where are you going?” asked her sister.

“Into Mrs. Marion’s room.”

“Oh no, don’t!” returned Miriam, speaking from some vague fear that made her heart shrink.

But Edith did not heed the words. Her light tap at Mrs. Marion’s door was not answered. Opening it softly, she stepped within the chamber. On the bed, where she had evidently thrown herself, lay Mrs. Marion; and, on approaching and bending over her, Edith discovered that she was sleeping. On perceiving this, she retired as noiselessly as she had entered.

Ten, eleven, twelve o’clock came; and yet Mr. Marion had not returned. An hour later than this, Edith and her sister lay awake, but up to that time he was still away. On the next morning, when the bell rang for breakfast, and the family assembled at the table, the places of Mr. and Mrs. Marion were vacant. From their nurse it was ascertained that Mr. Marion had not come home since he went out on the evening before, and that his wife had not yet arisen. Between nine and ten o’clock, Mrs. Darlington sent up to know if Mrs. Marion wished anything, but was answered in the negative. At dinner time Mr. Marion did not make his appearance, and his wife remained in her chamber. Food was sent to her, but it was returned untasted.

During the afternoon, Mrs. Darlington knocked at her door, but the nurse said that Mrs. Marion asked to be excused from seeing her. At supper time food was sent again to her room; but, except part of a cup of tea, nothing was tasted. After tea, Mrs. Darlington called again at her room, but the desire to be excused from seeing her was repeated. Mr. Marion did not return that night.

Nearly a week passed, the husband still remaining away, and not once during that time had Mrs. Marion been seen by any member of the family. At the end of this period, she sent word to Mrs. Darlington that she would be glad to see her.

When the latter entered her room, she found her lying upon the bed, with a face so pale and grief-stricken, that she could not help an exclamation of painful surprise.

“My dear madam, what has happened?” said she, as she took her hand.

Mrs. Marion was too much overcome by emotion to be able to speak for some moments. Acquiring self-possession at length, she said, in a low, sad voice —

“My heart is almost broken, Mrs. Darlington. I feel crushed to the very ground. How shall I speak of what I am suffering?”

Her voice quivered and failed. But in a few moments she recovered herself again, and said, more calmly —

“I need not tell you that my husband has been absent for a week; he went away in a moment of anger, vowing that he would never return. Hourly have I waited since, in the hope that he would come back; but, alas! I have thus far received from him neither word nor sign.”

Mrs. Marion here gave way to her feelings, and wept bitterly.

“Did he ever leave you before?” asked Mrs. Darlington, as soon as she had grown calm.

“Once.”

“How long did he remain away?”

“More than a year.”

“Have you friends?”

“I have no relative but an aunt, who is very poor.”

Mrs. Darlington sighed involuntarily. On that very day she had been seriously examining into her affairs, and the result was a conviction that, under her present range of expenses, she must go behind-hand with great rapidity. Mr. and Mrs. Marion were to pay fourteen dollars a week. Thus far, nothing had been received from them; and now the husband had gone off and left his family on her hands. She could not turn them out, yet how could she bear up under this additional burden!

All this passed through her mind in a moment, and produced the sigh which distracted her bosom.

“Do you not know where he has gone?” she asked, seeking to throw as much *sympathy* and *interest* in her voice as possible, and thus to conceal the pressure upon her own feelings which the news had occasioned.

Mrs. Marion shook her head. She knew that, in the effort to speak, her voice would fail her.

For nearly the space of a minute there was silence. This was broken, at length, by Mrs. Marion, who again wept violently. As soon as the passionate burst of feeling was over, Mrs. Darlington said to her in a kind and sympathizing voice —

“Do not grieve so deeply. You are not friendless altogether. Though you have been with us only a short time, we feel an interest in you, and will not — “

The sentence remained unfinished. There was an impulse in Mrs. Darlington’s mind to offer the unhappy woman a home for herself and children; but a sudden recollection of the embarrassing nature of her own circumstances checked the words on her tongue.

“I cannot remain a burden upon you,” quickly answered Mrs. Marion. “But where can I go? What shall I do?”

The last few words were spoken half to herself, in a low tone of distressing despondency.

“For the present,” said Mrs. Darlington, anxious to mitigate, even in a small degree, the anguish of the unhappy woman’s mind, “let this give you no trouble. Doubtless the way will open before you. After the darkest hour, the morning breaks.”

Yet, even while Mrs. Darlington sought thus to give comfort, her own heart felt the weight upon it growing heavier. Scarcely able to stand up in her difficulties alone, here was a *new burden* laid upon her.

None could have sympathized more deeply with the afflicted mother and deserted wife than did Mrs. Darlington and her family; and none could have extended more willingly a helping hand in time of need. But, in sustaining the burden of her support, they felt that the additional weight was bearing them under.

Three months more elapsed. Mrs. Marion was still an inmate of the family. Up to this time, not a word had come from her husband, and she had not been able to pay Mrs. Darlington a single dollar.

Painfully did she feel her dependent situation, although she was treated with the utmost delicacy and consideration. But all the widow’s means were now exhausted in the payment of the second quarter’s rent, and she found her weekly income reduced to thirty-five dollars, scarcely sufficient to meet the weekly expense for supplying the table, paying the servants, etc., leaving nothing for future rent bills, the cost of clothing, and education for the younger children. With all this, Mrs. Darlington’s duties had been growing daily more and more severe. Nothing could be trusted to servants that was not, in some way, defectively done, causing repeated complaints from the boarders. What proved most annoying was the bad cooking, to remedy which Mrs. Darlington strove in vain. One day the coffee was not fit to drink, and on the next day the steak would be burnt or broiled as dry as a chip, or the sirloin roasted until every particle of juice had evaporated. If hot cakes were ordered for breakfast, ten chances to one that they were sour; or, if rolls were baked, they would, most likely, be as heavy as lead.

Such *mishaps* were so frequent, that the guests of Mrs. Darlington became impatient, and Mr. Scragg, in particular, never let an occasion for *grumbling* or *insolence* pass without fully improving it.

“Is your coal out?” said he, one morning, about this time, as he sat at the breakfast table.

Mrs. Darlington understood, by the man’s tone and manner, that he meant to be *rude*, though she did not comprehend the meaning of the question.

“No, sir,” she replied, with some dignity of manner. “Why do you ask?”

“It struck me,” he answered, “that such might be the case. But, perhaps, cook is too lazy to bring it out of the cellar. If she’ll send for me tomorrow morning, I’ll bring her up an extra scuttleful, as I particularly like a good cup of hot coffee.”

His meaning was now plain. Quick as thought, the blood rushed to the face of Mrs. Darlington.

She had borne so much from this man, and felt towards him such *utter disgust*, that she could forbear no longer.

“Mr. Scragg,” said she, with marked indignation, “when a gentleman has any complaint to make, he does it as a gentleman.”

“Madam!” exclaimed Scragg, with a threat in his voice, while his coarse face became red with anger.

“When a gentleman has any complaint to make, he does it as a gentleman,” repeated Mrs. Darlington, with a more particular emphasis than at first.

“I’d thank you to explain yourself,” said Scragg, dropping his hands from the table, and elevating his person.

“My words convey my meaning plainly enough. But, if you cannot understand, I will try to make them clearer. Your conduct is not that of a gentleman!”

Of course, Mr. Scragg asked for no further explanation. Starting from the table, he said, looking at Mrs. Scragg —

“Come!”

And Mrs. Scragg arose and followed her indignant spouse.

“Served him right,” remarked Burton, in a low voice, bending a little towards Miriam, who sat near him. “I hope we shall now be rid of the low-bred fellow.”

Miriam was too much disturbed to make a reply. All at the table felt more or less uncomfortable, and soon retired. Before dinner time, Mr. and Mrs. Scragg, with their whole brood, had left the house, thus reducing the income of Mrs. Darlington from thirty-five to twenty-three dollars a week.

At dinner time, Mrs. Darlington was in bed. The reaction which followed the excitement of the morning, accompanied as it was with the conviction that, in parting with the Scraggs, insufferable as they were, she had parted with the very means of sustaining herself, completely prostrated her. During the afternoon, she was better, and was able to confer with Edith on the desperate nature of their affairs.

“What are we to do?” said she to her daughter, breaking thus abruptly a silence which had continued for many minutes. “We have an income of only twenty-three dollars a week, and that will scarcely supply the table.”

Edith sighed, but did not answer.

“Twenty-three dollars a week,” repeated Mrs. Darlington. “What are we to do?”

“Our rooms will not remain vacant long, I hope,” said Edith.

“There is little prospect of filling them that I can see,” murmured Mrs. Darlington. “If all our rooms were taken, we might get along.”

“I don’t know,” returned Edith to this, speaking thoughtfully. “I sometimes think that our expenses are too great for us to make anything, even if our rooms were filled. Six hundred dollars is a large rent for us to pay.”

“We’ve *sunk* three hundred dollars in six months. That is certain,” said Mrs. Darlington.

“And our *furniture* has suffered to an extent almost equivalent,” added her daughter.

“Oh, do not speak of that! The thought makes me sick. Our handsome French china dinner set, which cost us a hundred and fifty dollars, is completely ruined. Half of the plates are broken, and there is scarcely a piece of it not injured or defaced. My heart aches to see the destruction going on around us.”

“I was in Mr. Scragg’s room today,” said Edith.

“Well, what of it?” asked her mother.

“It would make you sick to look in there. You know the beautiful bowl and pitcher that were in her chamber?”

“Yes.”

“Both handle and spout are off of the pitcher.”

“Edith!”

“And the bowl is cracked from the rim to the center. Then the elegant rosewood washstand is completely ruined. Two knobs are off of the dressing-bureau, the veneering stripped from the edge of one of the drawers, and the whole surface marked over in a thousand lines. It looks as if the children had amused themselves by the hour in scratching it with pins. Three chairs are broken. And the new carpet we put on the floor looks as if it had been used for ten years. Moreover, everything is in a most *filthy* condition. It is shocking.”

Mrs. Darlington fairly groaned at this news.

“But where is it all to lead, Edith?” she asked, arousing herself from a kind of stupor into which her mind had fallen. “We cannot go on as we are now going.”

“We must reduce our expenses, if possible.”



“But how are we to reduce them? We cannot send away the cook.”

“No. Of course not.”

“Nor our chambermaid.”

“No. But cannot we dispense with the waiter?”

“Who will attend the table, go to market, and do the dozen other things now required of him?”

“We can get our marketing sent home.”

“But the waiting oh the table. Who will do that?”

“Half a dollar a week extra to the chambermaid will secure that service from her.”

“But she has enough to do besides waiting on the table,” objected Mrs. Darlington.

“Miriam and I will help more through the house than we have yet done. Three dollars a week and the waiter’s board will be saving a good deal.”

Mrs. Darlington sighed heavily, and then said —

“To think what I have borne from that Scragg and his family, ignorant, low-bred, vulgar people, with whom we have no social affinity whatever, who occupy a level far below us, and who yet put on airs and treat us as if we were only their servants! I could bear his insolence no longer. Ah, to what mortifications are we not subjected in our present position! How little I dreamed of all this, when I decided to open a boarding-house! But, Edith, to come back to what we were conversing about, it would be something to save the expense of our waiter; but what are three or four dollars a week, when we are going behind hand at the rate of twenty?”

“If Mrs. Marion — “

Edith checked herself, and did not say what was in her mind. Mrs. Darlington was silent, sighed again heavily, and then said —

“Yes; if it wasn’t for the expense of keeping Mrs. Marion. And she has no claim upon us.”

“None but the *claim of humanity*,” said Edith.

“If we were able to pay that claim,” remarked Mrs. Darlington.

“True.”

“But we are not. Such being the case, are we justified in any longer offering her a home?”

“Where will *she* go? What will she do?” said Edith.

“Where will *we* go? What will we do, unless there is a change in our favor?” asked Mrs. Darlington.

“Alas, I cannot tell! When we are weak, small things are felt as a burden. The expense of keeping Mrs. Marion and her two children is not very great. Still, it is an expense that we are unable to meet. But how can we tell her to go?”

“I cannot take *my children’s bread* and distribute it to others,” replied Mrs. Darlington, with much feeling. “My first duty is to them.”

“Poor woman! My heart aches for her,” said Edith. “She looks so pale and heart-broken, feels so keenly her state of dependence, and tries so in every possible way to make the pressure of her presence in our family as light as possible, that the very thought of turning her from our door seems to involve *cruelty*.”

“All that, Edith, I feel most sensibly. Ah me! into what a strait are we driven!”

“How many times have I wished that we had never commenced this business!” said Edith. “It has brought us nothing but *trouble* from the beginning; and, unless my fears are idle, some worse troubles are yet before us.”

“Of what kind?”

“Henry did not come home until after two o’clock this morning.”

“What!” exclaimed the mother in painful surprise.

“I sat up for him. Knowing that he had gone out with Mr. Barling, and, finding that he had not returned by eleven o’clock, I could not go to bed. I said nothing to Miriam, but sat up alone. It was nearly half past two when he came home in company with Barling. Both, I am sorry to say, were so much *intoxicated*, that they could scarcely make their way upstairs.”

“Oh, Edith!” exclaimed the stricken mother, hiding her face in her hands, and weeping aloud.

Miriam entered the room at this moment, and, seeing her mother in tears, and Edith looking the very image of distress, begged to know the cause of their trouble. Little was said to her then; but Edith, when she was alone with her soon after, fully explained the *desperate condition* of their affairs. Hitherto they had, out of regard for Miriam, concealed from her the nature of the difficulties that were closing around them.

“I dreamed not of this,” said Miriam, in a voice of anguish. “My poor mother! What pain she must suffer! No wonder that her countenance is so often sad. But, Edith, cannot we do something?”

Ever thus, to the mind of the sweet girl, when the troubles of others were mentioned to her, came, first, the desire to afford relief.

“We can do nothing,” replied Edith, “at present, unless it be to assist through the house, so that the chambermaid can attend the door, wait on the table, and do other things now required of the waiter.”

“And let him go?”

“Yes.”

“I am willing to do all in my power, Edith,” said Miriam. “But, if mother has lost so much already, will she not lose still more if she continues to go on as she is now going?”

“She hopes to fill all her rooms; then she thinks that she will be able to make something.”

“This has been her hope from the first,” replied Miriam.

“Yes, and thus far it has been a vain hope.”

“Three hundred dollars lost already,” sighed Miriam, “our beautiful furniture ruined, and all domestic happiness destroyed! Ah me! Where is all going to end? Uncle Hiram was right when he objected to mother’s taking boarders, and said that it was the *worst* thing she could attempt to do. I wish we had taken his advice. Willingly would I give music lessons or work with my hands for an income, to save mother from the suffering and labor she has now to bear.”

“The worst is,” said Edith, following out her own thoughts rather than replying to her sister, “now that all our money is gone, debt will follow. How is the next quarter’s rent to be paid?”

“A hundred and fifty dollars?”

“Yes. How can we pay that?”

“Oh dear!” sighed Miriam. “What are we to do? How dark everything looks!”

“If there is not some change,” said Edith, “by the close of another six months, everything we have will be sold for debt!”

“Dreadful!” ejaculated Miriam, “dreadful!”

For a long time the sisters conferred together, but no gleam of light arose in their minds. All the future remained shrouded in darkness.

The man named Burton, to whom reference has been made as being particularly attentive to Miriam, was really charmed with the beautiful young girl. But the affection of a man such as he was, comes to its object as a *blight* instead of a blessing. Miriam, while she did not repel his attentions, for his manner towards her was ever polite and respectful, felt, nevertheless, an *instinctive repugnance* towards him, and when she could keep out of his way without seeming to avoid him, she generally did so.

A few evenings after the conversation held with Edith, as given in the last chapter, Burton, in passing from the dining room, said to Miriam —

“Come. I want you to play for me some of those beautiful airs in Don Giovanni.”

“Indeed you must excuse me Mr. Burton,” replied Miriam. “I don’t feel like playing tonight.”

“Can’t excuse you, indeed,” said Burton, smiling pleasantly, and, at the same time, taking Miriam’s hand, which she quickly withdrew from his touch. The contact sent an unpleasant thrill along her nerves. “So come. I must have some music tonight.”

Miriam yielded to the request, although she felt in no mood for touching the piano. After playing several pieces, she lifted her hands from the instrument, and, turning away from it, said —

“There, Mr. Burton, you must really excuse me. I cannot play tonight.”

“Excuse you! Certainly. And for the pleasure you have given me, accept my thanks,” replied Mr. Burton. There was a change in his tone of voice which Miriam did not comprehend. “And now,” he added, in a low voice, bending to her ear, “come and sit down with me on the sofa. I have something particular that I wish to say.”

Miriam did as she was asked, not dreaming of what was in the mind of Burton.

“Miriam,” said he, after a pause, “do not be startled nor surprised at what I am going to say.”

But his words and manner both startled her, and she was about rising, when he took her hand and gently detained her.

“Nay, Miriam,” said he, “you must hear what I wish to speak. From the day I entered this house, you have interested me deeply. Admiration was followed quickly by profound respect; and to this succeeded a warmer sentiment.”

A deep crimson instantly mantled the face of Miriam, and her eye fell to the floor.

“Can you, my dear young lady,” continued Mr. Burton, “reciprocate the feeling I have expressed?”

“Oh, sir! Excuse me!” said Miriam, so soon as she could recover her disordered thoughts. And she made another effort to rise, but was still detained by Burton.

“Stay! stay!” said he. “Hear all that I wish to utter. I am rich — “

But, before he could speak another word, Miriam sprang from the sofa, and, bounding from the room, *flew* rather than walked up the stairs. The instant she entered her own room she closed and locked the door, and then, falling upon the bed, gave vent to a flood of tears. A long time passed before her spirit regained its former composure; and then, when her thought turned towards Mr. Burton, she experienced an *inward shudder*.

Of what had occurred, she breathed not a syllable to Edith when she joined her in the chamber to retire for the night.

“How my heart aches for mother!” sighed Edith, as she came in. “I have been trying to encourage her; but words are of no avail. *Where is all to end?*’ she asks; and I cannot answer the question. Oh dear! What is to become of us? At the rate we are going on now, everything must soon be lost. To think of what we have sacrificed and are still sacrificing, yet all to no purpose. Every comfort is gone. Strangers, who have no sympathy with us, have come into our house; and mother is compelled to bear all manner of *indignities* from people who are in every way her inferiors. Yet, for all, we are *losing* instead of gaining. Ah me! No wonder she is *heart-sick* and *utterly discouraged*. How could it be otherwise?”

Miriam heard and *felt* every word; but she made no answer. Thought, however, was busy, and remained busy long after sleep had brought back to the troubled heart of Edith its even pulsations.

“*I am rich.*” These words of Mr. Burton were constantly recurring to her mind. It was in vain that she turned from the idea presented with them: it grew more and more distinct each moment. Yes, there was a

*way of relief* opened for her mother, of safety for the family, and Miriam saw it plainly, yet shuddered as she looked, and closed her eyes, like one about to leap from a fearful height.

Hour after hour Miriam lay awake, pondering the new aspect which things had assumed, and gazing down the *fearful abyss* into which, in a spirit of self-devotion, she was seeking to find the courage to leap.

"I am rich." Ever and anon these words sounded in her ears. As the wife of Burton, she could at once lift her mother out of her present unhappy situation. Thus, before the hour of midnight came and went, she thought. He had offered her his hand. She might accept the offer, on condition of his settling an income upon her mother.

This the *tempter* whispered in her ears, and she hearkened, in exquisite pain, to the suggestion.

When Edith awoke on the next morning, Miriam slept soundly by her side; but Edith observed that her face was pale and troubled, and that *tears* were on her cheeks. At breakfast time, she did not appear at the table; and when her mother sent to her room she returned for answer that she was not very well. The whole of the day she spent in her chamber, and, during all the time, was struggling against the *instinctive repulsion* felt towards the man who had made her an offer of marriage.

At supper time, she reappeared at the table with a calm, yet sad face. As she was passing from the dining room after tea, Burton came to her side and whispered —

"Can I have a word with you in the parlor, Miriam?"

The young girl neither looked up nor spoke, but moved along by his side, and descended with him to the parlor, where they were alone.

"Miriam," said Burton, as he placed himself by her side on the sofa, "have you thought seriously of what I said last evening? Can you reciprocate the ardent sentiments I expressed?"

"Oh, sir!" returned Miriam, looking up artlessly in his face, "I am too young to listen to words like these."

"You are a *woman*, Miriam," replied Burton, earnestly — "a lovely woman, with a heart overflowing with pure affections. Deeply have you interested my feelings from the first; and now I ask you to be mine. As I was going to say last evening, I am rich, and will surround you with every comfort and elegance that money can obtain. Dearest Miriam, say that you will accept the hand I now offer you."

"My mother will never consent," said the trembling girl, after a long pause.

"Your mother is in trouble. I have long seen that," remarked Mr. Burton, "and have long wanted to advise and befriend her. Put it in my power to do so, and then ask for her what you will."

This was touching the right key, and Burton saw it in a moment.

"Yes, you have said truly," replied Miriam; "my mother is in great trouble. Ah! what would I not do for her relief?"

"Ask for your mother what you will, Miriam," said Burton.

The maiden's eyes were upon the floor, and the rapid heaving of her bosom showed that her thoughts were busy in earnest debate. At length, looking up, she said —

"Will you lift her out of her present embarrassed position, and settle upon her an income sufficient for herself and family?"

"I will," was the prompt answer. "And now, my dear Miriam, name the sum you wish her to receive."

Another long silence followed.

"Ah, sir!" at length said the maiden, "in what a strange, humiliating position am I placed!"

"Do not speak thus, Miriam. I understand all better than words can utter it. Will an income of two thousand dollars a year suffice?"

"It is more than I could ask."

“Enough. The moment you are mine, that sum will be settled on your mother.”

Miriam arose up quickly, as Burton said this, murmuring —

“Let me have a few days for reflection,” and, before he could prevent her, glided from the room.

Two weeks more went by, and the pressure upon Mrs. Darlington was heavier and heavier. Her income was below her table expenses and servant-hire, and all her reserve fund being exhausted, she felt the extremity of her circumstances more than at any time before. To bear longer the extra weight of poor, deserted Mrs. Marion and her two children, was felt to be impossible. With painful reluctance did Mrs. Darlington slowly make up her mind to say to Mrs. Marion that she must seek another home; and for this purpose she one day waited upon her in her room. As tenderly and as delicately as possible did she approach the subject. A word or two only had she said, when Mrs. Marion, with tears upon her face, replied —

“Pardon me that I have so long remained a burden upon you. Had I known where to go, or what to do, I would not have added my weight to the heavy ones you have had to bear. Daily have I lived in hope that my husband would return. But my heart is sick with hope deferred. It is time now that I began the work of self-dependence.”

“Where can you go?” asked Mrs. Darlington.

“I know not,” sadly returned Mrs. Marion. “My only relative is a poor aunt, with scarcely the ability to support herself. But I will see her today. Perhaps she can advise me what to do.”

When Mrs. Marion returned from this visit to her aunt, she looked very sad. Mrs. Darlington was in the passage as she came in; but she passed her without speaking, and hurried up to her chamber. Neither at tea time on that evening nor at breakfast time on the next morning did she appear, though food for herself and children was sent to her room. Deeply did Mrs. Darlington and her daughters suffer on account of the step they were compelled to take, but *stern necessity* left them no alternative. During the day, Mrs. Marion went out again for an hour or two, and when she came back she announced that she would leave on the next day. She looked even sadder than before. Some inquiries as to where she was going were made, but she evaded them. On the day following, a carriage came for her, and she parted with her kind friends, uttering the warmest expressions of gratitude.

“I have turned her from the house!” said Mrs. Darlington, in a tone of *deep regret*, as she closed the door upon the poor creature. “How would I like my own child treated thus?”

For the rest of the day she was so unhappy, owing to this circumstance, that she could scarcely attend to anything.

“Do you know where Mrs. Marion went when she left our house?” said Edith to her mother, about two weeks afterwards. There was a troubled look in Edith’s face as she asked this question.

“No. Where is she?”

“At Blockley.”

“What!”

“In the Alms-house!”

“Edith!”

“It is too true. I have just learned that when she left here, it was to take up her abode among *paupers*. She had no other home.”

Mrs. Darlington clasped her hands together, and was about giving expression to her feelings, when a servant came in and said that Mr. Ellis was in the parlor, and wished to see her immediately.

“Where is Miriam?” asked the brother, in a quick voice, the moment Mrs. Darlington entered the parlor, where he awaited her.

“She’s in her room, I believe. Why do you ask?”

“Are you certain? Go up, Edith, quickly, and see.”

The manner of Mr. Ellis was so excited that Edith did not pause to hear more, but *flew* up stairs. In a few moments she returned, saying that her sister was not there, and that, moreover, on looking into her drawers, she found them nearly empty.

“Then it was her!” exclaimed Mr. Ellis.

“Where is she? Where did you see her?” eagerly asked both mother and sister, their faces becoming as pale as ashes.

“I saw her in a carriage with a notorious *gambler* and *scoundrel* named Burton! There was a trunk on behind, and they were driving towards the wharf. It is ten minutes before the boat starts for New York, and I may save her yet!”

And, with these words, Mr. Ellis turned abruptly away, and hurried from the house. So paralyzed were both Mrs. Darlington and Edith by this dreadful announcement, that neither of them had for a time the power of utterance. Then both, as by a common impulse, arose and went up to the chamber where Miriam slept. Almost the first thing that met the eyes of Mrs. Darlington was a letter, partly concealed by a book on the mantel-piece. It was addressed to her. On breaking the seal, she read —

“My dear, dear Mother: I shall be away from you only a little while; and, when I return, I will come with relief for all your present troubles. Do not blame me, dear mother! What I have done is for *your sake*. It almost broke my heart to see you so pressed down and miserable. And, then, there was no light ahead. Mr. Burton, who has great wealth, offered me his hand. Only on condition of a handsome settlement upon you, would I accept of it. Forgive me that I have acted without consultation. I deemed it best. In a little while, I will be back to throw myself into your arms, and then to lift you out of your many troubles. How purely and tenderly I love you, mother, dear mother! I need not say. It is from this love that I am now acting. Take courage, mother. Be comforted. We shall yet be happy. Farewell, for a little while. In a few days I will be with you again. MIRIAM.”

As Mrs. Darlington read the last sentence of this letter, Henry, her son, who had not been home since he went out at breakfast-time, came hurriedly into the room, and, in an excited manner, said —

“Mother, I need ten dollars!”

The face of the young man was flushed, and his eyes unsteady. It was plain, at a glance, that he had been *drinking*.

Mrs. Darlington looked at him for a moment, and then, before Edith had seen the contents of Miriam’s letter, placed it in his hands.

“What does this mean?” he exclaimed, after running his eyes over it hurriedly. “Miriam gone off with that Burton!”

The letter dropped upon the floor, and Henry clasped his hands together with a gesture of pain.

“Who is Mr. Burton? What do you know of him?” asked Edith.

“I know him to be a man of the *vilest character*, and a *gambler* into the bargain! Rich! Gracious Heaven!”

And the young man struck his hands against his forehead, and glanced wildly from his pale-faced mother to his paler sister.

“And you knew the character of this man, Henry!” said Mrs. Darlington. There was a smiting rebuke in her tone. “You knew him, and did not make the first effort to protect your young, confiding, devoted sister! Henry Darlington, the blood of *her murdered happiness* will never be washed from the skirts of your garments!”

“Mother! mother!” exclaimed the young man, putting up his hands to enforce the deprecation in his voice, “do not speak so, or I will go beside myself! But where is she? When did she go? I will fly in pursuit. It may not yet be too late.”

“Your *Uncle Hiram* saw her in a carriage with Mr. Burton, on their way, as he supposed, to the steamboat landing. He has gone to intercept them, if possible.”

Henry drew his watch from his pocket, and, as he glanced at the time, sank into a chair, murmuring, in a low voice of anguish —

“It is too late!”

When Mr. Ellis left the house of his sister, he called a carriage that happened to be going by, and reached the wharf at Walnut Street in time to spring on board of the steamboat just as the plank was drawn in at the gangway. He then passed along the boat until he came to the ladies’ cabin, which he entered. Almost the first people he saw were Burton and his niece. The eyes of Miriam rested upon him at the same moment, and she drew her veil quickly, hoping that she was not recognized. Hiram Ellis did not hesitate a moment, but, walking up to where Miriam sat, stooped to her ear, and said, in a low, anxious voice —

“Miriam, are you married yet?”

Miriam did not reply.

“Speak, child. Are you married?”

“No,” came in a half audible murmur.

“Thank God! thank God!” fell in low accents from the lips of Mr. Ellis.

“Who are you, sir?” now spoke up Burton, whom surprise had until now kept silent. There was a *fiery gleam* in his eyes.

“The *uncle* of this dear girl, and one who knows you well,” was answered, in a stern voice. “Knows you to be *unworthy* to touch even the hem of her garment!”

A dark scowl lowered upon the face of Burton. But Mr. Ellis returned his looks of anger glance for glance. Miriam was in terror at this unexpected scene, and trembled like a leaf. Instinctively she shrank towards her uncle.

Two or three people, who sat near, were attracted by the excitement visible in the manner of all three, although they heard nothing that was said. Burton saw that they were observed, and, bending towards Mr. Ellis, said —

“This, sir, is no place for a scene. A hundred eyes will soon be upon us.”

“More than one pair of which,” replied Mr. Ellis, promptly, “will recognize in you a notorious *gambler*, who has at least one wife living, if not more!”

As if stung by a serpent, Burton started to his feet and retired from the cabin.

“Oh, uncle! can what you say of this man be true?” asked Miriam, with a blanching face.

“Too true, my dear child! too true! He is one of the *worst* of men. Thank God that you have escaped the *snare of the fowler!*”

“Yes, thank God! thank God!” came trembling from the lips of the maiden.

Mr. Ellis then drew his niece to a part of the cabin where they could converse without being overheard by other passengers on board of the boat. To his inquiry into the reasons for so rash an act, Miriam gave her uncle an undisguised account of her mother’s distressed condition, and touchingly portrayed the anguish of mind which had accompanied her reluctant assent to the offer of Burton.

“And all this great sacrifice was on your mother’s account?” said Mr. Ellis.

“All! all! He agreed to settle upon mother the sum of two thousand dollars a year, if I would become his wife. This would have made the family comfortable.”

“And you most wretched! Better, a thousand times better, have gone down to your grave, Miriam, than become the wife of that scoundrel. But for the providential circumstance of my seeing you in the carriage with him, all would have been lost. Surely, you could not have felt for him the least affection.”

“Oh, uncle! you can never know what a fearful trial I have passed through. Affection! It was, instead, an *intense repugnance*. But, for my mother’s sake, I was prepared to make any sacrifice consistent with honor.”

“Of all others, my dear child,” said Mr. Ellis, with much feeling, “a sacrifice of this kind is the worst. It is full of evil consequences that cannot be enumerated, and scarcely imagined. You had no affection for this man, and yet, in the sight of Heaven, you were going solemnly to vow that you would love and cherish him through life!”

A *shudder* ran through the frame of Miriam, which being perceived by Mr. Ellis, he said —

“Well may you *shudder*, as you stand looking down the *awful abyss* into which you were about plunging! You can see no bottom, and you would have found none. *There is no condition in this life, Miriam, so intensely wretched as that of a pure-minded, true-hearted woman united to a man whom she not only cannot love, but from whom every instinct of her better nature turns with disgust!* And this would have been your condition. Ah me! in what a fearful evil was this error of your mother, in opening a boarding-house, about involving her child! I begged her not to do so. I tried to show her the *folly* of such a step. But she would not hear me. And now she is in great trouble?”

“Oh yes, uncle. All the money she had when she began is spent; and what she now receives from boarders but little more than *half* pays expenses.”

“I knew it would be so. But my word was not regarded. Your mother is no more fitted to keep a boarding-house, than a child ten years old. It takes a woman who has been raised in a different school, who has different habits, and a different character.”

“But what can we do, uncle?” said Miriam.

“What are you willing to do?”

“I am willing to do anything that is right for me to do.”

“All employments, Miriam, are honorable so far as they are *useful*,” said Mr. Ellis, seriously, “though *false pride* tries to make us think differently. And, strangely enough, this false pride drives too many, in the choice of employments, to the hardest, least honorable, and least profitable. Hundreds of women resort to keeping boarders as a means of supporting their families when they might do it more easily, with less exposure and greater certainty, in teaching, if qualified, fine needle-work, or even in the keeping of a store for the sale of useful articles. But pursuits of the latter kind, they reject as too *far below* them, and, in vainly attempting to keep up a certain appearance, exhaust what little means they have. A breaking up of the family, and a separation of its members, follow the error in too many cases.”

Miriam listened to this in silence. Her uncle paused.

“What can I do to aid my mother?” the young girl asked.

“Could you not give music lessons?”

“I am too young, I fear, for that. Too little skilled in the principles of music,” replied Miriam.

“If competent, would you *object* to teach?”

“Oh, no. Most gladly would I enter upon the task, did it promise even a small return. How happy would it make me if I could lighten, by my own labor, the burdens that press so heavily upon our mother!”



“And Edith. How does she feel on this subject?”

“As I do. Willing for anything; ready for any change from our present condition.”

“Take courage, then, my dear child, take courage,” said the uncle, in a cheerful voice. “There is light ahead.”

“Oh, how distressed my mother will be when she finds I am gone!” sighed Miriam, after a brief silence, in which her thoughts reverted to the fact of her absence from home. “When can we get back again?”

“Not before ten o’clock tonight. We must go on as far as Bristol, and then return by the evening line from New York.”

Another deep sigh heaved the troubled bosom of Miriam, as she uttered, in a low voice, speaking to herself —

*“My poor mother! Her heart will be broken!”*

Meanwhile the hours passed with the mother, sister, and brother in the most agonizing suspense. Henry, who had been drawn away into evil company by two young men who boarded in the house, was neglecting his studies, and pressing on towards speedy ruin. To *drinking* and association with the *wicked*, he now added *gambling*. Little did his mother dream of the *perilous ways* his feet were treading. On this occasion he had come in, as has been seen, with a demand for ten dollars. When he left home in the morning, it was in company with the young man named Barling. Instead of his going to the office where he was studying, or his companion to his place of business, they went to a certain tavern in Chestnut Street, where they first drank at the bar.

“Shall we go up into the billiard-room?” said Barling, as they turned from the white marble counter at which they had been drinking.

“I don’t care. Have you time to play a game?” replied Henry.

“Oh, yes. We’re not very busy at the store today.”

So the two young men ascended to the billiard-room, and spent a couple of hours there. Both played very well, and were pretty equally matched.

From the billiard-room, they proceeded to another part of the house, more retired, and there, at the suggestion of Barling, played a game of *cards* for a small stake. Young Darlington was loser at first, but, after a time, regained his losses and made some advance on his fellow-player. Hours passed in playing and drinking; and finally, Darlington, whose good fortune did not continue, parted with every penny.

“Lend me a dollar,” said he as the last game went against him.

The dollar was lent, and the playing renewed. Thus it went on, hour after hour, neither of the young men stopping to *eat* anything, though both *drank* too frequently. At last, Darlington was ten dollars in debt to Barling, who, on being asked for another loan, declined any further advances. Stung by the refusal, Henry said to him, rising as he spoke —

“Do you mean by this that you are afraid I will never return the money?”

“Oh, no,” replied Barling. “But I don’t want to play against you any longer. Your luck is bad.”

“I can beat you,” said Darlington.

“You haven’t done it today certainly,” answered Barling.

“Will you wait here a quarter of an hour?” asked Henry.

“For what?”

“I want to pay you off and begin again. I am going for some money.”

“Yes, I’ll wait,” replied the young man.

“Very well. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

It was for this work and for this purpose that Henry Darlington came to his mother just at the moment the absence of Miriam and her purpose in leaving had been discovered. The effect of the painful news on the young man has already been described. From the time he became aware of the fact that Miriam had gone away with Burton for the purpose of becoming his wife, until ten o'clock at night, he was in an agony of suspense. As the uncle could not be found at the office where he wrote, nor at the house where he boarded, it was concluded that he had reached the boat before its departure, and gone on with the fugitives in the train to New York. Nothing was therefore left for the distressed family but to await his return.

How anxiously passed the hours! At tea time Edith only made her appearance. Henry and his mother remained in the chamber of the latter. As for the young man, he was cast down and distressed beyond measure, vexing his spirit with self-accusations that were but too well founded.

"Oh, mother!" said he, while they were alone, starting up from where he had been sitting with his face buried in his hands — "oh, mother! what *evils* have come through this opening of our house, for strangers to enter! *Miriam*, our sweet, gentle, pure-hearted *Miriam*, has been lured away by one of the worst of men; and! — " the young man checked himself a moment or two, and then continued — "and I have been drawn away from right paths into those that lead to *sure destruction*. Mother, I have been in great danger. Until Barling and Mason came into our family, I was guiltless of any act that could awaken a blush of shame upon my cheek. Oh, that I had never met them!"

"Henry! Henry! what do you mean by this?" exclaimed Mrs. Darlington, in a voice full of anguish.

"I have been standing on the *brink of a dangerous precipice*," replied the young man with more calmness. "But a hand has suddenly drawn me away, and I am trembling at the danger I have escaped. Oh, mother, will you not give up this mode of life? We have none of us been happy. I have never felt as if I had a home since it began. And you — what a *slave* have you been! and how unhappy! Can nothing be done except keeping boarders? Oh, what would I not give for the dear seclusion of a home where no stranger's foot could enter!"

"Some other mode of living *must* be sought, my son," replied Mrs. Darlington. "Added to all the evils attendant on the present mode, is that of great financial loss, instead of a profit. Several hundred dollars have been wasted already, and daily am I going in debt."

"Then, mother, let us change at once," replied the young man. "It would be better to shrink together in a single room, than to continue as we are. I will seek a clerkship in a store and earn what I can to help support the family."

"I can think of nothing now but *Miriam*!" said Mrs. Darlington. "Oh, if she were back again, safe from the *toils* that have been thrown around her, I think I would be the most thankful of mortals! Oh, my child! my child!"

What could Henry say to comfort his mother? Nothing. And he remained silent.

Long after this, Mrs. Darlington, with Henry and Edith, were sitting together in painful suspense. No word had been spoken by either for the space of nearly an hour. The clock struck ten.

"I would give worlds to see my dear, dear child!" murmured Mrs. Darlington.

Just then a carriage drove up to the door and stopped. Henry sprang down the stairs; but neither Edith nor her mother could move from where they sat. As the former opened the street door, *Miriam* stood with her uncle on the threshold. Henry looked at her earnestly and tenderly for an instant, and then, staggering back, leaned against the wall for support.

"Where is your mother?" asked Mr. Ellis.

"In her own room," said Henry, in a voice scarcely audible.

Miriam sprang up the stairs with the fleetness of an antelope, and, in a few moments, was sobbing on her mother's bosom.

"Miriam! Miriam!" said Mrs. Darlington, in a thrilling voice, "do you return the same as when you left?"

"Yes, thank God!" came from the maiden's lips.

"Thank God! thank God!" responded the mother, wildly. "Oh, my child, what a *fearful misery* you have escaped!"

In a few minutes, the mother and sisters were joined by Henry.

"Where is your uncle?" asked Mrs. Darlington.

"He has gone away; but says that he will see you tomorrow."

Over the remainder of that evening, we will here draw a veil.

On the next morning, only Mrs. Darlington met her boarders at the breakfast-table, when she announced to them that she had concluded to close her present business, and seek some new mode of sustaining her family; at the same time, desiring each one to find another home as early as possible.

At the close of the third day after this, Mrs. Darlington sat down to her evening meal with only her children gathered at the table. A subdued and tranquil spirit pervaded each bosom, even though a dark veil was drawn against the future. To a long and troubled excitement there had succeeded a calm. It was good to be once more alone, and they felt this. "Through what a scene of *trial, disorder, and suffering* have we passed!" said Edith. "It seems as if I had just awakened from a dream."

"And such a dream!" sighed Miriam.

"Would that it were but a dream!" said Mrs. Darlington. "But, alas! the *wrecks* that are around us too surely testify the presence of a *devastating storm*."

"The storm has passed away, mother," said Edith; "and we will look for calmer and brighter skies."

"No bright skies for us, I fear, my children," returned the mother, with a deeper tinge of sadness in her voice.

"They are bright this hour, compared to what they were a few days since," said Edith, "and I am sure they will grow brighter. I feel much encouraged. Where the heart is willing, the way is sure to open. Both Miriam and I are willing to do all in our power, and I am sure we can do much. We have ability to *teach* others; and the exercise of that ability will bring a sure reward. I like Uncle Hiram's suggestion very much."

"But the *humiliation* of soliciting scholars," said the mother.

"To do right is never humiliating," quickly replied Edith.

"It is easy to say this, my child; but can you go to Mrs. Lionel, for instance, with whose family we were so intimate, and solicit her to send Emma and Cordelia to the school you propose to open, without a smarting sense of humiliation? I am sure you cannot."

Edith communed with her own thoughts for some moments, and then answered —

"If I gave way to *false pride*, mother, this might be so; but I must overcome what is *false* and *evil*. This is as necessary for my happiness as the external good we seek — nay, far more so. Too many who have moved in the circle where we have been moving for years strangely enough connect an idea of *degradation* with the office of teaching children. But is there on the earth a higher or more important use than instructing the mind and training the heart of young immortals? It has been beautifully and truly said, that 'Earth is the nursery of Heaven.' The teacher, then, is a worker in God's own garden. Is it not so, mother?"

“You think wisely, my child. I grant that your true thoughts may sustain you in the trials to come!” replied Mrs. Darlington.

The door-bell rang as the family were rising from the tea-table. The visitor was Mr. Ellis. He had come to advise with and assist the distressed mother and her children; and his words were listened to with far more respect than was the case a year before. Nine or ten months’ experience in keeping a boarding-house, had corrected many of the false views of Mrs. Darlington, and she was now prepared to make an effort for her family in a different spirit from that exhibited in the beginning. The plan proposed by her brother — a matter-of-fact kind of person — was the taking of a house at a more moderate rent, and opening a school for young children. Many objections and doubts were urged; but he overruled them all, and obtained, in the end, the cordial consent of every member of the family. During the argument which preceded the final decision of the matter, Mrs. Darlington said —

“Suppose the girls should not be able to get scholars?”

“Let them see to this beforehand.”

“Many may promise to send, and afterwards change their minds.”

“Let them try.” replied the brother. “If, at the end of the first, second, and third years, you have not made your expenses, I will supply the deficiency.”

“You!”

“Yes. The fact is, sister, if you will be guided in some respects by my judgment, I will stand by you, and see you safely over every difficulty. Your boarding-house experiment, I did not approve. I saw from the beginning how it would end, and I wished to see the end as quickly as possible. It has come, and I am glad of it; and, still further, thankful that the *disaster* has not been greater. If you only had now the five or six hundred dollars wasted in a vain experiment during the past year, how much the sum might do for you! But we will not sigh over this. As just said, I will stand by you in the new experiment, and see that you do not fall again into embarrassment.”

Henry was present at this interview, but remained silent during the whole time. Since the day of Miriam’s departure with Burton, and safe return, a great change had taken place in the young man. He was like one starting up from sleep on the brink of a fearful precipice, and standing appalled at the danger he had escaped almost by a miracle. The way in which he had begun to walk, he saw to be the way to sure destruction, and his heart shrunk with shame and trembled with dismay.

“Henry,” said the uncle, after an hour’s conversation with his sister and Edith, “I would like to talk with you alone.”

Mrs. Darlington and her daughters left the room.

“Henry,” said Mr. Ellis, as soon as the rest had withdrawn, “you are old enough to do something to help. All the burden ought not to fall on Edith and Miriam.”

“Only show me what I can do, uncle, and I am ready to put my hands to the work,” was Henry’s prompt reply.

“It will be years before you can expect an income from your profession.”

“I know, I know. That is what discourages me.”

“I can get you the place of *clerk* in an insurance office, at a salary of five hundred dollars a year. Will you accept it?”

“Gladly!” The face of the young man brightened as if the sun had shone upon it suddenly.

“You will have several hours each day, in which to continue your law studies, and will get admitted to the bar early enough. Keep your mother and sisters for two or three years, and then they will be in a condition to sustain you until you make a practice in your profession.”

But to this the mother and sisters, when it was mentioned to them, objected. They were not willing to have Henry's professional studies interrupted. That would be a great wrong to him.

"Not a great wrong, but a great good," answered Mr. Ellis. "And I will make this plain to you. Henry, as I learn from yourself, has made some dangerous associations; and some important change is needed to help him break away from them. No sphere of life is so safe for a young man as that which surrounds *profitable industry pursued for an end*. Temptation rarely finds its way within this sphere. Two or three years devoted to the duties of a clerk, with the end of aiding in the support of his mother and sisters, will do more to give a right direction to Henry's character — more to make success in after life certain — than anything else possible now to be done. The office in which I can get him, the situation I speak of, adjoins the one to which I am attached, and I will, therefore, have him mostly under my own eye. In this new school, the ardency of his young feelings will be duly chastened, and his thoughts turned more into elements of usefulness. In a word, sister, it will give him self-dependence, and, in the end, make a man of him."

The force of all this, and more by this suggested, was not only seen, but felt, by Mrs. Darlington; and when she found her son ready to accept the offer made to him, she withdrew all opposition.

Steps preliminary to the contemplated change were immediately taken. First of all, Edith waited upon a number of their old friends, who had young children, and informed them that she was, in connection with her sister, about opening a school. Some were surprised, some pleased, and some indifferent at the announcement; but a goodly number expressed pleasure at the opportunity it afforded them of placing their younger children under the care of teachers in whose *ability* and *character* they had so much confidence. Thus was the way made plain before them.

A few weeks later, and the contemplated change was made. The family removed into a moderate-sized house, at a lower rent, and prepared to test the new mode of obtaining a livelihood. A good portion of their furniture had been sold, besides three gold watches and some valuable jewelry belonging to Mrs. Darlington and her two eldest daughters, in order to make up a sum sufficient to pay off the debt contracted during the last few months of the boarding-house experiment. The real loss sustained by the widow in this experiment, fell little short of a thousand dollars.

"How many scholars have you now?" asked Mrs. Darlington of Edith, two months after the school was opened, as they sat at tea one evening, each member of the family wearing a cheerful face.

"Twenty," replied Edith. "We received two new ones today. Mrs. Wilmot came and entered two of her children; and she said that Mrs. Armond was going to send her Florence as soon as her quarter expired in the school she is now attending."

"How much will you receive from your present number of scholars?" inquired Henry.

"I made the estimate today," returned Edith, "and find that the tuition fees will come to something like a hundred and twenty-five dollars a quarter."

"Five hundred dollars a year," said Henry; "and my five hundred added to that will make a thousand. Can't we live on a thousand dollars, mother?"

"We may, by the closest economy."

"Our school will increase," remarked Edith; "and every increase will add to our income. Oh! it looks so much brighter ahead! and we have so much real comfort in the present! What a *scene of trial* have we passed through!"

"How I ever bore up under it, is more than I can now tell," said Mrs. Darlington, with an involuntary *shudder*. "And the *toil*, and *suffering*, and *danger* through which we have come! I cannot be sufficiently thankful that we are safe from the dreadful ordeal, and with so few *marks of the fire* upon us."

A silence followed this, in which two hearts, at least, were humbled, yet thankful, in their self-communion — the hearts of Henry and Miriam. Through what *perilous ways* had they come! How near had they been to *shipwreck!*

“Poor Mrs. Marion!” said Edith, breaking the silence, at length. “How often I think of her! And the thought brings a feeling of condemnation. Was it right for us to thrust her forth as we did?”

“Can she still be around here?”

“Oh no, no!” spoke up Henry, interrupting his mother. “I forgot to tell you that I met her and her husband on the street today.”

“Are you certain?”

“Oh yes.”

“Did you speak to them?”

“No. They saw me, but instantly averted their faces. Mrs. Marion looked very pale, as if she had been sick.”

“Poor woman! She has had *heart-sickness* enough,” said Mrs. Darlington. “I shall never forgive myself for turning her out of the house. If only I had known where she was going!”

“But we did not know that, mother,” said Edith.

“We knew that she had neither friends nor a home,” replied the mother. “Ah me! *when our own troubles press heavily upon us, we lose our sympathy for others!*”

“It was not so in this case,” remarked Edith. “Deeply did we sympathize with Mrs. Marion. But we could not bear the weight without going under ourselves.”

“I don’t know, I don’t know,” said Mrs. Darlington, half to herself. “We might have kept up with her a little longer. But I am glad from my heart that her husband has come back. If he will be kind to his wife, I will forgive all his indebtedness to me.”

A few weeks following this time, as Miriam sat reading the morning paper, she came upon a brief account of the arrest, in New Orleans, of a “noted gambler,” as it said, named *Burton*, on the charge of *bigamy*. The paper dropped to the floor, and Miriam, with clasped hands and eyes instantly overflowing with tears, looked upward, and murmured her thanks to God.

“*What a narrow escape!*” fell tremblingly from her lips, as she arose and went to her room to hold communion with her own thoughts.

Three years have passed, and what has been the result of the widow’s new experiment? The school prospered from the beginning. The spirit with which Edith and Miriam went to work made success certain. Parents who sent their children were so much pleased with the progress they made, that they spoke of the new school to their friends, and thus gave it a reputation, that, before a year had elapsed, crowded the rooms of the sisters. Mrs. Darlington was a woman who had herself received a superior education. Seeing that the number of scholars increased rapidly, and made the pressure on her daughters too great, she gave a portion of her time each day to the instruction of certain classes, and soon became much interested in the work. From that time she associated herself in the school with Edith and Miriam.

Three years, as we said, have passed, and now the profits on the school are more than sufficient to meet all expenses. Henry has left his clerkship, and is a member of the bar. Of course he has little or no practice — only a few months having elapsed since his admission; but his mother and sisters are fully able to sustain him until he could sustain himself.

“How much better this is, than keeping boarders!” said Edith, as she sat conversing with her mother and uncle about the prospects of the school.

“And how much more *useful and honorable!*” remarked Mr. Ellis. “In the one case, you fed only the body, but now you are dispensing food to the immortal mind. You are moreover *independent* in your own house. When the day’s work is done, you come together as one family, and shut out the intruding world.”

“Yes, it is better, far better,” replied Mrs. Darlington. “Ah, that first mistake of mine was a sad one!”

“Yet out of it has come good,” said Mr. Ellis. “*That painful experience corrected many false views, and gave to all your characters a new and higher impulse. It is through disappointment, trial, and suffering, that we grow wise here; and true wisdom is worth the highest price we are ever called upon to pay for it.*”

Yes, it is so. *Through fiery trials, are we purified.* At times, in our suffering, we feel as if every good thing in us was about being consumed. But this never happens. No good in our *characters* is ever lost in affliction or trouble; and we come out of these states of pain wiser and better than when we entered them, and more fitted and more willing to act usefully our part in the world.