


# The Old Man's Bride

Timothy Shay Arthur, 1853

---

Table of Contents in PDF Bookmarks 

---

## INTRODUCTION

The author of the “Old Man’s Bride” has little to say in regard to the story, beyond the simple declaration, that it has been written with, perhaps, more than common earnestness, and with a directness of purpose that never permitted him to lose sight of the important social lesson he was aiming to teach; a lesson much needed in the present time, and one that cannot be studied too closely. Marriage is too important a contract to be entered into lightly. Those who make it a matter of *bargain and sale*, we care not under what pressure from outward circumstances — commit an error most fatal to their happiness; and inflict a wrong upon themselves, it may be upon others, which nothing can ever fully repair. To set this forth in strong light, is the design of the present volume.

## Chapter 1.

It was on a dark, cold, rainy morning, late in November, that *Helen Lee* came down from her room, with a thin shawl drawn around her shoulders. She had nearly reached the street door, when her steps were arrested by her mother's voice.

"You're not going out on such a morning as this, Helen, surely!" said Mrs. Lee.

"Oh yes" replied the young girl, in cheerful tones. "I must give my lessons, you know."

"But you will not be expected, Helen. And even if you were, a regard for health should keep you at home on a day like this."

"I have on my thick shoes, mother," returned Helen, in the same cheerful tones with which she had at first spoken. "And you know I am warmly clothed. I shall not feel the cold."

Warmly clothed! Her garments were more fitting the month of June! Thick shoes? A wafer might be called thick as well!

"Don't go, Helen," said Mrs. Lee in an almost pleading voice. She was not deceived by her daughter's words.

"I *must* go, mother," returned Helen, now speaking more seriously. "I cannot afford to miss giving a single lesson. But don't feel worried about me. Good by — I will be home by twelve o'clock."

And, saying this, the brave-hearted girl turned quickly away, and went forth on her errand.

As she closed the door, and stepped upon the pavement, the rushing wind swept against her, and penetrated, almost in an instant, her thin garments, causing a chill to run through her slender frame; and almost as quickly did she feel the dampness reach her feet from the wet pavement.

But she shrank not in the cold blast, for the earnest and high purpose that was in her heart, lifted her above the consciousness of physical suffering like this.

Helen Lee, an only child, was now in her twenty-second year. Her parents were in reduced circumstances. But they had once been moderately well off.

There had been no withholding of means, on their part, so far as the education of their child was concerned; and in the *dark days of their adversity* she was repaying them for all their care and affection. Ills of life too rarely come alone. This was the experience of Mr. and Mrs. Lee. Very soon after the former failed in business, his health became so bad that even the smallest mental or bodily exertion was attended with dangerous consequences; and the physician enjoined the most perfect quiet, as absolutely necessary.

In this unhappy extremity, Mrs. Lee found herself almost helpless. What could she do to support the family? In vain did she ask this question. She had no resources in herself.

But now it was, that the seed sown in their daughter's mind, began to germinate. The true affection which Helen had for her parents, led her thoughts to the projection of means whereby to serve them. She had been well educated in most of the branches taught in schools, and her first effort was to endeavor to get a situation as an assistant in some established female academy. But, this she found no easy matter. She next endeavored to get music scholars, and was successful in procuring a few, the instruction of which was immediately commenced. From these, the income was not large; yet it was *something*, and helped to eke out their slender resources, which were fast melting away.

Months went by, and then one sacrifice after another having been made, the family found itself reduced to an entire dependence on Helen's income, which was now swelled by the addition of scholars, to about four hundred dollars a year.

Such was the state of affairs at the time we introduce *Helen Lee* to the reader. Four hundred dollars were not sufficient to meet the expenses of the family. The small house, into which they had moved, was obtained at a rent of one hundred and twenty dollars a year, leaving two hundred and eighty dollars with which to buy food and clothing for three people. Accustomed to a different style of living, Mrs. Lee found it impossible to shrink into the dimensions required by outward circumstances, and was, therefore, unable, by any modes of economy understood by herself, to supply the needs of the family with so small a sum. A gradual accumulation of debt to the baker, butcher, and milkman, was the natural consequence, which debt soon became a source of annoyance and trouble.

If Helen had felt no other motive impelling her to attend to the lessons that were to be given on that stormy morning, the fact of two people having made imperative demands for the settlement of bills, since breakfast time, would have been all sufficient.

The brave-hearted girl had gone but two or three blocks when she was met by a young man, who turned and walked along by her side.

“A very bad morning, this, for you to be out, Helen,” said he, seriously. “Aren’t you afraid of taking cold!”

“Oh, no,” she replied, but not with a great deal of warmth in her manner, and partly averting her face as she spoke.

The young man seemed surprised at the character of his reception by Helen, and bending towards her, looked earnestly upon her countenance. As he did so, she turned still farther from him; while from the quick rising and falling of her bosom, it was evident that her mind was much disturbed.

“Have I *offended* you in anything?” said the young man, after a brief silence.

“No, Henry, I am not offended with you. Why should I be?” Helen spoke in a softer tone, in which tenderness and sadness were both blended. But still she kept her face partly averted.

“Why this change, then Helen?”

“What change!”

“You are cold to me; and reserved beyond anything that I have known since we were acquainted.”

Helen was silent.

“You are unhappy about something, Helen,” said the young man. “Tell me what it is.”

“How can I help feeling unhappy?” was returned with some bitterness of tone. “You know the circumstances of our family.”

“I do, and Heaven knows how gladly I would relieve them. Oh, Helen! how often I have desired riches for your sake.”

“I know the goodness of your heart, Henry,” replied the young girl, with visible emotion. “But your hands are tied. You have claims as sacred and imperative as those which are binding upon me.”

A deep sigh was the young man’s only answer. Yes, there were claims equally binding upon him. He was a widowed mother’s sole dependence.

“Henry,” said Helen, breaking the silence, and speaking in a low, firm voice “we had better be to each other as strangers.”

“Helen!” the young man started, as if he had been stung.

“I am in earnest,” was continued in the same low, steady voice. “Each of us has indulged an idle dream. We must bend to the iron stroke of circumstance.”

“Helen! Helen! Why do you speak thus?” exclaimed her auditor, in a distressed voice. “You cannot mean what you say?”

“I mean it, Henry.”

“Then you do not love me,” was replied in a voice that evidently hurt the young girl, for she answered in still sadder tones.

“You have never looked into my heart. But, no matter. Think so, if you will, Henry. It is better, perhaps, that you should have something to make the trial easier, I shall not have even this to sustain me.”

By this time they were in front of a large house, and Helen, with a hurried “good-by,” sprung up the steps, and after ringing the bell, stepped into the vestibule. Not once did she glance back towards her companion, who stood for a few moments gazing after her, and then walked slowly on.

“We hardly expected you this morning, Miss Lee,” said a lady, who met Helen as she entered one of the parlors, where a young lady was practicing at the piano. “It is wet and cold outside!”

“I don’t mind the weather,” replied Helen, forcing a smile.

“But in weather like this, you should put on warmer clothing,” said the lady seriously. “You are no more thickly clad today, than you were at your last visit, and then the air was as soft as in May. It will not do, my young friend. Health is a thing too valuable to be risked after this fashion. Are your feet wet?”

“Only a little damp,” replied Helen.

“A little may be too much. There’s a fire in the dining room grate. Go up and get dry and warm before you begin Mary’s lesson. She can go on with her practicing in the meantime.”

Helen, who really felt chilled, did as she was directed, and sat before the glowing fire until a genial warmth pervaded her body. Then she gave her music lesson of an hour, and again went forth in the wet and chilling atmosphere.

After a walk of nearly half an hour, by which time her shoes and stockings were saturated with water, Helen came to the residence of a man far past the middle period of life; the only female inmate of whose family, besides domestics, was a young niece whom he was educating. His name was *Bullfinch*. Helen had been engaged to give this niece instruction in French and Spanish, both of which languages she spoke with fluency. As Helen was raising her hand to pull the bell, some sudden thought passing through her mind, caused her to stop, and then slowly to turn away and walk on. For nearly half a block, she moved along slowly, with her eyes cast to the ground. Pausing, at length, she retraced her steps, and again stopping at the house of Mr. Bullfinch, rang the bell. On being admitted, she passed into the parlor.

“Why, Miss Lee! My dear young lady! What has induced you to come out on a day like this?”

Such was the unexpected salutation received by Helen, as she entered the parlors, in one of which a bright fire was burning. Before this fire, sat Mr. Bullfinch and his niece. The former, quite an old man, rose up quickly, and extending his hand took that of his visitor, and pressed it warmly.

“Your hand is like ice,” said he, with much kindness of manner, which was blended with interest and sympathy. “It is wrong for you to risk your health in this way. Look at the girl’s feet. Completely soaked in water! Fanny, dear, take Miss Lee right up into your room, and get her a pair of dry stockings and shoes. She may take her death with a cold.”

“It isn’t at all necessary, Mr. Bullfinch,” returned Helen, blushing with confusion. “I shall not take cold.”

“But I say it is necessary,” persisted the old gentleman. “What strange, inconsistent creatures you young girls are! Go right upstairs with Fanny and get dry stockings.

And he put his hand upon her and almost forced her from the room.

Helen was trembling all over when she entered the chamber of Fanny; so much so, that it attracted the young lady’s attention.

“What ails you?” said the latter. “I do believe you are chilled through, and are shaking in a fever. What could have possessed you to come out this morning? I never thought of expecting you. As for lessons in French, I’m in no humor for that. I gave you up immediately after breakfast, and set myself down to a new novel. Being at a deeply interesting spot of the book, a French lesson is out of the question. So, you may run back home again, and take your comfort for the rest of the day.”

Helen smiled faintly at the animation of the young girl, as she replied —

“I’ve two more engagements yet to meet, before I can go home and take my comfort.”

“You’ll kill yourself,” said Fanny, seriously.

“Oh no. I can bear a good deal.” Helen spoke partly to herself, yet in a voice that was sad in spite of her effort to seem cheerful.

“I’ve sent for a carriage,” said Mr. Bullfinch, when Helen returned again to the parlor; “and as soon as it arrives, you must go directly home. It was very bad for you to come out on such a day.”

“I have two more engagements yet this morning,” replied Helen.

“No matter if you have a dozen,” said the old gentleman, as he gazed earnestly and admiringly upon the fair and innocent face of the young teacher. “You’ve got to go home. Health and life are first to be considered.”

“But, Mr. Bullfinch!”

“I’ll hear no argument!” he interrupted her, smiling, with an air of self-satisfaction as he spoke. “I’ve sent for a carriage, and shall take it upon myself to send you back to your father’s house; or, rather take you back — for I will not trust you to go alone, lest you jump out, and run off to give some of your confounded music lessons.”

“Oh! you needn’t fear that,” quickly replied Helen; her face flushing, and then becoming extremely pale.

“I do fear it,” persisted the old gentleman; “and shall not trust you. You are now *my prisoner*, and I will not lose sight of you until I have returned you safety to the place from which you escaped this morning.”

“Uncle is exceedingly gallant,” said Fanny, laughing. “He’s a gentleman of the old school.”

Just then the carriage which a servant had been sent to order, drove up to the door.

“Don’t think of going home with me, Mr. Bullfinch!” said Helen, in a very earnest way. “It’s very stormy out.”

“Tut, child! I’m not afraid of the weather; if it isn’t too stormy for a delicate young girl — then it certainly is not for a hale, hearty man like myself.”

And as Mr. Bullfinch said this, he glanced involuntarily at his face and figure in a large mirror, opposite to which he was standing.

In spite of all the remonstrances of Helen, the old gentleman persisted in his purpose of accompanying her home, and, to this end, entered the carriage with her. The moment the vehicle moved away, his whole manner changed, and he attempted to take the young girl’s hand. This she at first resisted, but at length permitted him to hold it passively within his grasp.

“My dear Miss Lee,” said Mr. Bullfinch, with all the ardor of a young lover, leaning close to his auditor as he spoke, “I need not repeat to you what I have already said. You fully comprehend my feelings. From the first moment I saw you, I have been deeply interested in all that concerns you. Sympathy has quickly given place to a warmer and purer sentiment. I am older than you are, it is true; but my heart is still young — as young I trust as yours. Have you well considered the proposition I made? Are you ready to become my wife?”

A quick *shudder* ran through the frame of Helen as the last sentence reached her ear; a shudder perceived by Mr. Bullfinch in the hand he was holding.

“At once you will be elevated above your present condition — above the necessity for this wearing toil, which is sapping the very foundations of your life!”

But there was no reply from the old man’s statue-like companion, whose face was still in part averted; nor did a word pass her lips, until the carriage drew up before the humble abode of her parents. Then, as she was about stepping out — he remaining behind, and shrinking back, as if to avoid observation — she said, in a husky whisper —

“Tomorrow you shall hear from me.” A moment or two more, and Helen Lee had passed from his sight.

## Chapter 2.

“You’re home early,” said Mrs. Lee, as her daughter came in. “I did not expect you back for an hour or so yet. Are you not well?”

“O yes, I am very well,” returned Helen, with forced animation. “But, Fanny Milnor’s uncle said I ought not to have ventured out on a day like this, and actually *made* me come home. He wouldn’t let me give Fanny a lesson.”

“It was very thoughtful in him, certainly,” said Mrs. Lee, “very thoughtful. Didn’t I hear a carriage stop at the door just now?”

The color deepened in Helen’s face as her mother asked this question. Mrs. Lee perceived the change, and her interest and curiosity were immediately excited. As her daughter did not answer her last inquiry, she repeated —

“Didn’t I hear a carriage stop at the door?”

“I presume so,” was replied. “Did you come home in it?”

Mrs. Lee’s eyes were now intently fixed on her daughter’s countenance. “I did,” said Helen.

“Indeed! why is that? Whose carriage was it?”

“Mr. Bullfinch sent for a carriage, and insisted on my coming home in it,” returned Helen, with as much self-possession as she could assume.

“That was kind in him — very kind, indeed! But why should he do this? Were you sick at his house?”

“Oh, no, mother, I was not sick, but my feet were very wet, and he seemed to think I was in danger of taking cold. It was kind in him, certainly.”

“It is not often that such kindness is received from total strangers.”

“Certainly it is not. But Mr. Bullfinch is a very kind-hearted man, I believe.”

Saying this, Helen passed by her mother, and went up to her own room, there to ponder the new relations which things had assumed, and to endeavor to see, in a clear light, what it was her duty to do. If she had been standing alone in the world, there would have been no doubt in her mind. Her heart would have pointed the way in which to go. But others were deeply interested in the decisions she might make concerning the future. Others were dependent, even for food and clothing, upon her personal efforts. Was it not her duty to regard them, even to the sacrifice of herself? This was the momentous question she was called upon to decide.

Towards Henry Wellford, the best and tenderest affections of her heart had gone forth; and she knew that he loved her with a true devotion. She had not only read it in his eyes, but listened to the ardent confession as it fell from his lips. Formally they were not betrothed. It had been enough that they loved, and were happiest in each other’s society. But, Henry Wellford was poor. He was simply a clerk, on a small salary, and had a widowed mother to support. Helen was also poor — a humble teacher, whose income was insufficient to meet the needs of those dependent upon her.

Thus it stood, when a *rich old man* saw the gentle, brave-hearted girl — and, won, by her graces of mind and body, conceived the idea of making her his wife. In his love, if the sentiment may be called by such a name — there was nothing with which her heart could possibly reciprocate. He was a bachelor of nearly sixty; a confirmed sensualist, whose very sphere tended to suffocate the heart of a young, pure-minded girl like Helen. For a *true* marital union to take place between them, was impossible; and that Helen felt the instant he approached her with the idea of marriage.

But, as her thoughts dwelt upon the hopeless indigence of her parents, and her own inability to meet their common needs — while the deep affection she felt, made her heart yearn towards them — she looked away from herself; or, rather, calculated the extent of the *sacrifice* it was her duty to make, in order to secure them from need and privation. Mr. Bullfinch had wealth — she had only to consent to become his wife, and a portion of that wealth came under her control. At once she could lift her parents above their humble, suffering condition, and place every comfort within their reach.

Against all this, her heart rebelled. But she laid her hand upon her heart, and called its shrinking from the ordeal proposed, mere *selfishness*. She kept close to her mental vision, the feeble form and pale face of her father, and said, almost aloud, in the effort to give weight to the forced conclusions of her mind —

“It is *my duty* to make his last days peaceful at any sacrifice.”

And, as the words trembled in husky and unnatural tones on the air, a low chilling shudder ran along her nerves.

Then stood distinctly before her, the form of Adam Bullfinch, and the shudder ran deeper. She shut her eyes; but he was before her still. She bent her head forward upon the table by which she was seated, and drew her hands over her face. It availed not.

“God help me!” she at last exclaimed, in a despairing voice, and starting up, flung herself, with a low moan of anguish, upon her bed, where she lay for a long time, as still as death.

There was something in the manner of her daughter, when she came in, which Mrs. Lee did not understand; and she was still wondering to herself what it could mean, when it occurred to her that Helen remained an unusual time in her room.

“I’m afraid she’s sick. It was wrong for her to go out on a day like this,” said she, and, acting from a newly awakened concern, she went up to her daughter’s chamber.

Mrs. Lee came in so softly, that Helen did not observe her entrance. She was still lying upon the bed, her face deeply buried in a pillow.

“Daughter,” said Mrs. Lee; and she laid her hand on Helen as she spoke.

Now first conscious of her mother’s presence, the suffering girl did not move, nor reply, but commenced a strong effort to regain the control of her feelings. If she looked up, she knew that her face would betray her intense suffering; and that she wished above all things to conceal.

“Helen! Daughter! Are you sick?”

And Mrs. Lee shook her gently. The girl murmured something that did not reach, with any meaning, the ears of her mother; turned herself partly, yet still concealing her face; thus seeking to gain time, while she strove, with almost desperate energy, to regain her self-possession.

“Are you sick, Helen!” repeated Mrs. Lee, anxiously.

“Not sick, mother,” said Helen, now venturing to speak, yet still keeping her face averted. Her voice was low, yet steady. What an effort it cost to give it steadiness!

“What ails you then, dear? Something is the matter.”

Helen now ventured to look towards her mother. As hard as she had striven, she had not been able to call back the blood to her cheeks, and their deathly paleness frightened Mrs. Lee.

“Oh, my child!” she exclaimed, “you are ill — very ill! What is it? Speak, dear.”

A feeble smile — how it mocked the shadows which lay, like a pall, on her heart — flitted over the countenance of Helen.

“I am not very well,” she answered, “but I shall be better soon.” And, rising from the bed, she bathed her face, and re-arranged her hair and dress; seeking, thus, to produce a mental as well as physical reaction, which would conceal, in a measure, the fearful trial through which she was passing. She did not, however, satisfy Mrs. Lee, whose anxieties were fairly aroused. But, how little dreamed the mother, of what was passing in the bosom of her child! To efforts in support of the family beyond her strength, and to cold taken from exposure that morning — she attributed the utterly exhausted condition in which she had found her. Had she known the truth, it may be doubted whether she were woman enough at heart, to sympathize fully with the deeply tried and unhappy girl.

“I feel a great deal better now,” said Helen, turning upon her mother a countenance less pale than before, and lit up with a warmer smile. “I will come down soon. Don’t say anything to father about my not being well. It will only make him feel more anxious, and he is troubled enough as it is.”

“I wouldn’t come down at all, this morning,” replied Mrs. Lee. “Take as much rest, and be quiet as possible today. You will feel all the better tomorrow.”

It did not take much urging on the part of Mrs. Lee to induce Helen to remain, at least for some hours, in the seclusion of her own room. A dress to alter would employ her hands, without bodily fatigue, she



said. After repeating her injunction that Helen would remain quiet, at least for the morning, the mother retired, and the unhappy girl was once more alone with her distracting thoughts.

During the time that Mrs. Lee lingered in her chamber, Helen had taken from a closet the dress she proposed to alter, and was sitting with it in her lap, scissors in hand, when her mother retired. How quick a change passed over her the moment she was again alone! Her hands sunk down nerveless, the feeble flush an effort had called to her pale cheeks, faded; her body swayed weakly forward, while her dark lashes drooped until the inward-looking orbs beneath were scarcely visible. How very still she sat for a long, long time! Oh, the fearful trial through which she was passing! With what panting eagerness did she search for a way of escape from the *terrible fate* impending over her!

Had the peace of her own heart alone been at stake, the trial would have been a lighter one for Helen Lee — the decision more easily made. But, she loved Henry Wellford truly, deeply, and unselfishly. All the purest and tenderest affections of her maiden heart had gone out towards him; and to make him happy, would have been the joy of her life. His looks, his tones, and his whole manner, during the last brief interview, were photographed in her mind; and the question of her duty to *him*, came up and arrayed itself against the questions of duty to her *parents*. On the side of her lover, her heart sustained the argument; yet filial self-devotion stood firmly up, and with the spirit of a martyr, held its painful position.

“Have I a right thus to dispose of myself? Is it not sinful? Will God smile on such a *sacrifice*?”

These words were spoken aloud, as, in the anguish of strong trial, she was searching for a way of escape. Their very utterance brought light into the mind, and imparted a measure of strength.

“No — no,” she added, as the light shone more clearly, “I dare not do this. God will not smile on the deed. He asks not so fearful a sacrifice of any heart. Death! Death!” she added in a quicker voice, “Oh! it would be a sweet alternative — a welcome visitant.”

Her pulses beat with a freer motion. A ray of hope had dawned. Alas! how quickly did it fade away into darkness! There came, at this moment to her ears, the sound of a strange voice from below. It was the voice of a man, and its sudden loudness startled her. Going quickly to the door of her room, she partly opened it, and stood listening. The words that came to her ears left her in no doubt. The voice was strange, but it demanded the payment of *money*.

“It is impossible today,” she heard her mother answer in a distressed voice.

“Impossible, sir! we have not the money,” said her father, in tones feeble and tremulous.

“And *when* will you have it, please?” the man asked, with rude impertinence.

To hear her father spoken to thus — her father, so feeble in health, that his physician had warned him against the danger of any excitement — her father, so tenderly loved, so highly honored and regarded — was more than Helen could bear. At once the balance trembling, so nicely equipoised in her mind, yielded. Filial self-devotion gained the preponderance. Springing, with a sudden impulse down the stairs, she confronted the rude collector, and said, with a decision of manner that surprised her parents —

“You shall be paid *tomorrow*, sir. Call at this hour, and the money shall be ready.”

The man, almost as much surprised as Mr. and Mrs. Lee, looked upon the flushed and indignant face of Helen for a moment or two, and then recovering himself, said —

“A promise is all very well, my young lady, but I have had, in the last two or three months, more than enough of these. What surety have I that your promise will be kept?”

“I have just said,” replied Helen, drawing her form up proudly, “that you would be paid tomorrow — let that suffice.”

“The bill is sixty-four dollars,” said the man, still lingering.

“If it were a thousand, I have told you that it would be paid tomorrow,” returned Helen, sharply, while her eyes, which were fixed upon the man, flashed with a fiery indignation, that caused him to retreat a pace or two involuntarily.

Never before had the parents of Helen seen her so moved; and they looked upon her with a feeling of wonder. She had made her decision, and now, a feeling akin to desperation was in her heart.

“Tomorrow at this hour?” said the collector, now speaking in a respectful voice, and slightly bowing with a deferential air.

“I have said it,” was briefly answered.

A moment or two the man's eyes fixed curiously upon the maiden's excited face, and then left the room. As he did so, Helen turned and fled to her chamber. There Mrs. Lee soon followed her, but she found the door locked. Half an hour later, she came again, but the lock was still turned; and it was so at the end of an hour.

"Helen!" she now called; for anxiety had overcome the instinctive reluctance at first felt to intrude herself forcibly upon her child. There was no answer, nor any movement heard within.

"Helen, dear! Helen!" repeated Mrs. Lee.

Still, all remained silent.

She called again, louder than before, and rattled the lock. There came, now, a feeble, half-smothered reply, as of one awaking from sleep.

"Helen, dear?"

"Yes, mother, I will be down in a little while," answered Helen.

Mrs. Lee retired, but with a troubled, restless feeling in her heart. What did Helen mean by the promise to pay so large a sum on the following day? Over and over a hundred times had she asked herself that question, but no satisfactory reply came. Where was she to get sixty-four dollars? All her resources she knew perfectly well. There would not be a single quarter-bill due for a month. It was in vain, that she continued to puzzle her thoughts. No satisfactory answer came.

At dinner time Helen joined her parents. She was very pale, and the expression of her countenance strangely altered. But she was more cheerful in manner than she had been for many days. She made no reference to the exciting scene of the morning, until her father said, with much concern of manner —

"I'm afraid, Helen, that you were wrong to promise that payment tomorrow. Where are you to get so much money? The collector will certainly be here at the time, and, if disappointed, will be more uncivil than he was today, and more inclined to give us trouble."

Helen smiled, as she answered in a composed voice —

"I did not promise lightly, father. I knew where I could get the money by simply asking for it."

"Where, my child?" inquired Mr. Lee, looking at his daughter very earnestly.

"More than one of those by whom I am engaged to give lessons, would, I know, advance, if applied to, what I need."

"I am not so sure of that, Helen," said Mr. Lee. "Most people object to advances of money. Indeed, with some, such an application might end in the loss of scholars. People don't like to be *annoyed* in this way."

"I know at least one person who will neither object nor be annoyed," said Helen, in a low, yet firm voice. But she did not look into her father's face as she said this.

"Of whom do you speak?" inquired Mr. Lee.

"Of Mr. Bullfinch," replied Helen. Her voice was still lower, yet it did not in the least falter. Its firmness was preserved by its depression.

"Of Mr. Bullfinch!" Mr. Lee spoke with some surprise, yet with no manifestation of pleasure. "Why will you apply to him?"

"He has always treated me with great kindness," said Helen.

"He was certainly very kind to you today," remarked Mrs. Lee, "and we are greatly indebted to him for sending you home, instead of letting you go from house to house, in wet garments, for the purpose of giving your lessons. I have often heard him spoken of as a good-hearted man."

"Good-hearted only where some *selfish end* is to be gained," said Mr. Lee. "That is my estimation of his character."

Helen bent her head to conceal her face, the expression of which she feared was passing from her control.

"Have you not looked at him through the glass of prejudice?" asked Mrs. Lee. "I believe not," was firmly answered. "I believe not," repeated Mr. Lee. After a pause, he added: "I met Mr. Bullfinch occasionally, while in business, but never was much drawn towards him. The sphere of every man's quality of mind is around him, as certainly as the quality of a rose is diffused in the atmosphere, and

perceived by its odor, and this quality may be, and is perceived by all who came in contact with him. In Mr. Bullfinch, I always had a repulsive perception of something extremely *sensual* and *selfish*.”

“It is hardly safe,” replied Mrs. Lee, “to decide upon a man’s character on such slight and altogether intangible evidence.”

“Yet,” said Mr. Lee, “it is always safe to let such evidence place you upon your guard; and, believe me, that opportunities for personal observation will, in most cases, confirm the *instinctive repugnance*.”

Helen listened to this brief conversation with an eagerness that would have betrayed itself, had not the observation of her parents been, for the time, withdrawn from her. How fully did her own perceptions of Mr. Bullfinch’s quality, accord with those of her father! The thought of becoming his wife, when it was distinctly presented, caused her heart to cease, for the moment, its beating, and produced a feeling of suffocation.

The convention between her father and mother was continued for some time, but she took no part in it whatever. To conceal, as far as possible, the painful state of mind from which she was suffering, Helen tried to partake of food. A few mouthfuls were received and swallowed — though producing on the palate no sensation of taste — and then the forced effort was abandoned. As soon as she could, with propriety, leave the table, she did so, and retiring once more to her chamber, abandoned her feelings to any current in which they might be inclined to flow. She did not again join her parents until tea-time, when she met them with a cheerfulness which they did not look for and which she had scarcely hoped to assume. The father, however, saw much below the *false exterior*. He saw that Helen was *acting a part*; but *what* the part, and *why* assumed — he could not clearly understand.

## Chapter 3.

The day closed as it had begun, cold and stormy, adding its *gloom* to the already too sad hearts of Mr. Lee and his family. Soon after tea, Helen bade her parents *good night*, and retired to her own room. Here she strove, once more, to collect her thoughts, to ponder the way before her, and to search again for the *means of escape*. Her promises to Mr. Bullfinch, and to the collector, had narrowed the chances against her. The one was to have an answer to his suit in the morning, and the other to receive the large sum of sixty-four dollars. Unless the answer to Mr. Bullfinch were favorable, she saw no way by which the demand of the latter could be satisfied.

During the wretched night that followed, the unhappy girl remained awake, now pondering, with shrinking heart, the *fearful abyss* down which she was about to plunge, and now eagerly renewing the search for a path leading to a place of safety. It was long after midnight, when she, at length, found temporary relief in sleep. When she awoke, the sun was shining brightly into her window. The *storm* had passed away, and the face of nature smiled again. Alas! her heart gave back no answering smile. Dark and portentous clouds were yet above and around it.

The time for a *decision* had come. Before mid-day, the unfeeling collector would be there, and his demand must be satisfied. Was there no other resource for the poor girl but Mr. Bullfinch? In ten families she gave music lessons, and six out of the ten families were wealthy. Among these, was there no true woman to whom she could go and find wise counsel and aid in her great extremity? Was there not a single heart of sympathy among all these? Was there no one able and willing to stand forth and forbid the *fearful sacrifice* about to be offered up? We know not. But, doubtless, there was. Yet, even where there exists a humane regard for others, how rarely does it allow itself to become fully interested! How quick are we to turn away with indifference, when the needy and the seeker present themselves!

As the time of *decision* drew nearer and nearer, a feeling of desperation came over the maiden's heart.

"This must not be!" she said, with a sudden energy of feeling, as she stood thoughtful in her chamber, prepared, at a much earlier hour than usual, to go out. "This must not be! I will make one effort, at least, to gain time, even if all is lost in the end. Mrs. Barker has been very kind; has always shown great interest in me. To her I am indebted for many scholars. She cannot, she will not refuse to help me in this great extremity. I will go to her, and tell her everything."

With this resolution, Helen left her home that morning.

Mrs. Barker was a widow, with two daughters. She had a large income, and was regarded in society as a humane and liberal woman. In many of the public charities, she took an active part, and contributed of her money freely to their support. Her style of living was expensive, but not beyond what her ample means would justify. In her fellowship with others, no matter what their condition, she was generally kind and lady-like. In part, this flowed from natural goodness, and in part from a desire to be thought well of by everyone.

Mrs. Barker sat reading. The book was one of imaginary pictures; yet the groupings were from characters in real life. Against the wrong now visible, the heart of the reader was indignant; and now she sympathized deeply with *suffering innocence*. Those who knew of this suffering, and yet relieved it not, and those who remained in ignorance thereof, from lack of thought — she blamed alike. "I would not have done so!" she said to herself, with a feeling of self-complacent virtue. As she thus thought within herself, a servant came to say that Miss Lee was in the parlor, and would like to speak with her.

"This is not the day for your Spanish lesson, Clara?" said Mrs. Barker, speaking in a slight tone of *surprise* to her eldest daughter, a young lady in her eighteenth year.

"I don't take my Spanish lesson until tomorrow," replied Clara.

"I wonder what *she* can want? Perhaps she has mistaken the day. You had better go down and see her, Clara."

Clara went down to the parlor, while Mrs. Barker re-opened her book. She was in the midst of a scene that drew strongly on her *sympathies*, and the *interruption* had not been altogether agreeable. She had just

caught up the broken thread of the narrative, when Clara returned, and said that it was her mother, whom Helen wished to see.

“What does she want?” asked Mrs. Barker, in a disappointed tone.

“I don’t know, mother. She didn’t say.”

“Well, I suppose I *must* see her.” And Mrs. Barker, with a reluctance that she did not seek to conceal, laid aside her book, and arose to leave the room.

“I don’t think she is very well,” remarked Clara. “I never saw her look so badly. There isn’t a dab of color in her cheeks.”

Scarcely heeding this, Mrs. Barker withdrew, and descended to the parlors, in one of which she found the young teacher.

“Well, Helen,” she said, rather coldly, as Miss Lee arose on her entrance.

This coldness was perceived by the poor girl, and it dashed the hope of support she had permitted herself to cherish. She stood, her eyes upon the floor, and without the courage to make known tin purpose of her visit.

“Sit down, Helen,” said Mrs. Barker, noticing her embarrassment. Helen sunk back into the chair from which she had just arisen. She had not yet uttered a single word.

“You wished to see me, Clara said.” If there had been, in the voice of Mrs. Barker, anything of *sympathy*, Helen would, in the abandonment of a heart appalled by the approach of utter ruin, have thrown herself upon her, and cried, “Oh! save me! save me!” As it was, she hurriedly sought to compose herself, and, as soon as she was composed enough to speak, said —

“I am not very well, Mrs. Barker, and if you do not object, would like to omit Clara’s lesson tomorrow.”

“Object, Helen!” replied Mrs. Barker, with manifest surprise, at so singular an application. “Why should I object? Sickness is a sufficient excuse under all circumstances.”

Helen cast her eyes to the floor, and remained silent for a few moments, in hurried conference with herself, as to whether she should make known the *real object* of her visit. But the repulsive sphere of the lady was so strong, that she felt her case to be hopeless.

“Good morning, ma’am,” she said, as she arose up, and slightly inclined her body.

There was something in the tones of Helen’s voice, and in her manner, as she said this, and then turned away, and almost ran from the house — that Mrs. Barker did not, for a long time, forget. Scarcely had the jar of the closing door ceased to vibrate in the ears of the lady, before she repented of her coldness, and wished that she had received the visitor in a different spirit. But it was now too late to remedy the evil.

## Chapter 4.

“I shall not have even this to sustain me.” These last words of Helen Lee, as she hurriedly turned from Henry Wellford, at their last interview, kept ringing in the young man’s ears; and as he pondered them, he saw, but too clearly, the painful struggle through which her heart was passing.

“Her love for me is still the same!” This was the just conclusion to which he arrived, so soon as the agitated waters of his spirit had time to run clear. “Why, then, does she propose that we be to each other hereafter as strangers? Oh, poverty! You are a curse!”

In this bitter exclamation, Wellford answered his own question. Still, the answer was far from being entirely satisfactory. There was a future for them both. He had ability, industry and energy; and he was willing to suffer, to work and to wait. Could Helen not do the same? Why this sudden, unwomanly impatience? The more he thought, the more difficult to be found seemed the *clue* to Helen’s strange conduct. But for the words, “I shall not have even this to sustain me,” he would have fallen back on the usual explanation in such cases — estranged affection. He could not do so now. He knew that she loved him. What, then could it mean? Why did she wish to break the cord *entwining* both of their hearts, and feeling a mutual pulsation? As he continued to think, suggestion after suggestion was presented; and among them one near the truth; yet that was quickest repelled, as both *monstrous* and *impossible*.

“No — no — no!” he said, with an inward shudder, “she would never make that sacrifice. There is about her too much of the true woman for that.”

And he cast the thought from his mind.

“What can it mean?” Again and again the distressed young man asked himself this question. But his thoughts gave back no reliable answer. If Helen were alone in the world, how clear would have been the way before him! He would have gone to her, and asked her at once to become the sunshine of his humble dwelling. Or, if Providence had blessed him with abundance, he would have opened wide the doors of home and heart, to take in the beloved ones for whom she was toiling with such an earnest self-devotion. Alas for him! neither of these conditions existed. She was not alone — and he was poor. His slender income barely sufficed, under a system of the closest economy, to procure for himself and mother the meager necessities and a few of the comforts of life. To have proposed anything to Helen, under such circumstances, would have been a mockery — and so the young man felt it.

The gloomy day had waned towards evening, and Wellford was about bringing his uncheered labors to a close, when the merchant in whose service he was, drew him aside and said —

“Henry, I have for some time wished to see you getting a higher salary. Your ability is worth more than you receive. And yet, in my business, only a certain sum can be paid for assistance. That sum is now paid, and cannot be increased. If there was a vacancy above you, I would at once promote you to that vacancy. But, as you know, none exists, or is likely for some time to exist. I cannot fill your place to my satisfaction as well as it is now filled; that I know too well. Still, I am not so selfish as to wish to keep you when an opportunity for rising is offered. There is such an opportunity now, Henry. Do you wish to embrace it?”

The young man’s face flushed, and he became instantly excited. Is it any wonder? With as much composure as he could force himself to assume, he replied —

“I need very much an increase of salary, Mr. Vincent; but have no wish to leave your service.”

“Your duty to yourself is first, Henry,” said the merchant. “I can fill your place without trouble; though not so well as it is now filled, I am assured; but an opportunity like the present may not offer to you again for years.”

“What is the situation to which you refer?” asked Wellford, by no means concealing the eager interest he felt.

“You are aware, I suppose, that Mr. Burton, one of Lane & Latta’s book-keepers, has been in very poor health for a long time. Well, I heard this morning that his physician had positively ordered him to leave the desk, and travel for at least two or three months. His place will, in consequence, be vacant.”

“Not permanently?”

“Yes. His physician says that he must, when his strength is sufficiently restored, seek other and more active employment. He has, accordingly, given notice to Lane & Latta that he will be obliged to give up his situation finally.”

“He receives a thousand dollars a year?”

“Yes, that is the salary.”

“Do you think it possible for me to obtain the place?” said Wellford, holding his breath as he waited for a reply.

“I do,” was the assured answer.

“There will be many applicants, so soon as it is known that Burton intends to leave.”

“We must be in advance of these applications,” said Mr. Vincent, in a manner that showed his entire confidence in the result.

“I have no acquaintance with Messrs. Lane & Latta,” said Wellford.

“But I have,” replied his kind employer, “and my word with them will go a great way. In fact, Henry, to set your mind at rest, I have already spoken to them, and the place is yours if you are willing to accept it.”

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed Wellford, suddenly grasping the hand of Mr. Vincent, and exhibiting strong emotion, “I will never, never forget this! You don’t know the good you have done!”

Mr. Vincent smiled, and said something kind, about the just *reward of faithful service*, adding —

Ever be as true to the interests of your future employers as you have been to mine, Henry — and you will never lack for friends to promote your interests. *Ability* and *honesty* are ever in demand; and the higher the *ability* — the more ample will be the *reward*.”

Though clouds and darkness were in the sky when Henry Wellford turned his steps homeward on that evening, the face of nature was not gloomy to him. Light seemed shining all around him, and he walked with a step so elastic, that he scarcely seemed to leave his weight upon the earth. After telling his mother of his good fortune, and taking, hurriedly, his evening meal, for which he found little appetite, he dressed himself to go out, determined at once to call upon Helen Lee, tell her of his good fortune, and offer his hand in marriage.

A few times only had Wellford visited Helen at her father’s house. He did not belong to a family which, from any cause — whether from wealth, or from literary or professional standing — had gained a prominent place in the community. His father, a poor but honest man, had lived and died in obscurity, though honoring the position he held, and transmitting his *virtues* to a son better educated than he had been, and, therefore, better fitted for that higher place in society he was destined to gain. His visits to Helen were not smiled upon by Mrs. Lee, whose mind had become fixed in the hope of social elevation through the marriage of her accomplished child. How this was to be brought about, she did not exactly know. Extreme poverty had excluded Helen from that social contact formerly enjoyed; and now, she only entered the mansions of wealth as a humble and unregarded teacher.

We are forced to say, that the marked interest shown by Mr. Bullfinch, in sending Helen home in a carriage through the storm, had affected her with a pleasure beyond what the simple act of kindness might legitimately have awakened. Almost truant to themselves, her thoughts played with pictures drawn against the future, in which Helen, as the wife of Mr. Bullfinch, formed a prominent figure. Half ashamed of herself, the mother would sweep an obliterating hand across these pictures; but, before she was aware of it, fancy would sketch them again, while she looked on dreamily, yet with a pleased emotion. And thus it was, at times, through all that day of agony to her nearly distracted child.

Thus it was at an early hour in the evening, when there came a knock at the door. Mrs. Lee opened it, and there stood Henry Wellford.

“Is Helen at home?” he inquired.

Mrs. Lee held the door partly open; and, without asking the young man to walk in, replied —

“She is in; but not well. She has retired to her room.”

Wellford expressed regret, and asked if she were seriously indisposed. Mrs. Lee answered, indifferently, that she had taken some cold.

“If not too much indisposed to come down, I would like particularly to see her this evening. Will you say this to her, Mrs. Lee?”

“I cannot permit her to be disturbed,” was coldly replied.

Still the young man lingered, while the damp air swept against Mrs. Lee’s thinly clad person, causing her to close the door farther; almost, in fact, shutting it in Wellford’s face.

“Good evening, sir,” she said, finally; and in the next moment, the generous lover of her daughter, who had come to lay his hand and opening fortune at her disposal — stood alone, repulsed rudely, on the outer threshold.

Indignant pride held, for a time, the mastery over Wellford. At first, he permitted himself to believe that Mrs. Lee had repulsed him in accordance with her daughter’s wishes. But his cooler judgment made a more correct decision. This decision was strengthened by the fact that Mrs. Lee had treated him with exceeding formality on each of his previous visits.

At the house of a mutual friend, he had most frequently met Helen, and an intimacy, almost as unreserved as that between a brother and sister, had grown up between them. Freely had they spoken to each other of what was personal to themselves, their hopes, fears, trials and privations; and, without a formal avowal of love on the one side, or a looking for it in the other, they had come to regard the uncertain future as a way they were to tread side by side; and that thought was the pleasantest of all the thoughts which flowed through their minds. No wonder that the sudden interruption of this thought, produced turbulence in the minds of both.

From the residence of Helen, Wellford returned immediately home. Half the night was spent in pondering the *new aspect* which things had so suddenly assumed. In the morning, with a calmer mind, he was able to look at the whole subject.

“I must and will see her.” This he said as he left home. He had frequently met Helen, on her way, at an early hour in the morning, to give lessons, and thus secured the brief pleasure of seeing her face, and listening to a voice the tones of which grew daily more musical to his ears. Now, he would see her with a more defined and higher purpose.



## Chapter 5.

“*All lost! all lost!*” sobbed the wretched girl, as she hastily retired from the dwelling of Mrs. Barker, and took her way, she knew not, in the bewildered state of her mind, where. Utterly hopeless as she now was, fluttering like a *charmed bird* almost in the very jaws of the *serpent* — she yet held back from the final, dreadful alternative which loomed up the more awfully the nearer it approached.

With her eyes cast upon the ground, Helen moved along with hurried steps, the agitation of her mind giving fleetness to her motions, and continued to walk for nearly an hour; when, in some measure, recovering her external consciousness, she looked around in surprise to find that she was in a strange part of the city, and remote from her home. Retracing, now, her steps, and, at the same time, forcing her thoughts to a consideration of what was next to be done in the limited space of time left to her, she took her way towards the dwelling of Mr. Bullfinch, attracted thitherward by an influence which she did not seek to resist, and yet she was not fully determined to go there, without another effort to escape the *doom* which now seemed almost inevitable. She had reached the neighborhood in which Mr. Bullfinch resided, and was only a short distance from his house, when, lifting her eyes, she saw, a few paces in advance of her, one, whom of all others, she least wished to encounter — her lover, Henry Wellford. And yet, how the sight of him caused her heart to bound, and the blood to rush in hot currents through all her veins! How earnestly did her woman’s nature take up instantly the plea for him — and chide the cold, mercenary, calculating spirit to whose influence she was giving herself up body and soul.

Wellford was not approaching Helen, and did not, therefore, see her at the moment she recognized him. How little she knew, of what was in his thought! How little she dreamed that he was then in search of her; and that he was both *able* and *ready* to save her from a fate more dreaded than death.

Checking her pace, Helen lingered along, in order that Wellford might get sufficiently in advance, to remove the danger of observation. A crowd of passengers hiding him, for the space of a minute from her sight, she found herself suddenly within a few feet of him. He had paused on a corner, and was gazing, first along one street and then another, his eyes alternately ranging both pavements. At the moment he was partly turned from her; starting quickly forward, she almost brushed him with her garments, passing and hurrying on. For the time, her heart ceased to beat, and her breath was suspended.

“*Helen! Helen!*”

In an instant after, his voice reached her. Why, why did she not obey the quick impulse of her heart, and pause as that voice, to her ears so full of music, fell upon her ears? Why did she not turn for one more look at the face so beautiful to her eyes? Had she done so, she would have been saved. Alas! that it was otherwise. For an instant only, were her steps arrested; then, like a frightened deer, she fled forward, and quickly disappeared from the sight of Wellford, who did not attempt to follow, but, with a heavy heart, took his way to his place of business. Fortune had begun to smile upon him; but, how cold the smile now, that was so warm and bright when its beams first shone!

Panting from excitement and hurry, Helen next found herself at the door of Mr. Bullfinch, and, with a kind of blind desperation, ascended the marble steps, and placed her hand upon the bell to ring for admission. But, before the summons was given, the native delicacy of her pure heart aroused itself against the unmaidenly act, and, still irresolute, she was about turning away, when the door opened, and Adam Bullfinch met her face to face.

“My dear girl!” he exclaimed, seizing her hand, and drawing her with a force she had neither the strength of mind or body to resist, into the hall, closed the door, and led her, now all passive, to her *destiny*, into the elegant parlors where she was so soon to preside as mistress!

“My dear Miss Lee!” He still held tightly the hand of the poor young girl. “I have been looking for you this hour. My heart told me you would be here” — he laid a hand gracefully on his bosom, “and more than this, told me that my love for you was no rejected passion.”

The words were like *heavy strokes* on the heart of Helen. She caught her breath, panted, grew faint, and would have sunk to the floor, had not the arm of Mr. Bullfinch, who saw, from her extreme paleness, that she was suddenly ill, been drawn around her. Her head drooped upon his shoulder. Not voluntary, oh

no! She had become half unconscious. Slightly alarmed, the old man bore her to a sofa, and commenced bathing her face with cold water. He called for no attendance. In fact, his niece was not at home. In expectation of the coming of Helen, he had induced her, on some pretense, to go out on a visit for the morning.

Suspended consciousness was but temporary. Helen soon recovered, and arose from the reclining position in which she had been placed. Mr. Bullfinch was holding her hand; but now she forcibly withdrew it from his grasp, a movement that caused a shadow to flit over his animated face.

“You have come to a decision, Helen — or you would not be here,” said Mr. Bullfinch, endeavoring to recover the hand of his victim, but not succeeding in the effort. “Do not keep me long in suspense; and before you speak, remember how much is at stake.”

This was unwisely said. Helen did remember how much was at stake, and it caused her to startle in sudden terror, at thought of the *horrible pit* opening at her feet, to rise quickly from the sofa, and spring towards the door, saying, as she did so, in an *agonized* voice, “O spare me! In mercy, spare me! I am too weak for this. Kill me — but ask me not to encounter so fearful an ordeal.”

Pausing, before she had reached the door, the wretched creature pressed, convulsively, her open hands over her face. A gush of tears gave vent to the stifling oppression of her bosom, and sinking into a chair, she sobbed for a time violently.

There came not to the *selfish heart* of Adam Bullfinch, as he looked upon the quivering form of the poor girl, now within his *toils* — the smallest motion of relenting. In fear of losing the object of his sensual regard, his passion grew into an intenser flame; and, with the skill of the mere sensual man, he composed and controlled his exterior with most consummate art.

Until Helen had grown calm, Mr. Bullfinch did not speak again; but he was by her side, caressing a hand she had relinquished; not without resistance. With the utmost tenderness, he now spoke to her; but he did not urge his suit as at first.

“It is a *hard life* that you are leading, Helen,” he said, with such well assumed sympathy, that her heart was deceived, and it leaned, hearkening, and with a softened response, to the tone.

“A life,” he continued, “which is obscuring and destroying one fitted to adorn the highest station.”

This was not *adroitly* said. It appealed to her *pride* — and that was nearly extinct. Perceiving the lack of response, Mr. Bullfinch, after a moment’s silence, resumed —

“You have seemed in trouble for some time, Helen. Will you not confide in me as a true friend? There is, believe me, none living who would do more to secure your happiness than I. Come! Make me your confidant. Tell me freely of your anxieties, your cares, and your fears — and if there is power in a human arm, they shall be relieved. Love ever seeks to bless its object.”

“I am in trouble,” said Helen, with the calmness that always follows the subsiding of strong emotion.

“Speak, then. Let it have full utterance. There is no human ear that will listen so earnestly as mine.”

Helen, with partly averted face, remained silent.

“Your father is in poor health,” said Mr. Bullfinch slowly. “His physician has forbidden all exertion, bodily, as well as mental. On *your feeble arm* rests the heavy burden of sustaining the family. But your arm is too weak. Will you not let me hold it up? I have manly strength. Let me put it forth in your behalf. Believe me, that the privilege of doing so, will be the dearest pleasure of my life.”

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed Helen, turning suddenly towards him, “you can aid me if you will.”

A smile of encouragement lit up the old man’s countenance.

“Speak!” said he. “Speak freely, my dear Miss Lee. To your wish I can only give a quick response.”

“My father needs, “

“Go on,” said Mr. Bullfinch, seeing that Helen paused with hesitation.

“Our circumstances are very limited, as you must know, Mr. Bullfinch.” Helen was now entirely self-possessed, and as she spoke, she looked calmly into the old man’s face. “My earnings are our sole income. But these have, hitherto, proved insufficient for our needs, as small as we have endeavored to make them. Several *debts* have accumulated, and the people to whom they are owed, have become impatient. Yesterday, a man to whom sixty-four dollars is owed, demanded its payment. He was angry and insolent. Distressed beyond measure at my parents’ distress, I desperately promised the payment of

the money this morning. If you can *lend* me that sum, or advance it on Fanny's lessons, the act will be one for which my heart will bless you."

"Is it so bad with you, my poor child?" said Mr. Bullfinch with great tenderness. "Why did you not tell me of this before? Have I not ever sought your friendship and confidence? Have I not always manifested the warmest interest in your welfare?"

He was now holding her hand tightly, and looking fondly into her face.

"You have but to say the word," he continued, "and all I have is yours. One little word, spoken now, will lift you, and those you love with such deep self-devotion, above the shadow of earthly evil. I hold your promise to an *answer to my suit* this morning. Are you ready for the response? Think, dear Helen, how much you have to gain for you and yours: and think of the exquisite happiness you will confer upon one, who, until he looked upon your sweet young face, never saw the angel of his being. Say that you will be mine, Helen, and the words will unlock for you the iron doors of wealth. A day need not pass, before the joy of seeing your parents forever raised above the pressure of need and care, may be yours. Can you look at them, and hesitate?"

Helen was silent for a few moments. But, her choice was made. That appeal in favor of her *parents*, had decided the question. But, there was still a matter of *justice* that she wished to settle — justice to her infatuated suitor. If he took her, he must take her for what she was. She could yield him a *hand* — but she had no *love* to give. So far as she was concerned, the struggle was now over. The throbbings of her heart had ceased. Upon its surface, had passed an icy calm; and if there was agitation beneath, it was far too deep for visible manifestation.

"Mr. Bullfinch," said she, her fine person seeming to grow taller under his admiring gaze, while a change passed over her pale countenance which excited a moment's surprise. How beautiful it was, in its pale, cold, elevated dignity! "Mr. Bullfinch, you have asked of me this *hand*, in marriage. It is yours."

She extended the hand, which he seized eagerly, and covered with kisses. Not a flush passed over her face. There was no softness in her cold, bright eyes. An observer would have noticed on her finely arched lips, a slight curving motion, and he would not have mistaken its meaning.

"But" — she added, as the ardent lover lifted his eyes again to her countenance, "that is *all* which is in my power to give you. The *heart*, Mr. Bullfinch, is not so easy of disposal."

"I will trust for that," said he fondly. "Love begets love. I have no fears. Give me the *hand* — and I will not despair of the *heart*. That will come in its own good time. Oh! you have made me the happiest man alive, today!"

And with ardor he kissed her brow, cheek, and lips. Helen did not shrink from the salutation; but her reception of it was statue-like. Her eyes now rested upon a mantle clock, and she saw that it was near the hour when the money she had promised must be paid.

"Let me repeat, Mr. Bullfinch," and Helen spoke with solemnity, "that my *heart* cannot go with my *hand* — and you must never hope to possess it. I will be to you dutiful and faithful. All in my power, will be done for your happiness. But, *love* goes not at the mere bidding. I do not *love* you — I can *never* love you. The difference between us is too great. And now, sir, if, after this declaration, you wish to withdraw the offer you have made, still hold yourself at full liberty to do so."

"Not for a moment will I think of it," replied Mr. Bullfinch, with ardor, "no, not for a moment! Angel!" And again seizing her hand, he pressed it to his lips. "Be it the highest aim of my life to secure your happiness."

From Helen there was not the slightest response. Nothing could have been colder or more passive, than her reception of this little piece of fond enthusiasm on the part of her lover.

"Ah, my Helen," he resumed, "you do not yet know me fully. You cannot realize how entirely my life will be devoted to your happiness, and to that of your parents."

"For the sake of my *parents*," said Helen, in a voice from which all feeling was removed, "I would do and sacrifice everything I dare sacrifice. And now, that you refer to them, let us understand each other in regard to the future. My home — must be their home."

"I desire nothing else," was quickly answered.

"They must be at once raised above care and need; in fact, above all anxiety concerning the future."

“It shall be as you wish, Helen. You cannot be happy without seeing them happy; and your happiness I desire above all things. Such filial devotion I honor. And, moreover, it is a pledge to me of a pleasant future. So devoted, self-sacrificing a daughter, cannot but make a good and loving wife. Heaven bless you, sweet one!”

“And now, Mr. Bullfinch,” said Helen, rising — he kept tightly hold of her hand, “I can remain no longer. The time has already come when my promise to the *collector* must be fulfilled. I wish to keep my word with him, as well as save my parents from the pain his insolence will occasion.”

Mr. Bullfinch released her hand, and going to a *secretary* which stood in one of the parlors, unlooked it, and, taking a purse, filled it with pieces of gold.

“Here, sweet one,” said he, placing the money in her hands, and kissing her white cheek as he did so, “go home quickly and set the hearts of your parents at rest.

“They may thank Heaven for so good a child — as I do for the destiny of so good a wife.”

Helen received the purse, and, without looking at it, thrust it in her pocket.

“You will call as usual, tomorrow,” said Mr. Bullfinch. “We will then talk about the future.”

“Call here, Mr. Bullfinch!” returned Helen, in a tone of surprise.

“Yes — no — why — I didn’t think” — stammered the old man, “oh no; of course not. It wouldn’t be just delicate for you to visit here now. But when shall I see you again?”

“That will be according to your own good pleasure,” replied Helen, coldly.

“I will visit you this evening.”

Helen inclined her head in acquiescence, and then, with a “Good day, sir,” turned and passed hurriedly from the room. At the door, Mr. Bullfinch, who had followed with light footsteps, was by her side. He had lifted his hat from the rack, in passing, and was now ready to accompany her in her walk home. Against this, she offered a feeble remonstrance; but gallantry and inclination were not to be overcome.

Of the many, tender things said by Mr. Bullfinch, and unheard by Helen — we will make no record. They parted at her father’s door, Helen not even looking into his face, nor, in fact, giving to his stealthy pressure of her hand, or low spoken, “I will see you tonight,” the smallest response.

## Chapter 6.

It was eleven o'clock, the time at which the collector was to receive his money, and yet, Helen, who had been out nearly three hours, had not yet returned. For more than an hour, Mr. and Mrs. Lee sat awaiting, momentarily, the return of their daughter. Thought was busy; but their feelings too much oppressed for conversation. And so both remained silent.

Eleven o'clock had come, and still Helen was absent, and now each listened for a knock at the door in a state of nervous anxiety. Both startled, at length, at a loud, impatient rap. Mrs. Lee answered the summons, and there stood the hard-featured collector.

"Well, madam?" spoke the man, with a rude familiarity of tone, "I'm here."

"Will you walk in, sir?" said Mrs. Lee.

He entered, and was conducted to the small sitting-room.

"Good day." Mr. Lee arose, and handed him a chair.

"Well, sir," said the collector, as he sat down, "I'm here at the hour. Is the money which you promised me, ready?"

"I didn't promise you any money," replied Mr. Lee, so much fretted at the man's *insolent manner* that he could not control his feelings.

"Didn't promise to pay me sixty-four dollars at eleven o'clock, today!"

"No, sir."

"Ah, what did you promise then?" asked the collector, in a voice still more insolent and annoying.

"I promised nothing. I had no present means of paying your bill, and I told you so."

"Too bad! I ought to have known you were merely *trifling* with me to gain time. But, it will be worse for you; mark my word for it! Promised nothing, ha? I wonder why I'm here at precisely eleven o'clock?"

"My *daughter* promised, under excitement of feeling, wrongly promised — to pay your bill this morning," said Mr. Lee, speaking more firmly, and in that manly, reactive tone which always subdues vulgar impertinence. "That she is making an effort to keep her promise, her absence for some hours is to me sufficient evidence. We look for her return every moment. Whether she will bring the money or not, is more than I can tell. I almost hope she will not. You can await her return, or leave the house, as best suits your fancy. In either case, it is of little consequence to me. Your *rudeness*, I might better call it *insolence*, has made me quite indifferent. As to the *consequences* which you have so freely threatened, I stand in no fear."

The collector did not anticipate a reaction like this. It came upon him so suddenly, that he cowered under the fixed gaze of Mr. Lee, who, at once conscious of the power he had gained, kept his eye upon him as he would have done upon a *wild beast*. He was still holding him thus at bay, when the street door was heard to open; then light feet came along the passage.

"Remember, sir!" said Mr. Lee, sternly, "not an improper word or tone to my child, under any circumstances. If she has not the money for you, it is no fault of hers."

Helen entered the room as he was speaking. So altered was the expression of her face, that her parents hardly recognized her.

"My child!" exclaimed Mr. Lee, "what has happened?"

She did not answer him, but turning to the collector, said, somewhat sternly, "Here, as I expected."

As she spoke, she drew from her pocket the purse received from Mr. Bullfinch, adding, as she commenced counting out the pieces of gold,

"I have kept my promise. Your money is ready for you."

Not another word was spoken, until the collector, after receiving the amount of his bill, and passing a receipt, uttered a subdued *good day*. He was rougher and ruder as a collector, than as a man. To a great extent, his business had *encrusted* his feelings with a hard and jagged exterior. For the first time, in many weeks, he was touched by what he saw; and, as a thought of his own daughter came into his mind, accompanied with a question as to the price Helen Lee might have paid for gold, a low chill ran along his nerves.

“I didn’t think it was quite so hard with them,” he said to himself, as he left the house. “Money is often gained at too great a cost, and has been in this instance, I greatly fear. Ah, me! This is a hard business. I sometimes wish I were well out of it. A man must have *iron nerves*, and a *heart like steel*.”

Thus musing to himself, he passed on his way. The inner softness — was hidden by the rough, jagged, acquired exterior.

“My dear child!” said Mr. Lee, catching hold of his daughter, the moment they were freed from the collector’s presence, and speaking in a voice of deep concern, “What have you done? Where did you get all this money? Speak, my child! Oh, speak!”

Helen had dreaded this meeting with her parents. While hurrying homeward, her thoughts had gone forward, picturing the interview which had now come, and she had sought to prepare herself for it, and to fix a rule of action. Alas! of how little avail do we often find preparation for a great heart-trial! It proved of no avail now. For a brief time only, did Helen struggle against overmastering emotion; then with a low, bursting sob, she let her head fall upon his bosom. How still she lay there; all the strength of mind she could rally, striving for external composure. This was at length gained; when raising herself up, and laying her hands upon her father’s temples, she pressed backwards his fast whitening locks, and said, with a loving smile, which seemed like sun-light suddenly breaking on her pale face —

“You shall know all, soon.”

“All *what*, dear Helen? All what? I am frightened. What have you done? Why concealment now? Speak out, my child; speak now, if you love me.”

“Have you seen Mr. Bullfinch?” asked Mrs. Lee. She had her own thoughts, and she wished to verify them as quickly as possible.

“I have,” replied Helen; the smile she had assumed, fading from her countenance.

“And you received this money from him?” continued Mrs. Lee.

“Yes, mother. To his kindness, are we indebted for timely relief!”

“Helen!” Mr. Lee held his daughter from him, and gazed into her face with a look of intense anguish. “Helen!” and he spoke with solemnity, “At what *price*, my child? At what *price*?”

“You will know that soon, dear father!” replied Helen, now regaining her self-possession. “Mr. Bullfinch will be here tonight.”

She moved away a pace or two, saying that she had *lessons* to give during the morning.

“I cannot remain in doubt, Helen,” said Mr. Lee; “suspense like this is more than I am able to bear.”

“You shall know all in good time. But do not urge me now,” returned Helen; “for I can speak no further.”

“Has Mr. Bullfinch asked you to *marry* him?” said Mr. Lee, advancing towards Helen, and grasping the hand a few moments before withdrawn from him. She tried to escape, but her father kept a firm hold.

“Speak, dear. Say *yes* or *no*. I ask but a word.” A breathless silence followed. Then, with averted eyes, she answered, “Yes.”

“I feared as much,” returned Mr. Lee, sadly. “I feared as much. Oh!” clasping his hands together and looking upwards, “has it come to this — to this!”

“And you have given *consent*?” he added, a few moments after. But Helen, instead of answering, went hastily from the room. A little while afterwards she came down from her chamber, and without saying anything to her parents, or even turning her face toward them as she passed through the room where they were sitting, left the house to give her lessons in music as usual.

“Dreadful! dreadful! dreadful! That it should come to this!” almost sobbed Mr. Lee.

“Come to what?” asked Mrs. Lee, who had, from the first, been far less moved than her husband.

Mr. Lee gazed at his wife, in undisguised wonder, for a short time.

“Come to what, did you say?” he at length asked in a half rebuking voice.

“What dreadful consequence do you fear? Mr. Bullfinch’s proposals are, of course, perfectly honorable.”

“Honorable! Good Heavens — this from you!”

Mr. Lee was strongly excited. His wife looked rebuked; but it was more from his manner, than from any clear comprehension of the error she had committed in seeming to favor the marriage of her daughter

with Mr. Bullfinch; for both understood clearly enough, that this question was now to come up for consideration and decision. After a few moments, Mrs. Lee said —

“If Mr. Bullfinch comes to us with honorable proposals for the hand of our daughter, and she is willing to accept his offer, what will you do!”

“Never, while I live, will I consent to so *unnatural a sacrifice*,” replied Mr. Lee, warmly.

“But — if Helen has already accepted his offer. What then?”

“She has not done so.”

“She has taken from him, a gift of money,” said Mrs. Lee.

“No — no — no,” replied the father. “Not a *gift*, but a *loan*. Only an advance on the tuition of his niece. It can be nothing more.”

“She had a purse full of gold. It could not have contained less than two or three hundred dollars. Mr. Lee groaned aloud.

“My own impression is,” said Mrs. Lee, and the tone in which she spoke did not indicate much distress of mind arising from the conviction, “that Helen has consented to become the wife of Mr. Bullfinch. If this is so, opposition on our part will be unavailing. As something inevitable, let us look at it with at least a degree of calmness.”

“Calmness! Oh, Helen!” said Mr. Lee, reproachfully.

“Mr. Bullfinch, besides having large wealth, is a man in good social standing,” resumed his wife. “The only *drawback* is his *age*. But, if Helen can accept this, she may be happier with him than as the wife of a younger man, less favorably circumstanced, and with an undisciplined character. Think, Mr. Lee, from what a condition of toil, anxiety, and suffering — she will at once be lifted.”

“Into *gilded misery*,” said Mr. Lee, bitterly, “and there is none misery as hard to endure as that. Do not talk so to me. From your lips I did not expect to hear words like these. *Would you sell your child’s happiness for gold?*”

“Happiness!” returned Mrs. Lee, in a voice of equal bitterness. “For her, poor child! there has been little for a year or two past, that we might call by that name. Any change has in it a promise of good; and this one, it seems to me, of great good.”

“Good in *such* a life-companionship! Oh, Helen! Poverty has strangely altered you, or you never would speak thus. Never — never! Poor child! How sadly her white face told the story of her *heart-despair* in prospect of so fearful a sacrifice. But it cannot — it must not take place.”

“Do you know anything bad of Mr. Bullfinch?” asked Mrs. Lee.

“Oh, Helen! Helen! You will drive me distracted. Are you not a woman and a mother? How, then, can you favor such a marriage? In it, there cannot be a single element of conjunction — nothing of a *true* marriage. The union will be merely external, and attended by a sphere of *repulsion*, on one side at least, which will be the fruitful of *untold misery*. An old man, sixty years of age, and a confirmed sensualist at that — and a pure young girl, in the bloom of innocent maidenhood! The angels would weep at such a union! I could smile, and thank God for the *death* of my child, as I stood by her newly-made grave — if death had snatched her from a fate like this!”

“You look only at the *shadows* in this, picture, Mr. Lee,” said his wife, in answer. “It has strong *lights*, as well as deep *shadows*. They must be allowed to blend under our vision, if we would truly appreciate the picture. Look for a moment at our present condition. Could anything be more hopeless? Could there be for our child a rougher way in life, or a stormier sky?”

“Rougher and stormier, a thousand fold!” replied Mr. Lee. “A very paradise are her present surroundings — to what they will be, if so sad a fate as to become the wife of old Adam Bullfinch awaits her!”

“I cannot see and feel as you do,” said Mrs. Lee. “Helen must act her own good pleasure in the matter. If she thinks she can be happy as the cherished wife of Mr. Bullfinch, why should we object? Above the thousand ills that are now sapping the very foundations of her life, she will be at once removed. It is no use to talk about it. I cannot see anything so dreadful in such a marriage. Old men are proverbially *tender* and *indulgent* to their *young wives*. Better be an *old man’s darling*, you know — than a *young man’s slave*.”

“Spare me, Helen! Spare me!” exclaimed Mr. Lee, putting up his hands, while an expression of *blended pain and disgust* darkened his countenance. “From another, I might have borne this with some patience; but, from you — it is terrible. Never, never, shall my voice sanction so fearful an outrage of all that is pure, and good, and holy!”

Under this strong reaction, Mrs. Lee remained silent. Yet did she not feel the force of her husband’s objection. Already her imagination was picturing in warm colors — the proud, social elevation that her daughter would attain. To be lifted at once from extreme poverty — to ease, wealth, and abundance, was a change which she could not contemplate, without a feeling of lively satisfaction. For, looking at this consummation, so devoutly to be wished, she could not see the *painful steps* by which it must be attained. So *dazzled* were her eyes by the glitter of the *golden exterior* — that the *ghastly skeleton*, shrouded in gorgeous attire, was wholly invisible.

Thus were the parents of Helen Lee affected, when the prospect of so great a change in the future life of their daughter was suddenly presented. Mrs. Lee had been a *woman of the world* — we will not say a *heartless* woman of the world, for that would be giving rather too unfavorable an impression of her character. She had a higher appreciation of external things, than of internal things; for she comprehended them much more clearly. A condition in life, and its power to give happiness, she could understand; but she was not able clearly to realize how a *state of mind* could make or mar everything. They were all very unhappy in consequence of their *poverty*, and the *evils* it entailed upon them; and it seemed to her that wealth would restore the sunshine. The prospect of this, presented so unexpectedly, dazzled her.

Not so her husband. He had ever been unworldly. A man of pure, deep feeling, he understood how much of life’s happiness depends upon *states of mind*. Helen’s true character — its purity, delicacy, and womanly sensibility — he understood much better than his wife; and he at once comprehended, and with a distinctness that made him shudder — the *consequences* which would inevitably follow such a marriage as was proposed.



## Chapter 7.

The more Mrs. Barker thought about her treatment of Helen, the more uncomfortable her feelings became. Her icy reception had, evidently, prevented the young teacher from making known some request, upon the granting of which, much, it might be, depended.

“I will see her when she comes in the morning to give Clara a lesson, and learn in what way I can serve her.”

With this resolution, she endeavored to dismiss the subject from her mind, but, for some reason, it would keep returning, and troubling her.

“I will try and get her a few more scholars,” said Mrs. Barker, as she still thought of Helen. “Her parents are entirely dependent upon her, and I hardly think her income can, at present, be equal to their needs. *Struggling industry* needs encouragement and aid at times — as well as absolute indigence. I did think of letting Madame Arcot give Maggy lessons in French in order to secure the true Paris pronunciation; but Helen’s French is very pure, and I am not certain that I would really gain anything for my daughter, by giving her a foreign instructor. There are many things about Madame Arcot which I do not like, and, besides, she has not always borne the most unblemished character. I think, upon the whole, I will give Miss Lee another scholar. And there are Jane and Florence Ewing. Only yesterday I was talking with their mother about Madame Arcot, and she was hesitating on the question of employing her as their teacher. A word from me will, I know, determine the question in her mind. If I say that I prefer Miss Lee, and am about engaging her to give lessons to Maggy, she will decide to do the same. This will give Helen three more scholars, and make a very important addition to her income.”

Her mind now thoroughly interested, Mrs. Barker called upon Mrs. Ewing, who was very ready to act from her suggestion. And not only so; becoming, through Mrs. Barker, interested in Helen, she promised to get up an interest for her among her friends, and did not, in the least, doubt her ability to secure for her some two or three *more* scholars.

Greatly relieved in mind, Mrs. Barker waited for the appearance of Helen, on the next morning. The hour had nearly arrived, at which she usually came, when she remembered that the lesson had been deferred on account of indisposition.

“That was but an excuse to cover some more important request, which my lack of kindness prevented her from making. She will probably come as usual.”

And in this, she did not err; for, even as she thought so, Helen entered. There was so marked a change in her appearance, that Mrs. Barker could hardly help an *exclamation* when she came in. Marks of *intense mental pain* were strongly visible on her pale face, and there was a tightness about her lips, that no longer arched gracefully. Her eyes, usually drooping and modest, looked strangely large, and in them was something that Mrs. Barker could not comprehend, and from which she shrunk instinctively.

“You have been sick, Miss Lee,” said she. “Why did you come out this morning?”

“I am quite well,” Helen replied; but without referring to the fact that she had asked the privilege of omitting a lesson, on the plea of indisposition. There was a coldness in the tones of her voice, unmarked before, and a distance in her manner which repelled.

“When you called yesterday,” said Mrs. Barker, now forcing herself to approach a subject that was uppermost in her mind, “my attention was so much occupied with a book I was reading, that my manner must have seemed to you repulsive. It did not occur to me, until after you had gone away, that, in all probability, your visit to me was of more importance than merely to ask permission to omit a lesson on account of indisposition. In fear that my absent manner may have repulsed you, I have been troubled ever since. Am I right in this conclusion?”

“You are,” replied Helen, with cold dignity.

“I regret, exceedingly, that you did not make known your wishes,” said Mrs. Barker, with earnest kindness. “Believe me, that if I can serve you in anything, I will do so with sincere pleasure. What did you wish to ask of me?”

“The advance of a sum of money on Clara’s lessons, in order to pay a small debt, for which my poor father was sorely troubled. In a moment of desperation, on hearing him abused and threatened, I promised that the money would be paid by a certain hour. I had no present means to do this, and, in a moment after the promise was made, felt that I had done wrong. But my word was given — and must be kept. I knew where I could get the needed assistance, but, above all things, wished to avoid that application; and so, ma’am, I came to you, believing that you had not only the *heart* to feel for me, but the willing *hand* to help me in my extremity.”

“So I have, Miss Lee! So I have,” replied Mrs. Barker warmly. “How much money do you need? Oh! why did you not make free to tell me this, yesterday?”

And, while she said this, Mrs. Barker drew her purse from her pocket.

“I was choked when I saw you, and could not utter a word of what was in my mind,” replied Helen, with a distance and reserve that Mrs. Barker partly attributed to an offended state of mind.

“It is not too late to aid you,” resumed Mrs. Barker. “Tell me how much you need, and be assured, Miss Lee, that I will supply the sum with heart-felt pleasure.”

“It is too late,” said Helen in a tone that came like a freezing breath on the feelings of her auditor.

“Too late! Say not so, Miss Lee. Have you obtained the needed sum?”

“I have.”

“From *whom* did you get it?”

There was a pause of some moments. Then Helen answered, in a voice that betrayed but little feeling, “From Mr. Bullfinch.”

“Adam Bullfinch!” exclaimed Mrs. Barker, in surprise. “Why, of all others, did you apply to *him*?”

“Because I knew that I had but to make known my need, and it would be supplied.”

“And it was?”

“It was.”

“Did he advance the sum you needed on the lessons you were giving his niece?” asked Mrs. Barker, her eyes fixed earnestly on the face of Helen.

“I asked the money as an advance,” was coldly replied.

“How much did you require?”

“The debt was sixty-four dollars.”

“I will lend you the money, or double the sum, if required. Here it is,” and she unclasped her purse. “Take, it, and at once cancel this obligation to Mr. Bullfinch. Was there none but him to whom you could go for such a favor?”

“None,” sighed Helen, as she pushed back the hand of Mrs. Barker. “I thank you for your kindness; but it is too late, now.”

“Too late! Miss Lee. Too late! How am I to understand this?” said Mrs. Barker, in visible concern.

“Time will explain all,” murmured Helen, speaking in part to herself. Then, rising, she said, “It is late, and I have two more lessons to give this morning. Is Clara in her room?”

“A moment longer,” said Mrs. Barker, laying her hand upon the arm of her auditor. “I have some good news for you. Mrs. Ewing told me, yesterday, that she was going to engage you to give French lessons to her two daughters. And I have another scholar for you, besides.”

The expression that came into the face of Helen, when Mrs. Barker said this, was one of *pain* rather than pleasure. It was evident that she was disturbed by a quick emotion, to subdue which cost her a strong effort. In a little while, she replied, calmly —

“Two days ago, this would have been pleasant news to me; but it is of no particular interest, now. I have concluded to make no more engagements, and to give up all my present scholars, at the end of their respective quarters.

“Why, Helen! What does this mean!” exclaimed Mrs. Barker. “What are you going to do?”

Helen had no voice to reply. There was a genuine interest in the lady’s manner, which touched her feelings; the more so, as the full conviction now dawned clearly on her mind, that, if she had but spoken out freely what was in her heart, on the day before — she might have been saved from the dreadful

alternative she had so reluctantly taken. It was too late, now. A little while she sat silent, striving to regain her icy self-possession. Failing in this, she left the room abruptly.

At all this, Mrs. Barker was greatly troubled; and sorely did she repent of her *fatal indifference* on the day before.

“When golden opportunities are lost,” she sighed, “how rarely do they return to us again! We only have the *present* in which to do good; and if the present is neglected, it passes away from us forever. Poor child! What has she done? What can be the meaning of her suddenly formed resolution, to give up her present occupation? Surely, she cannot have consented to become — ”

She left the sentence unfinished in her own mind. She could not, even in thought, utter the word that was suggested.

“I must see her again before she leaves the house,” said Mrs. Barker, after musing for some minutes. “It will not do to let a matter so serious as this, take its course. Unhappy girl! What must she not have suffered! I never saw anyone so changed in as brief a space of time.”

The longer she continued to dwell upon the subject, the more earnest did she become. Impatiently she waited the hour to expire during which Helen was engaged with her daughter. More and more clearly did her mind begin to see how she might *extricate* the poor girl from the unhappy position into which she had fallen.

“I will save her from a fate so dreadful,” Mrs. Barker had just said to herself, when her ear caught the sound of light footsteps along the passage.

“Miss Lee!” she called, starting up and going quickly to the door of the room in which she was sitting. There was no answer, but she was in time to catch a momentary view of Helen as she was passing hurriedly from the house.

“Miss Lee! Helen!” she called again. But her voice was drowned in the heavy jar of the closing door. Claspings her hands together, she stood for a few moments, all her thoughts in a state of bewilderment. Then, as she turned slowly, and went back into the room from which she had come, she murmured, sadly —

“Unhappy girl! What a future is before her! Oh, that I had but known the greatness of her extremity! And I might have known it. God sent her to me; and when she came, shrinkingly and fearfully — my coldness and indifference repulsed her. Will He call me to answer for the marring of so fair and noble a spirit? But is it yet too late? No, no, I will not believe it. She will be here again several times. I will secure her confidence, learn all the truth in relation to this matter between her and Mr. Bullfinch, and, if it is as I suppose — devise some means to save her from the *false step* she is about to take. To accomplish this, I will do and sacrifice much. And,” she added, in a confident tone, “I must succeed in so good a work.”

## Chapter 8.

“Helen Lee must be sick,” said Fanny Milnor to her uncle, two days after Helen had been sent home through the storm in a carriage.

“Why do you think so?” asked Mr. Bullfinch, in a quick tone of voice, as if the suggestion had excited a sudden concern.

“This is her regular day for giving me a lesson. But she did not come. She has never missed before; I’m afraid she took cold from exposure on her last visit.”

The shadow that concern had thrown upon the face of Mr. Bullfinch, instantly gave place to a smile.

“I hope not,” he said. “Some other reason may have prevented her from coming. She is, I think, a very excellent girl, Fanny.”

“She is, indeed, a good girl, uncle,” returned Fanny, “I like her very much.”

“So do I,” said Mr. Bullfinch, with considerable animation. “From the first I have observed her closely, and am convinced that she is a true-hearted, pure-minded, excellent young lady; thoroughly educated and accomplished, and fitted to adorn any station in life. Don’t you think so, Fanny?”

“I have always thought so, and often said to myself, that if I were a young man, in search of a wife, I would, from among all my acquaintances, select Helen Lee.”

“Well said! Well said! You are a sensible girl.” And Mr. Bullfinch rubbed his hands together in undisguised pleasure. “And you think she is sick?” he added, after a pause, and with a steady, meaning look.

“I’m afraid so,” replied Fanny, thinking within herself that there was something unusual in the manner of her uncle.

“There is another reason, I presume, why she is not here,” said Mr. Bullfinch.

“You think so?”

“Yes. And I’ll tell you my thoughts a little farther, if you wish to hear them.”

There was a look of *mystery* in the countenance of Mr. Bullfinch.

“What do you mean, uncle?”

“I don’t think Miss Lee intends giving you anymore lessons.”

“Why? She gave me no such intimation.”

“I believe it is her intention to give up the office of instructor altogether.”

“Uncle! You surprise me. When did you hear this?”

“Yesterday.”

“And is it so, really?”

“Yes.”

“What is she going to do?”

“What a great many other lovely young creatures, just like her, have done before.”

“Get married?”

“Yes.”

“Why, uncle!”

“Anything so surprising in that!”

“It is a little surprising that *you* should know all about it, while I never once suspected that an emotion so deep as that of *love* had passed over the calm surface of her virgin heart.”

“And yet it is so.”

“Who is the happy man, uncle? Is he worthy of her? Will she marry well?”

“I think so.”

The look and tone that accompanied this would have betrayed Mr. Bullfinch to anyone else; but Fanny had not the remotest dream of the truth.

“I am surprised and delighted, Uncle Adam. But how very close she has been about it! Ah! I never would have suspected her.”

“You think her lover fortunate?”

"I do — very fortunate."

"He's a happy man, certainly. A *prize* like this is not often secured in a *matrimonial lottery*."

"Indeed it is not. But, why keep me in suspense, uncle? If you know the happy man — tell me his name."

"She is to be a very near neighbor of ours."

"Oh, uncle! Don't tease me in this way."

"A very near neighbor."

"How near? Next door?"

"Nearer than that."

The face of Fanny Milnor flushed, instantly, to a deep crimson. A suspicion of the truth had dawned upon her mind.

"Yes, nearer than that!" said Mr. Bullfinch, in a voice meant to confirm the impression which he now saw had taken hold of her mind.

"Speak plainly, uncle Adam." The color had already faded from the cheeks of Fanny; while the whole expression of her countenance was changed.

"Plainly, then, Fanny — Miss Lee is soon to become mistress of this house. Have you any objection?"

"Oh, uncle! Can this be possible?" exclaimed the niece, in a distressed tone.

"Surely you are trifling with me. *You* marry Helen Lee? Impossible!"

"It will certainly take place, Fanny. But why all this feeling on the subject? I can't understand it."

"She is but a *child*, uncle, and cannot marry a man of your age except for some low and debasing motive. She can have no *love* for you!"

"And why not, please?" Mr. Bullfinch glanced at himself in a large pier mirror. "I am only in the prime of life; and my heart is as warm as ever — that never grows old."

"Believe me, uncle," said Fanny, speaking slow and impressively, "that no young girl ever marries an old man, except from a *selfish motive*. As to loving him truly, that is impossible, in the very nature of things."

"Nonsense! Nonsense, child!" replied Mr. Bullfinch, impatiently. "These marriages are always the happiest. I've seen a good many of them in my time, and never saw one that did not turn out well."

"I had a better opinion of Helen than this," said Fanny, speaking partly to herself. "She was *poor* — but I believed her *virtuous*."

"Virtuous!" exclaimed Mr. Bullfinch, with indignation, "How dare you question her *angelic purity*?"

"If," replied Fanny, speaking very firmly, "there were *true maiden purity* in her heart, she would never consent to such a union."

"Silence, Miss!" exclaimed Mr. Bullfinch, passionately. "Silence, I say! How dare you speak thus, and to my face, of the woman who is soon to become my wife?"

And the old man, overcome with excitement, stalked around the room, throwing his arm about impotently.

"You will not *marry* this girl, Uncle Adam," said Fanny, in a pleading, affectionate voice, taking hold of the old man's arm in a fond manner, after his anger had in a measure subsided.

"And why will I not, please? Haven't I told you, that it is all settled?"

"Oh no, no, uncle! I will not believe it."

"You *must* believe it," replied the old man, positively; "for as sure as you are living — it will take place."

Fanny withdrew her grasp from his arm, and stepped back as if she had been repulsed by a strong hand.

"You are fully in earnest in this?" said she.

"I was never in my life more in earnest about anything," was the firm reply.

"Enough. When she enters this house as your wife — I leave it forever. I could not live beneath the same roof with a creature who had so forgotten all that belonged to her as a woman."

"You are beside yourself, Fanny. You don't know what you are talking about," said Mr. Bullfinch, in a perplexed tone of voice. He was in no way prepared for an alternative like this.

“Am I not free to do as I wish? And is not Helen free to make her choice in life, without becoming the subject of false judgment from her own gender? How dare you question the *purity* of her motives! An *angel* is not purer. As to leaving my house, Fanny, that is a *threat* I am sorry to hear you make. You have been to me as a very dear child, and I would still cherish you as such. No one can take your place in my heart. But, if you turn from me, if you go out from beneath the roof which has so long sheltered you, and would shelter you still — then the loss, the evil be on your own head. I am not to be turned from a right purpose by any threat like this — the hasty threat of a capricious girl.”

“I have said it, uncle — and I will abide by it,” was the calm, resolute answer. “If I remain, she must be my companion and equal. But, I hold her to be unworthy of that relation.”

“She is quite as good as you are!” said Mr. Bullfinch, angrily.

“So I would have said an hour ago — but I did not know her then. A veil has fallen from before my eyes, and now she stands revealed in her *true character*.”

“What folly for you to talk in this way! You know her to be pure and good, and in every way worthy your companionship.”

“I *thought* her so, until now. But, henceforth, I can only regard her as unworthy — as having been false to her maiden instincts — as being influenced in an act, which should be the *highest, purest* and *holiest* in woman’s life — by the most *sordid and mercenary motives*. She will not marry you because she *loves* you, but because you are *rich*! Augh! I shudder at the thought! How can you respect her? And you would place her side by side with me, as a companion and an equal! But I cannot permit it, uncle. I will not so *degrade* myself.”

“You jump to conclusions. You judge harshly, Fanny,” said Mr. Bullfinch, speaking with much feeling. “Why not judge a sister maiden with more charity? In supposing reasons for her conduct — why not suppose such as are good?”

“Because I cannot,” was replied. “Some acts are never to be misjudged. They always spring from wrong motives — and this is one of them.”

“You try me beyond endurance, by this perverseness!” exclaimed the old man again, losing command of himself. “Your language I regard as an *insult* to myself, and an *outrage* upon one about to hold to me the closest relation in life. I will hear no more of it. What I have announced, will soon take place. By that time, I trust you will have become wiser and more discreet. If not, the consequences must rest on your own head. Things have come to a pretty pass, when a strip of a girl like you, attempts to lecture me after this fashion, and to threaten what she will do, if my conduct doesn’t just please her fancy! A nice state of things, indeed! A nice state of things — let me hear no more of it!”

Fanny bowed, silently, her head upon her bosom, and stood, without speaking, for a few moments. Then she left the room and sought her own chamber, where, sinking into a chair, she burst into a wild passion of tears, and wept bitterly for a long time.

The *bark* Mr. Bullfinch had launched on the *sea of love*, was not destined to glide as smoothly along the rippling surface, as he had hoped. Already an *adverse wind* had crudely fluttered the sails — while a cloud, threatening many future storms, was lowering over the sky. Opposition on the part of Fanny, he had not once anticipated. He knew that she was attached to Helen, and had, besides, a great respect for her. He had not in the least doubted, that when she came to know that Helen was to be an inhabitant of their home, holding the high relation of his *wife* — that she would receive the announcement with unalloyed pleasure; but, he was destined to be bitterly disappointed. Several things that Helen said, smarted his feelings, while others excited no very pleasant thoughts. That his marriage with a *girl*, whose years numbered scarcely a *third* of his own, had produced so marked a feeling of reprobation on one mind, did not flatter him much as to the *general impression* the act would produce. Yet, for all this, he did not once think of looking back. The good he sought was, in his estimation, too great to be bartered for such lighter drawbacks as these.

## Chapter 9.

Opposition from those who deemed the act almost sacrilegious, availed not. Helen had betrothed herself, and, true to her *extorted vow* — was not to be held back from the consummation thereof. In love to her parents, she was about to offer herself up in an *unholy sacrifice*. As Mr. Bullfinch had said, he called to see her at her father's house, on the evening that followed the day of her promise to marry him. To Mr. Lee, he did not hesitate to declare the purpose of his visit. He met with a much more decided opposition in that quarter than he had expected. Mr. Lee at once avowed his *utter repugnance* to such an unnatural and impure union; and solemnly urged Mr. Bullfinch to reconsider the matter, and, with a noble magnanimity, release his unhappy daughter from her engagement.

"Does *she* wish to be released?" was the reply of Mr. Bullfinch to this. They were alone when the question was asked.

"Oh, sir!" returned Mr. Lee, eagerly, "you need only look at her changed countenance for an answer. Believe me, sir, that she is laboring under some *mental hallucination*. Never, never — were her mind perfectly clear, and evenly balanced — would she consent to the formation of so *unnatural* a union. Never would she take upon herself holy vows, which can never be kept."

"Never kept! What am I to understand by this, Mr. Lee?" said Mr. Bullfinch.

"In the marriage service," replied Mr. Lee, "a woman promises to *love* and *honor* her husband."

"Well, sir, well?" Mr. Bullfinch spoke with a slight show of impatience.

"Honor and love must be *spontaneous*."

"Well?"

"You cannot *extort* them."

"No, certainly not — certainly not."

"Are you willing to marry a woman, who, in the very nature of things, can neither *love* nor *honor* her husband?"

"I need not answer the question," replied Mr. Bullfinch. "No man would be so great a simpleton."

"Believe me, sir," said Mr. Lee, solemnly, "that, if you commit the *fatal error* of making this young girl your wife — you will be in the unhappy position I have supposed."

Mr. Bullfinch smiled with a self-satisfied air, as he answered —

"You cannot frighten me from my purpose, Mr. Lee. Suggestions like these do not in the least alarm me. I believe I know Helen too well to doubt her *truly wifelike qualities*. I am extremely sorry that your hearty approval is not on our side. It should be; for opposition will only mar your daughter's happiness. Of one thing you may be very certain — I will love and care for her with a tenderness and devotion never exceeded. She will be to me, as the apple of an eye. My every thought will turn towards her. My very life will be devoted to her pleasure. I have wealth — and that will be at her command. Her love for her parents exceeds all selfish considerations. At once she will have it in her power to gratify this love; and in seeking that gratification, she will ever have a prompter in me. Surrounded by every *external good*, how can she fail to be happy? And how can she fail to love the hand which joyfully lays all these blessings at her feet? She cannot, Mr. Lee, she cannot."

"Do not deceive yourself, Mr. Bullfinch," answered Mr. Lee; "for *deception* in a matter like this, proves utterly disastrous. It takes more than *wealth* to buy the love of a true woman; and you will find it so in the end. *Heart-affinities* are governed by laws over which we have little control. Love-fires, which kindle not, though we blow with ever so much ardor — often shoot up into a broad, bright, never-dying flame, at a single breath."

Still the old man wavered not.

"Do you know," said Mr. Lee, as a new suggestion was flung into his mind — he spoke without due consideration, "that, in all marriages of youthful maidens with men far advanced in years — the young wife is subject to severe temptations?"

"From what source?" asked Mr. Bullfinch, in a quick voice.

“A maiden’s affections are not under her control.” As Mr. Lee commenced speaking, his wife, who had been in conference with her daughter, came into the room where they were sitting. “Few reach the age of Helen without a lover, young in years, like themselves. If the *heart-impression* is not too deeply made, a first lover may give place to a second; but the second, like the first, must be in the freshness and beauty of early manhood. An old man cannot take the place of either of these; because, in him, there can be no *reciprocity*. The fires of love are burning in a clear, bright flame on the altar of one heart — while upon the other, lie only the black and smoking remnants of an *offered sacrifice*. What, then, is the natural consequence of a union between the old and the young? Need I say? Does not your own mind instantly see the danger? An old husband — and a young lover!”

“Has your daughter a young lover?” asked Mr. Bullfinch, with more calmness than he felt. These suggestions of Mr. Lee disturbed him far more than he choose to let be seen.

“Few reach her age without a lover, as I have just remarked,” was the evasive reply.

“But you do not answer my question,” said Mr. Bullfinch.

“If my observation is correct — her heart is not altogether free.”

“Mr. Lee!” exclaimed the mother of Helen. “How can you speak so? No one has visited her but young Harry Wellford, if the few calls he has made can be called visits. And he’s nobody. I was so vexed at his assurance, last night, in asking for her, that I shut the door in his face!”

“Henry Wellford?” said Mr. Bullfinch, musingly, and he repeated the name over two or three times to himself. “Oh, ah!” he remarked, at length, “the young man who lives with Vincent.”

“The same,” replied Mr. Lee.

“He’s nobody,” replied Mr. Bullfinch, in a *contemptuous* manner. And yet Mr. Lee had planted a *seed of jealousy* in the old man’s heart. How long it remained there without germinating, our story in its progress will show.

“You may well say that,” spoke up Mrs. Lee, warmly; “I wonder my husband could refer to him at all. A mother, Mr. Bullfinch, ought to know something as to the state of her daughter’s affections; and if my observation is worth anything at all, you may rest satisfied that Helen has never had a lover. In taking her for a wife, you may be certain of getting *an undivided heart*.”

Mr. Lee said no more. He saw that opposition would avail not; and was already aware that he had said too much, in his intimation that his daughter had a lover. This intimation might be, he now perceived, the *germ of trouble* in the future. It was an *evil seed*, and might produce a *harvest of misery*. The thought oppressed and silenced him.

“We had better be friends in this matter,” said Mr. Bullfinch, speaking with exceeding kindness. “Friends, not in a mere repression of antagonisms, but in a hearty good will. I wish to be so. In regard to my marriage with your daughter, that is a matter settled beyond a question. If you throw *impediments* in the way, it will avail nothing, and only produce unhappiness. For your daughter’s sake, then, give your full and free consent to this union. I will stand responsible for her happiness.”

Mr. Lee said nothing, but sat with his feeble body crouched in his chair, his head bent forward, and his eyes upon the floor. Opposition, he felt to be hopeless, and he could not speak *consenting* words. Oh! how weak and hopeless he felt! He had been stricken down by poverty and disease, and could not rise again. How he panted, in spirit, for the old ability — for the vigor of early manhood, when a *strong will* had *ready hands* to do its bidding. Had these been with him, how indignantly would he have rebuked the old sensualist, and spurned him from under his roof.

The father was silent, but the weak mother consented to the *sacrifice* of her child, and consented with more of pleasure than pain; for, in her imagination, were bright pictures of the future, a future for herself as well as her daughter. By Helen’s elevation — she would rise, and far above the present condition of hopeless strife with poverty. The *mere worldly woman* saw, in what the world had to offer — the greatest good. Ah! how often, during some twenty-five years of their married life, had the husband of this woman sighed, as he looked into her mind for higher, better, and purer instincts — and found them not! How sad he sometimes felt, in his little world at home! She, whom he had chosen as a life-companion, with whom he had hoped to form a true inner marriage union, had no appreciation of *spiritual* good — saw no desirableness in the *higher truths* which were to him so full of beauty. In what he loved — she saw



nothing lovely; and, therefore, there was not with them that inner conjunction of thought and affection which constitutes a true marriage. He was desirous of growing *wise* — wise in the true sense, for he sought that wisdom which the world calls foolishness — but she did not desire his wisdom; and, therefore, she was only adjoined to him, as it were, externally. Thus had they passed through life, and the world regarded them as most happily united, as presenting an instance of true marital unity. How many are like them! But the *worldly-mindedness* is not always on the *woman's* side.

## Chapter 10.

An early marriage was urged by Mr. Bullfinch. Helen, after being repeatedly asked to fix the time when it should take place, finally named a day six months in advance. Against so long a postponement, the ardent lover strongly remonstrated; but Helen remained immovable. She wished to put off the *dreaded time* as long as possible, and she had fixed the utmost limit. Beyond that, she knew it would be useless to go. Rapidly enough for her, approached the day.

All the *lessons* she was engaged in giving were completed up to the termination of the respective quarters, except those of Fanny Milnor. The reason for omitting these is already known to the reader. Two or three times, Mrs. Barker approached her on the subject; but Helen invariably declined to hold any conversation thereon whatever. Her appearance had undergone considerable change. Everyone noted this. And yet, all could not see, beneath her *partially disguised exterior* — the unmistakable signs of unhappiness. Her face did not recover the warm hue which once gave it a softened, almost *transparent beauty*. It was uniformly pale. But her eyes were larger and brighter from this very paleness. Her step was firmer, and her bearing prouder than before — almost haughty at times; and at times, defiant.

Having consented to take a false position in the world, she was steadily repressing all the *gentler qualities* of her nature, and putting on, as a coat of armor, a composed exterior. Day by day she laid her hand firmly upon her heart, to repress its natural emotions; and day by day she gained some new power over herself — some new ability to *appear* what she was not. As much to acquire this power, as from an instinctive repugnance to the contemplated union, had Helen deferred her marriage as long as possible.

Thus false to *herself*, and false to the *world* — the *unhappy maiden* prepared herself for the coming *sacrifice*, thinking often of the fate of *Jeptha's daughter* — as one full of pleasantness, when compared with her own. No one comprehended her state of mind — no one saw through the *false exterior* she had assumed, but her father. His eyes had a deeper penetration — the power of spiritual discernment. The *heart* which she hid from others — lay all open to him, and he saw, half palsied and crushed as it lay in her bosom, that its low, tremulous throb, was born of exquisite pain. How many times did he seek a conference with her on the subject of her approaching marriage, in the hope of inducing her, at all hazards, to *break the cords* by which she was *bound* — the cords, of an *extorted promise* — before to struggle against their sharp bondage, were utterly vain! But on this subject she would hold no communion with anyone. Money, freely supplied by Mr. Bullfinch, even though the hand filled with gold were pushed back often and again — was bringing every external comfort to their household; and the regular attendance of one of the most skillful physicians in the city, sent by the same interested friend, was mitigating the violence of a disease under which Mr. Lee was fast wasting away. These were the *accumulating obligations* that, to Helen, gave to her promise of marriage a still more binding force. The question of *escape* from the *hopeless future* was no longer debated in her mind; and she would not allow it to be opened.

“God will give me *strength equal to my day*. Thus she would seek to fortify herself, when thoughts of the coming self-sacrifice pressed upon her too heavily, and imagination drew too vivid pictures of the approaching reality. Ah! how can we hope for strength from above, when we enter upon trials not sanctioned by Heaven? If we take the *current of Providence* — that will never bear us out upon a sea where we must perish amid whirlpools of passion, or on the breakers of crime. But, if we choose a wrong course, no matter how specious the false persuasion under which we act, may be — then there is for us no safety.

The time wore on. The fond old lover made almost daily visits to the house of his affianced bride, where he was received by Mrs. Lee ever with a smiling and wordy welcome; by Helen, with a calm, dignified, almost *repulsive politeness*; and by Mr. Lee with a subdued toleration, which, while it seemed not to be noticed by Mr. Bullfinch, was *treasured up* never to be forgotten nor forgiven!

There was one thing which fretted the old man quite a bit. As often as he had tried to persuade Helen to appear with him abroad, he had never been able to induce her to go upon the street with him, or to

appear in any public place, since she had consented to become his wife. Earnest persuasion, and the exhibition of a half-offended manner, alike failed to influence her.

“This is all wrong, said her mother, more than once after Mr. Bullfinch had retired. “You are soon to become his wife. Do you never intend to go out with him?”

“When I am his wife, mother,” she usually replied, “I will try, to the best of my ability, to do a *wife’s duty*. Now, as a *maiden*, I wish to reserve a maiden’s privilege.”

It mattered not now warmly Mrs. Lee opposed this state of feeling in her daughter, it was of no avail; little beyond the reply just given, was ever urged in self-justification.

And so the time wore on, until the *day of sacrifice* was at hand.

The opposition shown by Fanny Milnor to this unnatural union, did not subside like a sudden outburst of passion. She thought and felt correctly in the beginning, from her true woman’s instinct. She knew that *no young girl could love an old man*, like her uncle — as a wife should love her husband; and it was, therefore, the instant conclusion of her mind, that Helen Lee, in consenting to such a relation, must be influenced by an *unworthy motive*. All *respect* for Helen died instantly in her bosom, and in its place was kindled a *strong aversion*, which daily gained strength. Several times her uncle had sought to approach her on the subject of his marriage, but she would hold no fellowship with him on that theme.

As for herself, she had marked out the course she would pursue — marked it out in the beginning. When Helen entered the home of her uncle, as its future mistress — she would go out therefrom, to return no more. Mr. Bullfinch did not believe that she would carry out her declaration — he regarded it as the hasty threat of a young girl, to be receded from, almost as soon as uttered. But he was in error here.

Not wholly dependent on her uncle, was Fanny. She had a small income, not beyond a few hundred dollars, secured to her from the shattered estate of her father, who had died when she was a child. Her uncle not being her *legal guardian*, this money had been regularly paid into her hands, since she had become old enough to receive it, and was entirely at her disposal. This *resource* made the way before her much clearer, as she thought upon the future. It did not, however, in the least influence her decision. Such was the *disgust of her soul* at the marriage about to take place, that she would have gone out from her uncle’s roof, though she knew not where to lay her head.

And what of Henry Wellford? Since the time he saw Helen in the street, on the day of his good fortune, his eyes had not rested upon her. Twice, after that evening, had he called at her father’s house, to be, each time, repulsed by Mrs. Lee, and, on the last occasion, with the cutting words —

“You needn’t come here any more. Helen doesn’t want to see you!”

How dark, and cold, and cheerless, seemed all the world to him, as, after this harsh repulse, he went wandering about the streets aimlessly, and conscious only of a heavy weight upon his bosom. Late at night he sought his pillow, and, in half-waking dreams, passed the hours, till morning came with a sense of relief. No further effort was made by him to see Helen at the residence of her father; but many an hour he lingered in and around the neighborhood, after night had closed in; but he lingered in vain. That form, fairer to him than the world’s highest type of beauty — blessed not his longing vision. Never was he upon the street, by day or by night, that his eyes searched not, constantly, for Helen. But, neither afar off nor near at hand, did she appear, and his heart grew sick in its *deferred expectations*. And so the time passed with him. Yet, a whisper of what was to take place — of the destiny of his soul’s bride — came not to his ears.

## Chapter 11.

The six months probation was over, and, in that time, Helen Lee has gained a *power over her feelings* far greater than she had ever hoped to achieve. Her face is a little paler than it was, but shows no signs of the weakness and weariness which once rested there almost continually. Her eyes did not droop meekly and maidenly, as of old, but are larger and steadier in their gaze. At times they are fixed and musing; and always they seem as if looking away from the present, seeking to penetrate the future, or resting on the past. Beautiful she was to look upon; beautiful with what some would call a proud, high-born beauty. She never spoke, except with a smile. Ah! But it is not the smile of old. She has taught her lips that smile, and they have learned their lesson well; though, far from perfectly.

Mr. Bullfinch is proud and happy. He calls to see her daily, and she receives him with a pleasant, yet subdued manner, and speaks to him with the feigned smile which she has taught her lips. He believes that it but reflects her feelings. He talks of the future — of the happy day now at hand, and she compels herself to join in with him, and to make such responses as she thinks he will best like to hear. She is still *schooling herself* — still learning her lesson — still rehearsing for the *great appearance*, when she is to come before the world as the *wife of Adam Bullfinch*. When her heart flutters, she lays her hand upon her bosom, and by an external and an internal pressure at the same time, subdues it into quietude. Great power over herself, has she gained; yet, oh! by what an intense struggle — and of what long continuance!

According to arrangement, a few friends are to be at the residence of Mr. Bullfinch, to receive him and his bride. The marriage is to take place at the house of Mr. Lee, and then all are to go in company to their future home. Instead of two households, there is to be, from this time, but one. Helen had stipulated from the first, that her home is to be that of her parents; and she will not go to the dwelling of her husband, even on her bridal night — except they go with her.

In view of the almost immediate consummation of a union, against which his feelings still revolt, Mr. Lee, who is very weak, from bodily illness, finds himself in such a state of nervous agitation, that he can scarcely trust his voice in words.

“My dear, dear child!” he sighs often to himself, “to think it should come to this! Oh! if I had but health and strength!”

He wanders about uneasily, or sits for many minutes at a time, motionless, his eyes gazing vacantly.

“Poor child!” he murmurs, “Poor child!” Yet not so audibly as to be heard either by his wife or Helen. He has no sympathy from the one, and he tries to be cheerful with the other.

And all this while, the minutes are gliding away, and the *appointed hour* approaches.

Dressed for the bridal, Helen asks to be left alone for the half hour that is to elapse, before she stands at the altar. How that brief season is spent, we know not. It is past, and she is leaving, for the last time, her chamber. There are *traces of tears* on her cheeks — her eyes are humid and red — but her lips are firm, though her cheeks are white; her step is steady, and her bearing one of entire self-possession.

Below she is met and received by the happy bridegroom, looking younger by ten years or more. He is dressed with great care, and more in the fashion of a man of twenty-five, than of one past three score. What a light comes into his wrinkled and age-marked face, as he grasps the hand she yields passively!

How pleased the mother looks! Dim-visions, through selfish worldly-mindedness — she sees only a sunny future for herself and child. They are no longer to be crushed beneath the *iron heel of poverty* — no longer to sit under the shadow of a foreboding cloud. She is ready to give her daughter away, untroubled by fears for the future. It is not so with Mr. Lee. His eyes are moist with tears. He does not speak to Helen, for he knows that a sob would choke the words, if he attempted an utterance. He could not feel sadder, if he were gazing upon her beautiful face, as cold as marble, and eternally calm in the repose of death.

And with no one to lift a voice and forbid the *offering* up of a young heart — the *sacrifice* is made. Mute are the bride’s responses, yet none the less binding. How passionless her face, as she receives the kissing salutations of husband and friends. She smiles — it is her *lesson* — but how *cold* the rays of light which faintly quiver on her beautiful countenance! Mr. Bullfinch accepts them as from the heart; the

mother persuades herself that her daughter is pleased, if not as happy as she will be; but the *agonized father* is looking down into the desolate, hopeless bosom of his wretched child, searching there, but vainly, for a single *green spot* made fresh by a ray of sunshine.

## Chapter 12.

Since the exciting interview between Adam Bullfinch and his niece, occasioned by his avowal of his purpose to marry Helen Lee, no word on the subject had passed between them, further than the simple announcement of the former as to the time when the marriage would take place, and his desire to have certain preparations made for the bride's reception.

It by no means escaped the uncle's observation, that Fanny was altogether changed from her former self. She was as kind in manner to him as before, and as much devoted to his wants and comfort; but her *cheerfulness* was gone, and she spent much of her time alone. More frequently than of old, did she decline entering into public and social amusements; and even when strongly urged by Mr. Bullfinch to go out with him, persisted in remaining at home.

Mr. Bullfinch had completed his dressing, after more than two hours of time devoted to his person. The carriage stood at the door, waiting to convey him to the residence of his bride elect, and now he descended to the drawing-rooms, where he expected to find his niece. She was not there, however. He sent to her room, and she returned for answer, that she was engaged, and wished to be excused.

"Tell her that I wish to see her particularly," he returned to this message. In a few minutes, Fanny came down. Her face wore a troubled expression.

"Fanny," said Mr. Bullfinch, taking her hand, "have I not always been kind to you?"

"Oh, yes, dear uncle! As kind as a father could have been," quickly replied his niece, speaking with concealed agitation.

"I could not have loved my own child better than I have loved you," said Mr. Bullfinch, tightening his grasp upon her hand that remained in his.

Fanny leaned her face against him, and sobbed.

"Dear child!" said Mr. Bullfinch, affectionately laying his hand upon her head. "You are wrong," he added, after a few moments, "to fret yourself about this matter — very wrong. I will love you none the less. Do not let your mind be warped by a false judgment of Miss Lee. Believe me, she is as *pure* as an angel. You will soon be as *tenderly united sisters*."

Mr. Bullfinch could feel the quiver that ran through the frame of his niece. But she answered not to his words.

"A few friends will be here," he continued. "Be cheerful with them. Do not, for my sake, let anyone see that you are opposed to what I am doing. By eight o'clock we will be here. Let Helen find you in our chamber; and, Fanny, my love, I beg of you to receive her frankly, kindly — with affection."

But Fanny made no reply, nor did she lift her head.

"I will trust you to do what is right," said Mr. Bullfinch, after waiting some time for a response. "I know that you will not disregard my wishes. Good-bye for a little while."

And as he spoke, he lifted her concealed face, and left, on her wet cheek, an earnest kiss.

"Mr. Bullfinch passed from the house, and Fanny returned slowly to her chamber. Here she did not long remain passive. Two large trunks were in the middle of the floor, both nearly filled with clothing; and to the work of packing these, which her summons to the parlor had interrupted, she again applied herself. Not much remained to be done. Drawers and wardrobe were nearly empty. Soon this work, indicating a hurried departure, was over. Then a *note* was penned, sealed, and directed — to "Helen Lee." This she placed in the bridal chamber.

Twilight was falling; and now another carriage stood before the dwelling of Adam Bullfinch. Upon this was placed the two trunks that Fanny had packed with her clothing. A brief time was spent in giving needful directions for the reception of company; and then, entering the carriage, Fanny Milnor departed from the home of her childhood and youth, and, with a troubled heart, went forth into the world, alone.

An hour afterwards, the old man brought home his bride.

"Fanny! Fanny, my love!" he called, as, on entering the rooms above, to make preparation for joining the already assembled friends, he missed the expected presence of his niece.

Even as he spoke, the pale bride saw the note inscribed with her name. Taking it hurriedly, and with a foreshadowing of its meaning, she broke the light seal, and read:

“Helen Lee! or, must I write, Mrs. Bullfinch! One word, on your entering this, my old and happy home, to become its mistress. I need not tell you, who must know the truth too well, that you do not and cannot *love* and *honor* my uncle as a true wife must ever love and honor her husband. I need not tell you, that *unworthy motives* have influenced you in the step you have taken. That some mere *worldly and external good* has prompted the act — for all this you must know but too well. If your *pillow* does not prove one of *thorns* — then are your maidenly instincts dead. If the *fruit* you have plucked, turns not to ashes in your mouth — then happy are you, thrice happy! *Budding youth* and *blighted old age!* *Spring* and *Autumn!* Unnatural Union! It cannot find favor in the sight of Heaven. But my feelings are carrying me away. As you enter, to become the mistress of this house, I go forth into the world, alone. We cannot live beneath the same roof — for I despise you! And, yet, for the old man you have consented to wed, let me ask something. I have loved him as a child, and as a child have ever sought his comfort. The duty was one full of pleasure, for *love makes labor light*. With you, all will be *cold task-work*. You do not *love* him as a wife — you cannot. Oh, Helen! Helen! why did you do this? I thought you wiser and better. He is old, with habits as fixed as iron; and if you not bend to these — if you do not live in daily self-denial — then you will both be wretched. I tremble as I think of this. Shall I write more? In vain! in vain! Fanny.”

The whole of this letter Helen seemed to take in at one eagle glance. Then it was crumpled in her hands and thrust, with a passionate gesture, into her bosom. Encased as she had thought her heart to be in a rocky-crust, these sentences, like heavy strokes, broke through to the sealed fountain, and there was a wild gush of feeling.

“What is it? What does it mean? Where is Fanny?” asked Mr. Bullfinch, greatly disturbed.

But Fanny did not appear, and Helen made no response, beyond her sobs and tears. The bell was rung violently by Mr. Bullfinch.

“Where is Fanny?” he asked of the servant who soon after entered.

“She went away, in a carriage, nearly an hour ago,” was answered to this inquiry.

“Gone away! Where did she go! Speak!”

But the servant could give no information.

“Was that *note* from her?” inquired the excited uncle, turning to Helen, as he spoke. His tones were sharp and imperative.

“It was,” sobbed Helen.

“Let me see it!”

Helen placed her hand on her bosom, and felt the crumpled letter beneath her dress, but did not comply with the demand.

“Quick! Let me see the letter!” said the old man, passionately.

“It is addressed to *me*,” replied Helen, now gaining a little self-possession, and speaking with some firmness.

“I don’t care *who* it is addressed to, let me see it!” exclaimed Mr. Bullfinch, in the excitement of the moment, forgetting even a decent regard for his young bride, or her parents, who, in the adjoining room, were *appalled witnesses* of the scene.

Not from hurried thoughts, but from a woman’s quick instincts, Helen decided her course of action. Already there was an unwarrantable assertion of *authority* over her, to which she could not yield. As she would act in the future — so she acted now. Passive and silent she sat, her tears suddenly dried up, and lifted her eyes till they rested upon the red and almost distorted face of her husband. Under his angry glare, they did quail a moment.

“The note is addressed to *me*, Mr. Bullfinch,” she said at length, “and I cannot show it. No doubt, Fanny has made, or will make, a communication for you also. *She* has left your house, because *I* am about to come into it. Of where she has gone, or what she will do — she says nothing to me. Beyond this, you have no interest in her letter.”

The calm dignity and self-possession of his young wife, instantly subdued the over-excited old man. He saw that he was wrong, and that he had made an exhibition of himself ever to be regretted. Still, he

was deeply disturbed by the unexpected departure of his niece; so much so, that he found it almost impossible to assume anything like a composed exterior. A confused, but not over hearty, apology was made, both to Helen and her parents. Soon after, all descended, and received, from the few friends of Mr. Bullfinch, who had come to honor the occasion, their wordy congratulations.

How that embarrassing evening was passed — embarrassing to all parties — we will not describe. At an early hour, the guests retired, feeling a sense of *relief* as they gained the open air, and talking ominously of the young bride's future, as they moved away.



## Chapter 13.

The *sun of fortune* was rising on Henry Wellford. He had now been six months in the business of Lane & Latta, and so trusty and capable was he, that his new employers had already raised him to a more responsible position. In doing this, an ulterior purpose was in their minds. They wished to test his higher abilities. They had business views beyond their present operations, which, if carried out, would require one of the partners to reside abroad. Before this change was made, they had decided to bring in a third partner, a young and active man, to take the place of Mr. Latta, who designed being absent. Of all their clerks, no one possessed just the qualities they desired, except Wellford; and their test of his higher abilities proved altogether satisfactory. Accordingly, the offer of a partnership in the business, with a fair percentage on the profits, was made and accepted. The young man was taken altogether by surprise at this new stroke of good fortune. He understood the business and resources of the business well enough to know, that as an integral part thereof, his own permanent prosperity was secured. Even from the beginning, should no unforeseen drawback occur, his dividend could not fall short of two or three thousand dollars.

How quickly turned his thoughts to Helen Lee, when, through this new vista, reaching into the future, light dawned upon him! Good fortune seemed a double blessing when he thought of her as sharing therein.

Never, since he was so insultingly repulsed by Mrs. Lee, had Wellford called at the residence of his *heart's idol*; and never since then, had he been so fortunate as to meet her on the street, though hour after hour, many and many a time, he walked the pavement in neighborhoods where he hoped she might be; yet searched for her thus in vain. Of what was passing in regard to her — not a whisper had reached him. Nor had the faintest imagination of the truth crossed his mind.

“More good fortune, mother,” said the young man, in a mirthful voice, on returning home after receiving the proposition from Lane & Latta, to which we have referred.

Mrs. Wellford lifted her pleasant, cheerful face, and looked earnestly into the animated countenance of her son, but without speaking.

“More good fortune, mother,” he repeated, “And what do you think it is?”

“I’m sure I cannot tell, my son,” was the quiet response.

“No, I’m sure you cannot,” said Henry. “Would you believe it? They’ve offered me a *partnership*.”

“Who?” quickly asked Mrs. Wellford.

“Lane & Latta,” replied Henry, struggling to appear composed, yet betraying his emotion.

“You are not in earnest, surely, my son!” replied Mrs. Wellford, in a voice that was now unsteady.

“Entirely in earnest, mother. Mr. Latta is going to London to reside, as a representative of the business abroad. They do not wish to fill his place here, which is a most important one, with an irresponsible clerk, and so have determined to take in a partner.”

“And they have chosen you?” said Mrs. Wellford, eagerly.

“They have, mother.

“It seems incredible, my son.” Mrs. Wellford’s voice trembled. “O, do not let this good fortune uplift your mind too greatly.”

“Do not fear for that,” said Henry, speaking now in a more subdued tone. “I have enough to keep my thoughts sober.”

Both were silent for some moments.

“Mother,” said the young man; his voice was low, hesitating and unsteady, “Mother, there is one thing of which I have never spoken to you.”

“What is that, my son?”

“Have you seen Helen Lee?”

“Oh yes.”

“For a long time she has been very dear to me, mother.”

Mrs. Wellford did not look surprised, but waited, in silence, for her son to proceed.

“Very dear, mother,” he repeated. “But for the *curse of poverty*,” (he spoke with a sudden bitterness) “I would have long ago brought her to our home, and you would have loved her as your own child. She is poor, mother, yet noble and self-devoted in her poverty. Bravely is she battling with the world, and wresting from it, in daily toil, the means of support for parents, who have, in her, their sole dependence. Oh, how often I have sighed for the means to lift her above her unhappy condition! And now they are about coming into my hands. So faithful and devoted a child, cannot but make a true and loving wife.”

“You have been to me a good son,” replied Mrs. Wellford, as Henry ceased speaking, “and I know you will make a good husband. If Helen is worthy of you, and I doubt not that she is — make her your wife. Only be sure, Henry, that you have the ability to meet the added expense. If Mr. and Mrs. Lee have no means of support but the earnings of their daughter, you cannot remove the support of their life, without taking the burden on yourself.”

“How thankful I am,” said the young man, “that I now have the ability to do this. No, no; I will not remove the support of their life, without myself taking up the burden.”

In the ardor of his new hopes and brighter prospects, Wellford could not bear, it seemed, the intervention of a single hour between this and the time of another meeting with Helen.

“I will see her this very night,” said he, as his thoughts grew more active in that direction. “Poor, dear girl! what may she not have borne and suffered, since our last meeting! But it is all over now.” And yet even as he spoke thus within himself, a *shadow* from the *wing of doubt* fell upon his spirit. Utterly unaccountable had ever been, and still remained, her sudden turning from him. That it was not from estranged affection, he knew, even though her mother had rudely striven to make him believe otherwise. And yet, might there not exist causes which would separate them forever? As *doubt* formed this question in his mind, a cold thrill ran along his nerves. Less confident now than when, under the impulse awakened by his unexpected good fortune, his thoughts turned fondly and hopefully towards Helen, Wellford prepared himself to make her a visit.

Daylight had faded, and night was closing in darkly when he left his now comfortable home, and took his way to the humble abode of Helen. Love gave fleetness to his steps, and he hurried along the pavement like one, on whose errand life and death were depending. Just as he turned into the little street where Mr. Lee resided, two carriages started from the immediate vicinity of his dwelling, and came sweeping past him rapidly. Into one of these carriages, a gas lamp threw its bright glare. Was it an illusion? or did his eyes rest upon the pale, passionless face of Helen Lee, as she crouched beside an old man! Instantly his steps were arrested, and he stood, for a time, like a statue.

Then, as the carriage whirled out of sight, he sprung forward, and was soon at the door of the dwelling he sought. His loud knock was answered by a hollow reverberation from within. He knocked again and again, but only *echo* replied to his summons. Gazing up at the house, he found all the shutters closed. What could be the meaning of this? Had they moved away, or were they only absent temporarily? Again he knocked, and more loudly; it was with the same result. All the while that he stood thus, vainly seeking to gain admission, the vision that had so suddenly fallen upon his eyes, remained before him with annoying distinctness.

Disappointed and troubled, he turned at length, away, and walked slowly from the seemingly deserted house. He paused, however, before passing the next street, looked back with an earnest gaze, and finally retraced his steps. His second attempt to arouse the inhabitants of Mr. Lee’s dwelling, if any were therein, proved as fruitless as the first.

“I will make inquiry concerning them,” said he, as a suggestion crossed his mind. “Their neighbors can tell me whether they have moved, and if so, where they are now to be found.”

And so he applied at the adjoining house.

“Has Mr. Lee moved?” he asked of a servant, who answered the bell he rung with a pretty decided hand.

“I believe not,” was the reply. “I have rung several times, but no one seems to hear.”

“Maybe they’re out,” suggested the servant.

“You’re sure they’ve not moved?” said Wellford.

“Haven’t seen any moving going on there, though I wouldn’t wonder.”

“Why wouldn’t you wonder?” asked the young man, in a voice that betrayed more interest than he wished to show.

“Oh, because.” And there was a knowing, vulgar leer on the servant’s face.

“Because what?” So sharp and imperative was the voice of Wellford, that the girl looked frightened, and stepped back a pace or two.

“Why wouldn’t you wonder if they had moved?” he repeated, bending towards the girl, and now speaking in a milder and more persuasive voice. “Nothing wrong there, I hope?”

“O, no sir; nothing that I know of.”

“But what reason have you to think they have moved?”

“It was only my fun, sir; nothing else,” replied the girl, who now began to fear that she might have said something that would bring her into trouble. Seeing that the young man was about pressing the matter on her still further, she shut the door, and left him standing outside.

More troubled and perplexed than ever, Wellford moved away, and again left the immediate neighborhood of Mr. Lee’s dwelling. Dissatisfied, he once more returned, unwilling to go until the mystery, which, in his mind, now closed around Helen and her family, was cleared up.

“There was something in that girl’s mind;” thus he communed with himself; “what could it be? She had light thoughts of the family; and such thoughts are never entirely baseless. Can there be any true foundation in the appearances upon which they rest? Where has *Helen* been — what has she been doing for over six months — the long, long period that has elapsed since I last gazed upon her face? Can anything be wrong? I tremble at the thought. In some fearful extremity, can she have yielded to temptation? No, no! I fling the unworthy thought aside, scorning myself for having given it utterance. But where is she? Could that have been *her* I saw in the carriage?”

In spite of his manliness, a shudder crept along his excited nerves.

“I must solve this mystery!” said he, and he rang the bell of another house in the immediate proximity to that of Mr. Lee.

“Has the family next door to you moved away?” he asked.

“Which family?” was returned.

“That of Mr. Lee.”

“I believe not, sir.”

“There is no one in the house. I have rung the bell a number of times.”

“I saw Mrs. Lee from our back windows, several times during the afternoon.”

“You did?”

“Oh, yes.”

“What is wanted?” now called out a voice, at some distance along the passage within.

“A gentleman is inquiring about Mr. Lee,” replied the servant.

“What about them?”

“He wishes to know if they have moved away?”

“They haven’t moved their things out yet,” said a lady, now advancing to the door.

“Then they are going to leave here,” remarked Wellford.

“Oh, dear, yes. Their daughter was married tonight, and they have gone with her to her new home.”

“Married!” exclaimed the young man.

“Oh, yes, indeed! And such a marriage! January and May! Spring in the lap of Winter! It’s the strangest thing I ever heard of.”

“To *whom* is she married?” asked Wellford, in a hoarse voice. It was only by a strong effort that he could control his feelings sufficiently to give utterance to the question.

“To a man old enough to be her *grandfather*. Who he is, I don’t know. But they say he’s as rich as a Jew. But, if she isn’t sorry for it before she dies, then I don’t know anything of woman’s nature.”

Nothing more, did the young man pause to hear. The blasting fact, so rudely announced, was enough for him. What need he care for details and particulars? It was a late hour when he reached his home, the time verging on to midnight. Mrs. Wellford still sat up, awaiting his return. She knew the purpose of his visit to the house of Mr. Lee, and she did not care about retiring until advised of the issue of his suit. That

it would be favorable, she had no reason to doubt. Well might she be startled at his appearance when he, at length, came in so quietly that her watchful ear had scarcely noticed his entrance, and stood before her, revealed suddenly, like an apparition.

“Oh, Henry!” she exclaimed, clasping her hands together. “What has happened? Why do you look so?”

The young man’s colorless lips quivered as he tried, but in vain, to speak. For a few moments, the mother and son gazed into each other’s faces. Then the latter attempted to pass on to his own room; but Mrs. Wellford caught his hand and detained him, saying, in a voice full of tender interest —

“Henry, my son, what ails you? Is anything wrong with Helen?”

“Wrong — wrong! Oh, mother!”

This was his first utterance, and the words were rather sobbed out than spoken.

A long silence ensued, in which Henry was striving for the mastery over his feelings; and his mother, conscious of the struggle, sat awaiting the result. At last the sufferer lifted his face — how changed in a few short hours! — and said, speaking now with icy calmness —

“As I came near the house of Mr. Lee, tonight, two carriages drove away. In one of them was a young girl, in whose very pale face, I thought I recognized the features of Helen. She sat beside an old man, and seemed as if she were shrinking away from, rather than toward him. This was seen only at a single glance, as a strong light shone for an instant into the passing vehicle. The house of Mr. Lee, I found deserted. I rang and rang again, but no one answered the bell. Then I made inquiry of a neighbor, as to whether the family had moved away, and learned that Helen had just been married!”

“Married, Henry!”

“Yes, mother, married, and to an *old* man!” He spoke with bitterness.

“Who is he?”

Henry shook his head, sighing. “I know not.”

“Married — married! Had you no intimation of this?”

“None in the world. Oh! how could I have dreamed of such a thing? It has fallen on me like a thunder-bolt from the sky, searing my very heart. Good night! good night, dear mother!” he added quickly, and with returning emotion; and, as he spoke, he left the room hurriedly, and went up to his own chamber.

Hours went by, and Mrs. Wellford, too much disturbed for sleep, could hear, ever and always, the footsteps of her unhappy son, as he walked restlessly the floor above her.

In the morning, he came down early, as usual. How that night of suffering had marred his fresh, young countenance, and dimmed the light of his pleasant eyes! He looked as if years had left upon him, their marks of suffering and disappointment. His mother’s eyes grew dim as she read the change, and understood too well how deep must have been the anguish that produced it. But few words were said as they sat at the scarcely tasted morning meal, and in these was not even a remote allusion to the incidents of the evening before. Each spoke to the other in tones of deeper affection; each felt for the other a stronger love. Their hearts were closer knit. Henceforth, in the bosom of Henry Wellford, the altar-fires were to be kept alive only by the oil of *filial* love. Beyond this, the support of his life had failed; and, like a long-absent wanderer, storm-tossed and tempest-marred, he sought rest and refuge where it was surely to be found.

## Chapter 14.

Henry Wellford was sitting at his desk on the morning after the marriage of Helen Lee, with his thoughts far away from business, when his attention was arrested by a remark from Mr. Lane, who was looking over a morning paper.

“Oh my!” said that gentleman, speaking to a friend, who was sitting near him, also engaged with a paper. “Here is news!”

The friend looked up inquiringly.

“Who do you think is married?” asked Mr. Lane. There was a broad smile on his face.

“Who?”

“You wouldn’t guess in a month.”

“Then I won’t be so foolish as to make the trial. Who is the happy man?”

“Old Bullfinch.”

“No!”

“It’s a fact, as I live. Here it is, all in black and white. Listen: Married, on Wednesday evening, 21st, Mr. Adam Bullfinch to Miss Helen Lee.”

“Why, the old sinner! He’d better be thinking of his *grave*. Married! And to Miss Helen Lee? And please, who is the damsel? A spinster of fifty — or some blooming maiden of sweet sixteen? The latter! Well, it does beat all!”

“You remember Lee who failed in the West India trade, after crippling himself through an unfortunate sugar speculation?” said Mr. Lane.

“O yes, very well.”

“You also remember his daughter Helen?”

“I do. She was a lovely girl. But I’ll not believe that *she* has thrown herself away upon old Adam Bullfinch.”

“He is rich; or, at least so esteemed,” said Mr. Lane, meaningly.

“What of that? If my impression of the girl is correct, money would never have bought her. She would have died of starvation, before thus proving *traitor to her woman’s heart*.”

“For the sake of her parents — she may have done this. They are very poor, and Mr. Lee is in bad health. He has not been able to engage in any business for some time.”

The friend shook his head, remarking, “Bad, bad, bad. Nothing will justify a marriage like this. Can she possibly find happiness?”

“She hardly took that into the account,” said Mr. Lane. “So far as she is herself concerned, if the girl I supposed her to be, she expects happiness in her marriage relation, about as much as the martyr looks for pleasure at the stake! She is passing through the *fire*, hoping for something beyond — or, I might rather say, is giving up her very life for the sake of her parents’ external comfort. This, at least, is my interpretation of the matter.”

“How sad to think of,” was remarked, in answer to this. “Ah me! It is a fearful mistake. And *such* a husband for a young, innocent, pure-minded woman! Why, he is the *merest sensualist*. A man who has blotted out from his impure mind, every idea involved in a true marriage! It is shocking to think of. Poor girl! If she has thus *sacrificed herself* for the sake of her parents — she is to be pitied indeed. They should never have allowed it to take place. Better have starved together, than buy luxurious living at *such* a price.”

“As for the luxurious living,” said Mr. Lane, “I am not so certain — at least so far as permanency is concerned.” He spoke in rather a lower tone of voice. “The fact is, Mr. Bullfinch is far from being as shrewd in business matters as formerly, and I wouldn’t be at all astonished if he were to find himself thrown to the wall one of these days. You remember that nice operation of his, in sugars and coffees?”

“Very well. It is said that he lost about ten thousand dollars.”

“Do you think the speculation was so bad as that?”

“I am sure of it. Then, he sold Wayland after everyone else had refused to credit him a single dollar, and bore, in consequence, the heaviest loss sustained by a failure which the merest novice in business, saw must inevitably take place. It’s my opinion, though I wouldn’t like to say it out of doors, that Adam Bullfinch isn’t worth as much now as he was twelve months ago, by twenty thousand dollars.”

“You surprise me,” said the friend.

“And what is more, if he doesn’t show himself wiser in his business operations than he has been for some time past, he’ll find the end of his rope much sooner than he or anyone else dreams of.”

“In that case, the *bird* who has just entered his *cage*, will not have even *gilded bars* against which to beat and bruise herself. Ah! what a mistake that young bride has committed!”

“Yes, look at it as you will, it is all a mistake. What compensation is there in mere wealth, or the external good it procures — for a life-long association against which the heart revolts, even from its profounder depths?”

“And you think her heart will so revolt! That she really has no affection for the old man? That she will not love him with something like *filial* tenderness? That, should wealth fail him, she will not cling to him more closely, hiding his defects lovingly from the world, and sustaining him, even as a vine the decaying branches which bore it at first from the earth, where it lay with no inherent power to lift itself into the pure air and warm sunshine.”

“No!” was the emphatic answer.

“That little word *no*, comprehends a great deal.”

“It does, and fully covers this question. What Mr. Bullfinch is, as a man, we know pretty well. His heart lies not in the center, but beats everywhere, so to speak, in the very external of his life. He comprehends only by the touch. He is, in plainer language, the *mere sensualist* — taking the term in its broader signification — in the world. What does he understand of the delicate emotions, the pure, almost spiritual perceptions, the exquisite appreciation of qualities, possessed by the heart of a truly virtuous woman, such as I believe his *child-wife* to be? Nothing — less than nothing.”

“Not much, I can readily believe,” was answered.

“And it is to be supposed, that the grosser qualities of his mind will be perceived, instinctively, by the finer appreciation of hers — and that such a perception will be accompanied by a suffocating disgust! We cannot reasonably hope for a different result.”

“I suppose not,” was remarked in reply. A customer entered at the moment, and there the conversation, every word of which had fallen upon the ears of Wellford, ended. He knew that Helen had married an *old man*; that he learned on the night previous — but he was not prepared to hear that *Adam Bullfinch* was her husband. Of him, he knew quite enough — knew him to be essentially a gross and impure-minded man.

“Unhappy girl!” he sighed, as a momentary forgetfulness of his own bitter disappointment, left his heart free to pity the wretched victim of a mistaken sense of duty, “into what a *gulf of wretchedness* you have thrown yourself!”

A short time he remained at the desk; then, unable to compose his mind, or to fix his thoughts on business, he went out, and wandered through the streets for an hour, striving, though vainly, to repress the wild agitation into which he had been thrown. Returning to the store, he sought to compose his mind, and give renewed attention to the duties which devolved upon him; but this he found utterly impossible. The disturbance from which he suffered, was no mere *ripple* on the surface of his life — it went to the very depths of his being! The whole current of thought and feeling was in commotion. Strong of will though he was by nature, and habitual in self-control — he failed now, utterly, in every effort to subdue the strife within. A plea of sickness — far from being assumed on his part — sufficed to release him from duties which, in his state of mind, he found it impossible to perform — and he left the store and returned home.

On the following morning, Wellford was absent from his post. On sending to his house, word came back that he was still too much indisposed for business, but hoped to be well enough on the next day to resume his place. But the next day, and the next following, he was still absent. Two weeks elapsed, and then his old position was resumed. All saw that he was a *changed* man, yet none guessed the cause and nature of the change. It was not strongly marked, yet clearly apparent to everyone who was familiar with his daily manner and habit of mind. He did not converse as freely as before, nor take his usual interest in

passing events. He was often absent-minded to a degree that, at first, made his business action partially defective; but this he gradually overcame, and devoted himself to trade with greater concentration of thought than ever. In fact, the new position he had assumed in the house of Lane, Latta & Co. demanded this intense application of all his powers.

It was well for him, perhaps, that such was the case. It prevented the sickly, brooding state into which he would have fallen almost inevitably. He not only felt the responsibility of his new relation in business, but a desire to make the most of it in a worldly point of view, from ends not even fully acknowledged to himself, came gradually into activity. And so he was sustained in the great trial he had been called to pass through; sustained so far, at least, as the world's observation was concerned. No eye penetrated the *secret chambers of his heart*; none knew of the *darkness and coldness* which dwelt there; none saw the *anguish* that overmastered him in his hours of solitude. Intimately blended with all his hopes in life — more intimately than was known even to himself — had been the image of Helen Lee. Though she had turned from him, he felt that there was no estrangement in her heart; and he was patiently awaiting the time that would remove the cloud from the sun of his life, when it was darkened suddenly by a total eclipse.

## Chapter 15.

The little scene enacted at the house of Mr. Bullfinch, on the occasion of bringing home the bride, was unfortunate. The quick temper and strong self-will of the old man, were thus fully exhibited in the beginning; while he saw something more in his young wife than he had expected to find — a dignified, womanly firmness — which he might not hope to *bend*. In the almost fragile, mild, retiring, beautiful girl — he had seen nothing but what was passive or yielding. In winning her to his home, he had looked for the possession of an object from which *only pleasure* would come. Such a thing as *opposition to his will* had never been taken into the account. He scarcely regarded her as one capable of opposition. In an instant, the delusion vanished.

On the other hand, Helen had seen nothing about Mr. Bullfinch that led her to regard him as anything but a kind, mild-tempered man. This sudden ebullition, therefore, while it surprised — armed her against him. And so, between the two, was established, from the very beginning, a position of *antagonism*, not strongly marked at first, but still existing, and the fact thereof never for a moment absent from the consciousness of both parties.

The abandonment of her home by his niece, was a circumstance for which Mr. Bullfinch was altogether unprepared. Not only as a *public rebuke*, did it hurt him; but the act did violence to his real affection for one who had been to him for so many years as a child — loved, indulged and cared for. Had the question of marrying Helen and giving up Fanny been presented for decision — could he have clearly seen this issue — the old man would have hesitated long before taking a step that now promised far less of *happiness*, than his fond imagination had pictured. Fanny knew all his tastes and habits, and had endeared herself to him by a daily regard for his comfort. Inordinately selfish, as such men are — he loved her the more, because she *ministered* to his enjoyments. With her as a daughter, and Helen as a wife, he had anticipated a *culmination of earthly good*. But even as he grasped the *cup* which was to intoxicate him with pleasure — a crude hand jostled it, and spilled more than half its contents upon the earth. Without Fanny, he felt that home would be robbed of half its sunshine; and he had already too good reason to doubt the ability of his young wife to restore the *absent light*. How little of good promise was there, in all this, for the future!

From the beginning, there was, on the part of Helen, a defective estimation of the daily wants of her husband. Her own father was nothing of an epicure, and few men sought, less than he, pleasure in a mere gratification of sensual appetites. She had not learned, therefore, to know the wants of a man like Mr. Bullfinch. Mr. Lee required little service from those around him. Greater pleasure he always derived from *ministering* — than from being *ministered to*. But Mr. Bullfinch thought *only of himself*, and was disappointed and fretted if everything did not bend to his gratification. Considering her home education, and the character of her mind, a mere child was about as well fitted for the wife of Adam Bullfinch — as the young creature he had dragged into a position from the duties of which her whole nature revolted. Had Fanny Milnor remained, the difficulties of Helen's position would have been less; as it was, more was expected of *her* than it was in her power to give.

A week from the inauspicious marriage day had elapsed. It was morning, and Mr. Bullfinch was walking the floor of the breakfast-room with a step the quickness of which showed his mind to be disturbed. Every now and then he would pause, glance at the time-piece on the mantle, and again resume his uneasy movement. At length, his impatience overleaped the barriers of repression; lifting a small table-bell, he rung it violently. Mr. Lee, who was reading, in one of the parlors, supposing this to be the summons to breakfast, came up, and entered the room. He saw, in a moment, by the dark brow of Mr. Bullfinch, and the unfurnished table, his error. And, so, without speaking, he retired, wishing, in his heart, that he were back again, with his wife and child, in the *poor* but independent home from which Helen's inauspicious marriage had lifted them. As he reached the parlor, he heard the bell again, rung louder and more impatiently than before.

A waiting-woman now appeared, in the breakfast-room, in answer to this repeated summons.



“What’s the meaning of this? Why is breakfast not ready?” said Mr. Bullfinch, angrily. “I don’t know, sir,” was the timid reply. Well, *somebody* ought to know! Here it is, half an hour past the usual time. Go down into the kitchen, and see what on earth’s the matter. Nothing goes right in this house, now.”

As Mr. Bullfinch said this, Helen entered the room, fixing, as she did so, her large, calm eyes upon him, with a look which subdued, yet inwardly chafed him.

“I wish you would see a little after things,” said he, in a greatly modified, yet *reproving* voice. “I like *order* and *punctuality*. I’ve always been used to it — and and must have it.”

“What is wrong, now?” inquired Helen, coldly.

“Wrong! Don’t you see that it’s almost an hour past our usual breakfast time?”

Helen glanced at the time-piece, and merely said —

“Is it any fault of *mine*?”

A rebuking reply trembled on the lips of Mr. Bullfinch; but he had already learned to fear the excitement of certain moods in his young bride; and, therefore, wisely restrained its utterance.

In the pause thus created, and while both parties stood looking at each other, with something of defiance in their manner, the waiter came in with breakfast.

“Ready, at last,” said Mr. Bullfinch, moodily. “This will never suit me.”

The bell was rung, and Mr. and Mrs. Lee joined their daughter and her husband at the table.

Silently the meal passed. Each heart was oppressed. How different from the *pleasant breakfasts* enjoyed by Mr. Bullfinch and his niece for so many years! As mistress of his household, Fanny had studied and met her uncle’s tastes and peculiar habits in almost everything. She was truly attached to him, and derived pleasure from thus anticipating and meeting his wants. Affection made the service delightful. No morning meal was set upon the table, in the preparation of which she had not given some direction, and in which was not some dish which her epicure uncle regarded as a favorite. And so, they ever met at breakfast in cheerful mood, and enjoyed it together.

Ah! how different were all the daily meals now! Mr. Bullfinch had *bought a wife with gold* — a young and beautiful wife — and she was now the mistress of his household. *Bought love!* It was mocking him already like an unsubstantial shadow.

Silently the morning meal passed, and comfortless to Mr. Bullfinch. Not a dish had the old taste, for the directing hand of the absent one was lacking. This, to the old man, was a serious drawback, for in *eating* was included a large measure of his *daily satisfaction* in life. Of this, his young wife knew nothing. She did not, in fact, comprehend how anyone could make the pleasures of the *table*, a paramount thing. Her father had always been to her, the type of manly virtues and endowments, and he never found fault with what was set before him — but ever partook of the plainest food with apparent relish. Her mother had little taste for the kitchen. And so, the domestic education of Helen in no way fitted her for the wife of Adam Bullfinch.

The unenjoyed breakfast over, the old man left for his store, in no pleasant mood, and Helen was alone with her parents.

“I never saw *such* a man!” exclaimed Mrs. Lee, almost as soon as he had left their presence, and before the street door closed on his retiring form. “Nothing *pleases* him; and he is as *sour*, at times, as vinegar!”

“Breakfast was late, and it fretted him,” said Helen, in an apologetic manner.

“I wonder if he never had breakfast late in his life before?” replied Mrs. Lee.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” Helen spoke in an absent manner. “But, we must try and remedy the defect. It may easily be done, I suppose, and if so, I must do it.”

“Yes, my child,” said Mr. Lee — “do it by all means. Mr. Bullfinch is a man of orderly, punctual habits, and *little matters* like this fret him a great deal. You will soon get to understand his wishes and peculiarities, and it will be your duty, and I hope your pleasure” — Mr. Lee’s voice faltered a little in spite of his effort to retain its calmness, “to meet the one, and adapt yourself to the others.”

“I will try to do right, father,” Helen replied. Her voice was steady, but her father saw that her eyes were humid.

“Ah!” he sighed to himself, as she passed from the room, “what a trial! May God give her *strength* to bear it.”

## Chapter 16.

A month had passed since Fanny Milnor went, a voluntary exile from her uncle's house. To her, the trial had not proved a light one. Much of this time she had suffered from a depressing home-sickness; and nightly she dreamed of the old pleasant place, and of her kind uncle. Yet, had she not once repented of the step which she had taken.

She was sitting, one day, about this time, in no cheerful mood, trying, but in vain, to become interested in the pages of a book she was reading, when a servant came to her door, and said that a lady had called and wished to see her.

"Did she send up her name?" inquired Fanny.

The servant replied in the negative.

"Why didn't you ask her name?"

"I did," was answered, "but she said it made no difference, and that she would prefer seeing you in your own room."

Fanny thought for a few moments, and then said, "Tell her to walk up."

The servant retired, and Fanny awaited her return with the visitor, wondering all the while, who it could be. Soon footsteps were heard on the stairs, and along the passage leading to her room.

The door was again opened by the servant; a lady stepped in, and the servant retired.

Instantly the face of Fanny Milnor flushed to a deep crimson; her eyes gave forth an indignant light, while her lips arched scornfully.

"*You* here! I did, not expect this," she said, while the stain of *anger* rose even to her brow. Then, with a suddenly assumed, yet mocking smile, she added, "To *what* am I indebted to a visit from Mrs. Bullfinch?"

"Helen — for it was she — had prepared herself for this, or even a more cutting reception. The bitter scorn of the girl, therefore, did not discompose her. Though not offered a chair, she seated herself, her wonderfully calm and penetrating eyes fixed with a steady look upon Fanny, who still remained standing.

"May I pass a few sober words with you, Fanny?" she now said, in a voice so low and serious, that the indignant girl felt its influence, yet was in no way inclined to bend from the haughty, repellant attitude she had assumed towards the wife of her uncle.

"What can *you* have to say to me?" was her sharply uttered retort.

"Much that you *ought* to hear," said Helen.

"Away! Leave me! We can hold no fellowship," exclaimed Fanny, passionately.

"Fanny Milnor!"

"Go!" And turning her face aside, the niece of Mr. Bullfinch waved her visitor with an imperative gesture, to retire.

"No, Fanny," was the undisturbed answer. "I am prepared for all this, and much more. Having entered upon the present work, I am not to be turned aside from my purpose by the first difficulty that presents itself. I have come to talk with you about your uncle; the old man in whose behalf you appealed to me so earnestly."

The arched lip did not in the least unbend itself; nor was there any softening of Fanny's cold, scornful eye; neither did she answer a word.

"Your uncle is not happy," said Helen.

"Happy!" was sharply and suddenly answered. "Happy! Was he so mad as to expect it with *you*?"

"If so," returned Helen calmly, "he has already awakened from his delusion. But, he was forewarned."

"In truth was he!" ejaculated Fanny.

"If by you, then twice forewarned," said Helen, as she looked steadily on the proud, defiant girl — so steadily, that the eyes of the latter sunk beneath her glance, and in slight confusion of thought, she said repeating the words of her visitor:

"Twice forewarned?"

"Yes, twice."

“And by whom beside myself?”

“I forewarned him.”

“You?”

“Yes, I; and repeated the warning. But, he would not hear me. That, however, is past now; and for either you or I to refer to it is fruitless. Enough that your uncle is unhappy, and will remain so until *you* return to him.”

That I will never do!” was the positive declaration of Fanny. “When I left his house — I left it forever. What! do you think that I would share the *honors* thereof with you?”

Again her lip curled with ineffable scorn.

The pale cheeks of Helen now flushed; and her hitherto steady eyes, grew restless. The loss of self-possession, however, was but momentary. When she spoke again, her voice was as steady as before.

“You can take all the honor if you will. I have no ambition. Make your uncle happy if you can. Supply to him again what he hoped, but vainly hoped, to find in me. That is your duty. My position need not touch yours. Never fear that I will interfere with your old prerogatives. Glad will I be to have you resume them. If you love your uncle, Fanny, return to him.”

“And did *he* send you to lure me back again?” said Fanny, bitterly. “Why did he not come himself? But, he knew the power of your eloquence!”

This meaning assertion, broke through the crust that protected the feelings of Helen. Her face, that had resumed its paleness, flushed again, and her eyes fell under the sharp glances of Fanny, while her form seemed to shrink into smaller dimensions. As soon as she could trust her voice with words, she said —

“Our assumptions are often far wide of the truth, Fanny. In this instance, yours are so.”

Steady though the voice was, it had in it a heart-touching mournfulness, to which even the cold heart of Fanny was not altogether armored. But she repressed the rising sympathy, or pity, which ever it might be called, and said as coldly, and in as repellent a manner as at first —

“Why did not my uncle come himself? Why did he send *you*?”

“He did not send me,” replied Helen.

“You have come at his instance, at least.”

“No.”

“Is he sick?”

“He is unhappy; and sickness of the soul needs medicine — quite as much as sickness of the body. For years, you have been the light of his household. All is dark since your withdrawal. Return, then, and be to him as of old; return, Fanny, and my heart will bless you. I have no power to chase the *shadows* from his heart and brow.”

“Why, then, did you assume an office that you cannot fill?” asked Fanny, sternly.

“To err is human,” was the touching, mournfully uttered reply.

“A poor excuse for *premeditated wrong*,” said Fanny. “But it weighs nothing here. With subtlety, from base ends, you adroitly flattered my uncle, until you drew him within your *toils*!”

“It is false!” exclaimed Helen, with an emphasis and an energy that startled her auditor. “False to the utmost meaning of the word.”

She had risen to her feet, and stood, with her body drawn to its full height, and her large eyes glaring upon the face of Fanny Milnor, who, in momentary surprise, retreated a pace or two.

“False, proud, harsh-judging girl!” she added, with a womanly dignity and self-possession that, for the time, completely subdued her listener. “I claim to be as pure in motive, as free from all that is base, as yourself. If I have erred, it has not been in *self-seeking*. Heaven knows I expected no good for myself — and I shall not be disappointed!”

“What did you expect, please?” inquired Fanny with a covert sneer.

“Silence!” was the stern, subduing answer to this. “I will bear from you no further insult. Do your own duty — before you question the right or wrong of my actions. You have *deserted* the relative to whom you owe a debt of gratitude, a life-service might not pay. I have told you that this desertion has robbed him of happiness; that no one can supply your place. Thus far I have done my duty. It is left for you, so quick to censure others on insufficient grounds, to do yours. Good day!”

And, without waiting for a response, Helen left the room.

## Chapter 17.

The effort made by Helen to induce Fanny to return to her uncle's house, proved unsuccessful. The girl's entire being had revolted against the unnatural union, and now, look at it and think of it as she would, the *intense disgust* at first created, remained. The interview just described had inspired her with a degree of respect for Helen not before felt, and left in her heart a feeling of pity for the unhappy creature, who gave painful evidence, not only in her countenance, but in the tones of her voice, of having *suffered intensely*. This was one thing; but to live in daily fellowship with her as the wife of her uncle, was another matter altogether. To do that, she did not regard herself as under obligation; and so she remained steady to her first purpose. Mr. Bullfinch was not the man to go after her, and seek to bring her back to his home. Had he put any faith in her threat to leave him, he would have used every inducement in his power to prevent her doing so. But, now that she had actually gone away — his *pride* would not let him take even the first step towards prevailing on her to return. The effort which Helen had made, was entirely without his knowledge.

Time, while it wore away some of the rough edges which at first produced unpleasant contact, did very little towards bringing into harmony the opposing elements which a *false marriage* had bound together. A closer union with Mr. Bullfinch, in no way broke down the *repugnance* which, from the first, possessed the mind of Helen — in no way lessened the pain of the *living sacrifice* she had made, and was still making.

The change produced upon the state and temper of the young wife, by the new relation into which she had come, was almost inconceivable. At the end of six months, she was so altered that a familiar friend, who had been absent through the period, would scarcely have known her. Not in the breaking down of her health was this apparent, though, most of the time, her face had an unnatural paleness; nor was it shown in a spiritless or melancholy exterior. Most the change was seen in the development of a *more decided character*; in an occasional haughtiness of manner, savoring at times of heartlessness, never displayed before her marriage. She seemed to regard her new position as one of defense, if not actual warfare, and to have armed herself at every point.

Although Helen tried, and faithfully, for a time, so to administer the affairs of her husband's household as to meet his wants and wishes — she was unable to satisfy his expectations; and he, too old and confirmed in his ways to bend to the new order of things, fretted, or stormed, as the case might be — thus making matters worse instead of better. A milder temper on his part; a giving up, in a measure, if only in appearance, of self, and a graceful acceptance of the earnestly made efforts of Helen to have all things as he desired — would have encouraged and softened her feelings towards him. But, he only thought of and felt the disagreeable differences which now existed, and continually *chafed* his wife by a *complaining* or *angry* reference thereto. Mr. Lee did what he could, in his weak way, to ameliorate what was around him, while the mother of Helen was ever making things worse by an unwise interference when Mr. Bullfinch was present, or indignant censures on his conduct when he was absent.

A few times had Helen been abroad with her husband since their marriage. From social or public appearances, she had shrunk with a reluctance, that it required all her strength of will to overcome. Of her personal appearance and accomplishments, Mr. Bullfinch was very proud; and having no delicacy concerning the diversity in their ages, would have *shown her off* on all occasions, could he have made her passive to his will. This, however, was a matter in which he rarely had his own way. When he wished her to go out with him, she never failed to have some good reason for desiring to remain at home; and far oftener than was agreeable to her husband, refused positively to go with him to places of public amusement, or to join in private entertainments. In company, the old man was ever desirous of bringing his wife forward; urging her to play and sing invariably on these occasions. She had a fine voice, and sang and played with exquisite taste and skill. But, thus to be thrust forward in strange companies — her circle of personal and intimate friends was very limited — was what she could not endure, and she yielded, therefore, only on few occasions to the wishes of her husband, who not infrequently lost patience with

her, and manifested, in mixed companies, to the mortification of Helen, and the delight of those who were ill-natured and fond of idle gossip — an overbearing and fretful temper.

Something like a year had elapsed since Helen's marriage, when, one day, invitations were sent for a party at the house of Mr. Lane. The first impulse of Mrs. Bullfinch was to destroy them, and thus leave her husband in ignorance of the fact that they had ever been received. Upon second thought, however, she hesitated to do this. Knowing the temper of Mr. Bullfinch, she did not wish to be involved in the *trouble* which would surely follow his discovery of what had been done. So, after pondering the matter for some time, she wisely determined to let things take their course.

"What is this?" said Mr. Bullfinch, as his eyes rested on the note of invitation, which Helen had been at no pains to conceal, and, as he spoke, he took it up and read it.

"Ah, indeed!" he remarked, with a pleased manner. "Company at Mr. Lane's, on Thursday evening."

"So it seems," remarked Helen, indifferently.

"Something brilliant, no doubt. I've been at several of Mr. Lane's entertainments, and they are handsome affairs. We will go, of course. I always regretted that you did not accept the last invitation. Now, I am sure you will be delighted."

"I care but little for company," said Helen.

"So much the worse for you," replied her husband, speaking in a quickened tone of voice. "If you would go abroad more frequently, instead of moping, as you do, at home, from week in to week out — you would have better health and lighter spirits. Really, Helen, you wrong yourself, your husband, and society, by the way you are acting. I like company — am social in my habits — have many friends whom I desire to meet; but you —"

Mr. Bullfinch felt himself growing warm, and, therefore, checked the utterance of what was on his tongue. He had learned to forbear a little, as the re-action of his young wife was at times, of a character far from agreeable.

"You need not deny yourself any social pleasures on my account, Mr. Bullfinch," said Helen. "I shall always be gratified to have you go into company. If I am happier at home — then why drag me out into the world, between which and myself is no congeniality?"

"I cannot bear to hear you talk in this way, Helen," replied Mr. Bullfinch, with real kindness of manner. "What would I not give to see you cheerful and happy — ready to take the world as it is, and enjoy all the good it has to offer! This is my philosophy, and if it was yours, how much of sunlight would be on your way — and on mine," — he added in a lower voice.

Helen drew a deep sigh, but did not answer. She felt the utter impossibility of being what her husband desired her to be; and yet, as a wife, it was her duty to do all in her power for his happiness. A clear perception of duty, accompanied by this sense of the impossibility of its performance, so saddened her spirit, that, in spite of her struggles to hide what she felt, tears flowed from her eyes.

It was not often that she had permitted Mr. Bullfinch to see her weep. Intensely as she had too frequently suffered, she had been able, through pride, strengthened by a strong will — to subdue the *woman's weakness* which melted into tears. And there was another reason. She did not love her husband, and, therefore, in her fellowship with him, was rarely affected with any of the tenderer emotions.

It was a strange thing for Mr. Bullfinch to see his wife in tears; and it moved him greatly.

"My poor, dear child," said he, with unaffected kindness, as he laid his hand caressingly upon her. "Do not go on so about this. If you are so adverse to going into company, I will not urge it upon you. We can be happy with each other at *home*. Try, dear Helen! to be more cheerful. I love you truly, and will do all in my power to secure your happiness. Have I not done so from the first? Perhaps I have been strong-headed, at times, from confirmed habit; this, you must look over and forgive. I am a little quick-tempered, but it is soon past and forgotten."

And as he thus talked, the feelings of Helen softened more and more, and, for awhile, she wept freely. Thought was clearer as emotion at length subsided, and she saw more distinctly her duty, than she had seen it for a long time. A softer expression came into her face, and her large eyes drooped with something of a woman's tenderness.

"I will go with you to Mr. Lane's," said she, in a gentle voice.

“We will decline the invitation, if it is at all disagreeable to you, Helen,” replied Mr. Bullfinch.

“I would rather go. It ought not to be disagreeable. I know that I seclude myself too much; that I am unjust to you. But I will try to overcome my weakness.”

Her voice trembled through part of this sentence, but regained its steadiness at the close.

“It is not good for us to keep ourselves too much away from society,” remarked Mr. Bullfinch. “The *mind will prey upon itself*. In cheerful contact with the world, we gain cheerfulness. As face answers to face in a glass, so does the face of a man to his friend. We reflect our mutual good feelings, and thus share them as common property. I am glad to hear you say that you will go to Mr. Lane’s. I know you will enjoy yourself.”

How little did he know of her true state of mind! Enjoy herself in a mirthful company, with the spirit of which her *palsied heart* had nothing in common! — in a company where she would be as the wife of an old man, the observed of many curious observers, and the subject of ungenerous and heartless comment! Enjoy herself! It was the anticipation of an *utter impossibility*. Ah! Mr. Bullfinch little dreamed of the *self-abnegation* involved in the declared purpose of his wife to go with him to the brilliant party that was to be given at Mr. Lane’s. He was too much pleased at her assent in the matter, to look very curiously below the surface; and too little skilled in the *mysteries of woman’s nature* to comprehend what he saw, even if it were possible for him to open a window into her heart.

Preparation for the event was next to be made. Mr. Bullfinch expressed his wish that Helen should appear with befitting elegance; and that there might be nothing to prevent it, supplied her liberally with money, besides presenting her with some rich and costly jewelry. If Helen had consulted her own tastes and feelings, she would have attired herself with extreme simplicity, in order to attract as little attention as possible. But knowing what her husband desired and expected, and aware how much he would be disappointed if she did not dress with an *elegance* that accorded with his views, she abandoned her own preferences. In doing this, she was still governed by good taste.

Having consented to dress for the sake of pleasing her husband — a change of *feeling* came over Mrs. Bullfinch. Gradually, an interest in the work of preparation was awakened. As one article of attire after another was chosen, and, in imagination, she saw the effect which it produced, the *pride of appearance* grew active, and something like a *spirit of emulation* warmed the cold atmosphere in which her thoughts had moved.

As strange as it may seem, this feeling gradually increased, until Helen began to look forward to the coming entertainment with something like pride and pleasure. If she was to be the observed of many observers — then admiration, as well as pity, would be excited. Once admitted to a place in her bosom, the feeling grew stronger; and by the time the evening of the party had arrived, the old man’s bride was anticipating the occasion as one in which triumphs were to be achieved. And she did not greatly err in this. But of their *nature*, there came no foreshadowing to her mind.

The evening of the party at Mr. Lane’s had come, and the interest now manifested therein by Helen, was a matter of surprise both to her husband and parents — pleased surprise to Mr. Bullfinch and her mother, and, to her father, who had observed with a sad hopelessness of feeling, the unnatural changes which were taking place in the *character* and *mental states* of his daughter, a source of at least some small degree of satisfaction.

If, in anything, Mr. Bullfinch was dissatisfied with the appearance of his wife, when she joined him, on descending from her chamber, dressed for the occasion, it was in the lack of certain showy points which her good taste had led her to reject. Yet, for all this, never had she appeared so beautiful in his eyes — never had he felt prouder of her than now.

“You really look charming, Helen,” he said, as he gazed upon her with lover-like admiration. “Charming,” he repeated, as his eyes ranged over her person.

“Do I?” was her simple response; yet, in the tones of her voice, the most indifferent ear could have detected an expression of pleasure.

“And you would have looked more beautiful still,” he added, “if you had consulted less carefully, your too severe taste. A little more ornament would have made the whole effect *perfect*.”

Helen smiled rather feebly, as she answered, “My own opinion is, that I am rather over-dressed.”

“O, no, no; not in a single particular,” said the ardent, admiring old man. “Your excellent taste will always prevent your falling into that error.”

“Others may see with different eyes,” replied Helen, as a shadow flitted over her face.

For the *sober moods* of his wife, Mr. Bullfinch had no fancy. He saw the passing shadow, and said, instantly —

“Come, dear; the carriage is waiting.” Without further remark, Helen passed from the house, and was soon whirling away towards the elegant residence of Mr. Lane.

It was not without sore conflict, and bitter self-denial, that Helen had decided to make one of this party, the second which she had been induced to attend since her marriage. After her decision, she came under the influence, as has been seen, of a new state. A certain *worldliness* of feeling overlaid the instinctive qualities of her mind, and gave birth to a spirit of display, and a desire to make an impression. She was too conscious that, in marrying an old man, she had forfeited the good opinion of her gender. She had but to take counsel of her own thoughts and feelings, to know how the act would be regarded. She had but to refer to her own loss of self-respect, to know how she would be esteemed among right-feeling women. She could not, therefore, go into society hoping to win regard and love — hoping to gain a position such as she might be proud to occupy. As she must appear on the social stage, it was needful to *act a part*; and her latent pride of character prompted her to choose a *brilliant* part, and to act it well. If she could not inspire a sentiment of *respect* — she was resolved to win *admiration*.

This was the state of mind which the *unhappy victim of a false marriage* was endeavoring to super-induce upon her real character. The effects of her last struggles with good impulses, were visible in the flitting shadow which darkened her young brow, as she was about passing from the scene of *rehearsal* at home — to make her *appearance* on the *stage* at Mr. Lane’s.

As Mrs. Bullfinch entered the brilliantly lighted and already well-filled drawing-rooms, not a trace of weakness could be seen on her beautiful countenance, that was flushed with hues warm from her now lightly beating heart. Leaning on the arm of her husband, she moved amid the crowd, extorting admiration, and conscious that it was given.

“Who is she?”

“Is that her father?”

Such questions, in suppressed tones, or low whispers, reached, ever and always, her ear. They did not awaken in her bosom a quicker throb. She was fully prepared for them. None knew better than she, that her husband was old enough to be her father, and she did not expect strangers to the true relation that existed, to be guiltless of error on the subject. Her *pride* had been wounded, over and over again, from these mistakes, so naturally made; but she had covered her coat of armor with new plates of harder and more highly polished steel, and especially for this occasion; and now the arrows rebounded from her protected bosom, with scarcely a jar against the armor.

“Beautiful!”

“What a splendid creature!”

“Not her husband?”

Was it a well-bred company, which remarks like these were loudly enough uttered to reach her ears — in fact, uttered at all?

Well-bred, or not, such whispered remarks were made, and were heard by the young wife. We only note the fact. If such things indicate lack of good-breeding, then there is a sad lack of this essential of truly good society in many of our fashionable drawing-rooms, and among people who effect to hold everything vulgar in abhorrence.

But Helen was *protected* at every point. She knew the quality of those among whom she was going, and was well enough *read* in the *book of human nature*, to understand the lessons which were profitable to be learned. And, yet, while she was altogether unaffected by a reference to her position as the *wife of an old man*, she was far from being insensible to the *admiration* she had designed to awaken. That produced a warmer glow in her bosom, and deepened the rose which spread its beautiful petals on her cheeks.



As the wife of Adam Bullfinch, Helen attained at once a social position. The standing thus settled, her personal attractions made her the *center of a circle*, in which she was no shrinking girl, timid of her powers — but a self-possessed woman, entirely equal to the maintenance of her position, yet never guilty of over-acting or indelicate boldness; and, therefore extorting a sentiment of *respect*, as well as compelling *admiration*. While she made no overtures, she rejected no offered attentions; and all who came in contact with her were, in a measure, constrained to a favorable impression.

It was not long after Helen entered the drawing-rooms of Mr. Lane, before she became aware of the presence of two people, who if she did not hold her natural feelings with a double rein, would have power to break down her *assumed character*, and compel her to retire in utter inability to sustain the *part* in acting, which she had made so good a beginning. These were Henry Wellford, and the niece of her husband, Fanny Milnor.

What she was to endure, from the presence of Wellford, may be imagined from the fact that she had not met him since her marriage, and had ever looked forward to such a meeting, as a *trial* of all others to be *dreaded*. Far away, in the most sacred chamber of her heart, a chamber with the door closed, and the secret of entrance known only to herself — was enshrined an image — the image of Henry Wellford. He was her first love and her only love, and to him would her *heart* remain true as the needle, even until its last feeblest pulsation. How many an hour, had she brooded over the picture of a meeting, which must sooner or later take place, and striven to *school her heart* into an *icy calmness*; but never in imagination could she compel the quick, throbbing pulses to beat low and evenly.

Never did she *unlock the door of that secret chamber*, open it, and stand reverently before the enshrined image — that she did not suffer from profound agitation. How, then, was she to meet her *heart's idol*, face to face, in utter hopelessness — and maintain a composed exterior? We may not wonder that she grew faint, nor that her cheek paled, as her eyes rested upon him. An electric consciousness of her position, and the fatal consequences which might follow a betrayal of her real feelings, brought back the color to cheeks and brow, and restored the fire of her eyes. To aid the recovery of her self-possession, she turned her eyes from him, and strove to forget the changed face that came upon her suddenly, like an apparition. It was some time before she ventured to look in the direction where she had first seen him.

Although frequently urged by his largely increasing circle of friends, to go into society, this was the first time that Wellford had been dragged from his self-imposed, and, to most of those who knew him, incomprehensible *seclusion*. But for the importunities of Mr. Lane, who disregarded all excuses, he would have spent this evening in his quiet home, instead of in the agitating sphere of a fashionable party.

It so happened that, soon after Wellford's entrance into the drawing-rooms, he received an introduction to Fanny Milnor, whose thoughtful, subdued, and rather retiring manners, combined with an agreeable address, gave him a bias in her favor. Change and trial had left their marks on her also. He was conversing with Fanny, when he first became aware of Helen's presence. He was remarking with more than usual animation, upon something which she had said, when, on lifting his eyes, he encountered those of Mrs. Bullfinch. They were fixed upon him with an intensesness which seemed like *fascination*. She seemed to be reading not only his countenance, but his very soul; and, while she did so, betrayed to him the secret of her own heart. No oral language was needed to tell him that he was still beloved; and with a devotion far greater than he had dreamed of, in the earlier and happier days, when lip-language falteringly told the story of affection. For a few moments, he was stunned — bewildered. Before he recovered himself, or Helen could withdraw her eyes from his, Fanny's gaze took the direction of her companion's, and she too first became aware of the presence of her uncle's wife.

There was a heightened color in the face of Fanny Milnor, when Wellford turned to her again, and her voice had lost its steadiness at her next utterance. His voice was also changed and husky. Both suddenly lost interest in the subject on which they had been conversing; were less pointed in their remarks, and gradually lapsed into silence.

They were sitting, each busy with new thoughts, when a young lady friend came to the side of Fanny, and said, in a low voice, as she glanced across the room,

“Have you seen Mrs. Bullfinch?”

“Yes,” was the low, and seemingly reluctant reply.

“She makes quite a showy appearance,” said the other.

“Yes.”

“I’m afraid she’s utterly heartless,” was added.

“How could you look for anything else,” said Fanny, with a *bitterness of tone* which almost caused Wellford to startle.

“Young ladies with much heart, don’t usually enter into marriages of this kind,” remarked the friend.

“*Heart* has nothing to do with it,” said Fanny. “None but motives the most *sordid*, could ever have induced Helen Lee to marry my uncle. I told him so, but he would not listen to me. He has had good cause, I have reason to believe, long before this, for a correction of his opinions in regard to her.”

“Do they not live *happily* together?” inquired the young friend.

“Happily! What a question to ask? One might as soon expect repose on the eternal billows — as happiness in such a union. They may *tolerate* each other, but as for happiness? — it comes not within the range of their experience. Look at Helen’s face.”

The young lady turned her eyes towards Mrs. Bullfinch.

“Did you know her before her marriage?” asked Fanny.

“I used to see her sometimes,” was answered.

“Do you remember her countenance as it was then?”

“Distinctly. I used to think it a very sweet, innocent face.”

“Look at it now!”

“It is much changed, certainly; but is more womanly and brilliant, if I may use the word. What splendid eyes!”

“Their splendor has been acquired at too great cost.”

“At what cost?”

“They shine not from *heart-fires*, kindled by the *breath of love*. Dead embers and ashes, lie upon the altar whereon she has offered up her sacrifices. Their light comes from without — they reflect only the glare of a vain, weak, debasing desire for admiration.”

“You speak strongly,” said Mr. Wellford, now first trusting himself in utterance; yet not venturing to look Fanny steadily in the face, lest he should betray something of what he felt. He was now first aware that his companion was the niece of Mr. Bullfinch, of whose indignant withdrawal from her uncle’s house, he had heard at the time of its occurrence.

“I do, and with reason,” answered Fanny.

“Mr. Bullfinch is your uncle?”

“He is.”

“Excuse me; I was not aware of this until a moment ago. You did not approve the marriage?”

“How could I?”

“You knew Helen Lee?”

“She was my teacher.”

“How did you regard her?”

“With a respect and esteem amounting almost to affection.”

“Upon what were these based?”

“On her *supposed* qualities.”

“May not your uncle have been as much attracted by these, as you were?”

“I have tried not to blame him,” said Fanny, in a low, troubled voice, partly speaking to herself. “She must have acted on him with consummate arts!”

“How often did she visit your house?” asked Wellford, now resolved to gain all possible information on a subject that had been, to him, a blight and a mystery.

“Twice a week.”

“For what purpose?”

“To give me lessons, according to engagement.”

“Was your uncle at home on these occasions?”

“Rarely during the earlier times of her visits; but, towards the last, quite frequently.”

“Did you then see anything in her manner towards him, that awakened suspicion?”

“Nothing. The announcement, when finally made, came upon me like a thunderbolt! I was utterly unprepared for it.”

“Her arts must have been consummate, indeed,” said Wellford, with an irony that Miss Milnor did not fail to perceive, “if it could win your uncle’s regard, without in the least exciting your suspicion. When and where did she act upon him? Did they meet except at your house?”

“I know not. Nothing that occurred, ever led me to think so. But, it strikes me, Mr. Wellford,” said Fanny, with a frankness that his rather close interrogations fully warranted, “that your questions are rather searching, and betray more than an *idle interest* in the wife of my uncle. It is said that she had a lover.” And she turned her eyes fully upon the young man’s face. “Did *you* ever hear whether this were so or nor!”

Vainly Wellford strove to keep down the tell-tale blood that a quicker heart-throb sent bounding up to his face. He was only in part successful. Before he could frame a reply, they were joined by two or three friends, and the conversation took a new shape, much to his relief.

## Chapter 18.

It was on this occasion, that Mr. Bullfinch and his niece met for the first time since Fanny turned from him with so stinging a rebuke. As each became conscious of the other's presence, each felt that a time of *trial* had come. Neither knew the exact feeling of the other, nor how the other would act. It would not do — each felt this — to meet without recognition; and it would little comport with good breeding, to make any marked exhibition of coldness or ill-feeling. As long as it could well be done, each avoided the other; but, at last, they were thrown into immediate contact, and in such a way, that they must act as total strangers, or pass a few words with each other. Many eyes were on them, and they knew it.

They met, but not a ripple on the surface was discovered even by the closely observant. A few pleasantly uttered common-places passed between them, and then they were separated by the crowd, each to breathe more freely, and with a sense of *relief* that the first meeting was over.

In the mean time, Mrs. Bullfinch was drawing an admiring circle around her, and *acting her part* with consummate skill. In assuming a new character, she seemed to have become a new creature, with new powers, and a new education. Surprise and pleasure were elicited on all sides. If there was, as might naturally be expected from one in her circumstances, a little over-acting — the defect was seen only by a few. Most of those who were in pleased contact with her, saw nothing in the *assumed character*, but what was real. She did not force herself into a prominent position; she exhibited nothing of boldness; did not act so much as react — and in no case inordinately. In a word, a strongly-grounded admiration of the woman soon came to be a prevailing sentiment, and even Fanny Milnor, who kept rigidly aloof, yet maintained a close observation, felt her prejudices insensibly melting away.

“What a sacrifice!”

“And *she*, the wife of that old man?”

“It is inconceivable!”

“What could she have seen in *him*?”

These, and similar expressions, passed occasionally, from lip to lip.

“I am altogether puzzled,” said one.

“She is an enigma to me,” said another.

“She is a brilliant, fascinating woman,” remarked a third.

“There'll be a rich young widow for somebody before long,” said a fourth, shrugging his shoulders and arching his eyebrows. “I rather think, that I will defer my matrimonial speculations for a few years.”

“Do you think old Bullfinch so very rich?” was responded to this.

“I would like to be worth about half what he is,” replied the first speaker.

“There is some difference of opinion on this head. His paper has been hawked about rather freely for the last six months.”

“That may not be his fault.”

“Though the fault of his credit. Some of the banks, I know, will not touch it.”

“You surprise me.”

“What I say is true, nevertheless. I saw a man, only yesterday, who had over fifteen thousand dollars of his paper, which he was offering at one-and-quarter percent.”

“That looks a little dubious.”

“So it strikes me. You can wait for the *widow* — but, take my advice, and don't build too strongly on the *fortune*.”

“I don't know,” was returned with a smile, “that I could resist the lady's personal attractions, if they survived to her widowhood.”

“That may not be for another twenty years. Old Bullfinch comes from a long-lived generation.”

“O dear!” lightly responded the other. “We can't have everything just our own way. But, what could have possessed *her* to marry that old man? Not love, certainly.”

“No, it was money.”

“Then she must be a *heartless* woman.”

“Something is wrong, without doubt. The marriage is unnatural, and must have had its origin in constraint, or overweening avarice. There has been a *lack of womanly virtue* somewhere. Do you know that the niece of Mr. Bullfinch, whom he had raised almost as his own child, left the house on the very day she entered it, and had not crossed the threshold since?”

“No!”

“It is yet true.”

“Who was she?”

“A Miss Milnor — and she is here tonight.”

“Ah! Can you point her out to me? I would like to observe her conduct in relation to them. It will present a fine *study in human nature*.”

“There she is in conversation with Mr. Wellford.”

“Ah! That’s the young lady. Well, there is certainly a look of spirit about her.”

The two men observed, in silence, for some moments, the personages alluded to. They were in earnest conversation.

“Did you see that look?” said one of them suddenly.

“What look?” asked the other.

“The look cast upon them by Mrs. Bullfinch.”

“No.” And, as he spoke, he turned his eyes towards Helen. “There’s something in that which I don’t just comprehend,” he said, after a brief observation.

“Nor do I. Unless I err, there was something of the *fire of jealousy* in her eyes.”

“Just so, I read them. There! See! She is looking at them again. What can it mean? Ah! Now I remember having heard something of a *lover*. Can *Wellford* possibly be the man?”

“Why should she give him up — for an old man like Bullfinch? His worldly condition, if not quite so good now, promises, in my opinion, to be much the best. You know he is a member of the house of Lane, Latta & Co.”

“I do. But little more than a year ago, he was only a clerk in that house. His prospects at the time Miss Lee was married, and his prospects now, are very different.”

“I must know something farther in regard to this matter,” said the other. “There’s a new study in human nature here, at least, for me.”

“If you would probe the matter pretty effectually, I will suggest a mode of procedure,” remarked the friend.

“Well?”

“Are you acquainted with Mr. Bullfinch?”

“I am not.”

“Does he know you?”

The friend shook his head.

“He is on the side of the room away from his wife just now.”

“So I perceive.”

“As a stranger you are not supposed to be aware of the fact, that so beautiful a young creature — a *mere girl* as it were — holds to an old man like him the relation of a wife.”

“Go on. I am all attention.”

“Approach, and enter into conversation. It will then be the easiest matter in the world to make allusion to the charming Mrs. Bullfinch.”

“Ah! I take your drift. You wish me to excite his jealousy?”

“Make allusion to *Wellford*. It will be the more effectual if Mrs. Bullfinch should happen to cast upon the young gentleman a glance or two, such as we detected just now.”

“I understand my part fully,” was replied. “Thank you for the suggestion. If I don’t awaken a *tempest* in at least one mind tonight, then I’m mistaken.”

“Take care that you don’t do harm,” said the friend, in a warning voice.

“Harm! what harm?”

“You may destroy the peace of that old man.”

“Would it not be a *just punishment* for his wickedness in marrying that young creature? What right had he to rob her of her true love in life? To lay a *sacrifice* like that — upon the *reeking altar of sensuality*. Hah! I burn with indignation at the thought. If I can lay upon him a *scorpion lash* — right freely will I do it!”

“As you choose. But, to my thinking, you are assuming towards him, rather unadvisedly, the joint office of *judge* and *executioner*. In matters like this, all are free to act as they think best. *Consent* must precede marriage. His wife, therefore, is quite as much a party in this business, as himself. Why he alone should be punished for a *mutual* fault, is what I do not clearly comprehend.”

“I can’t stop to argue this matter,” was replied. “My mind is already made up. So now for introducing my *probe* into this *festering sore*.”

And, as he said this, the young man moved away from his friend, and was soon at the side of Mr. Bullfinch. In a little while, with much adroitness, he succeeded in engaging the old man in conversation.

“What a *charming creature* that is!” said he breaking in, with well-managed abruptness, upon a remark of his companion. And he glanced towards Mrs. Bullfinch.

The countenance of the latter became lit up with pleasure in an instant; but before he had time to indicate the relationship in which he stood towards her, the young man added —

“I’m told that she is the wife of *old Adam Bullfinch*. But, I presume, there is a mistake in this.”

“I believe not,” was the rather grave answer.

“You surprise me! Well, I can only say, that I admire the old fellow’s taste. When I want a wife, I’ll get him to look out for me!”

This rather familiar way of speaking about himself and his affairs, made Mr. Bullfinch hesitate as to a declaration of his identity. To avow himself now, would be, he felt, rather embarrassing. He, therefore, determined to let his companion talk on in supposed ignorance as to the true personality of his auditor. He merely remarked —

“Mrs. Bullfinch is certainly a charming woman.”

“Oh, delightful! If I were her husband, I would feel strongly inclined to cage her up at home. Why, half the men here are in love with her already.”

The *arrow* had struck. A *cloud* fell instantly on the brow of Mr. Bullfinch.

“She had a *lover*, I’m told,” was the next remark. “I wonder if there is any truth in it. Someone said he was here tonight.”

The old man’s eyes turned instantly towards Wellford.

“There! Did you see that look?” said his companion, touching familiarly the old man’s arm.

“What look?”

“The look Mrs. Bullfinch cast on Mr. Wellford, who is in earnest conversation with that young lady — said to be the niece of her husband, and to have left his house indignantly on the very night of their marriage.”

The eyes of Mr. Bullfinch were instantly fixed upon his wife, who was regarding the two people just mentioned, with the peculiar look before described. Well might he take the *alarm*. Such a look never rested upon a man, in whom the heart had no interest.

“Wellford is the man — I’ll wager a kingdom of it!” said the evil antagonist of Mr. Bullfinch, triumphantly.

The old man startled, as if stung by a serpent. Thrown off of his guard, he said, in a low, angry voice —

“Who are you, sir, who dares to *trifle with me* after this fashion!”

The young man instantly shrunk away, and retiring to another part of the drawing-rooms, spent the rest of the evening in observing the result of his evil handiwork.

## Chapter 19.

Not until this unlooked-for meeting with Henry Wellford, did Helen fully comprehend the nature of the passion with which she loved him. As we have said, his image lay enshrined far away, in the most sacred recesses of her heart; not dust-covered, nor dimmed with gathering mold — yet as she had believed, forever hidden from the light. An image, before which, if her spirit sometimes bowed in its weakness, it bowed with a consciousness of sin, and, in bowing, prayed to Heaven for strength ever to stand upright.

Now that she had looked upon his living face for the first time since their last sad meeting in the street, she felt that she was unequal to the trial. More than an hour had glided away since her eyes rested upon him, and from that time, while she compelled herself to *act* even more skillfully, than at first, her part, ever and always, her glances would go searching after him, and when espied, linger on his form for moments, as if she were spell-bound. A strange feeling, almost suffocating in its intensity, seized upon the unhappy woman, when she saw that Wellford remained by the side of Fanny Milnor, much of the time engaged in earnest conversation. Was it a spirit of jealousy that, constricting her chest, gave to respiration a quickened impulse? — or, did she shrink from the personal detraction of herself, which she had good reason to believe would be poured into the ear of her former lover!

However this might be, the good understanding and mutual interest which seemed to exist between Wellford and Fanny Milnor, were to her a source of most exquisite pain. Yet for all this, she hid beneath the garment of a *well-assumed exterior* — the fox that was tearing her very vitals! A few, more observant than the rest, noticed occasionally the manner in which she regarded these two people; but no one dreamed of the *agony* that was veiled by her winning smiles, or concealed under the buoyant tones of her rich mellow voice. What a task had she imposed upon herself! The only wonder is that she was able to sustain her *part*.

An hour had glided away since she became aware of Wellford's presence; and now, for the first time, she found herself about coming into immediate personal contact with him. This was not accidental, but from design on his part, as she plainly saw. A gentleman with whom she had been conversing, had just left her side, and she was sitting alone. This opportunity, Wellford seized for the renewal of an acquaintance, broken off under such painful circumstances, nearly two years before. As he approached her, the heart of Helen fluttered, and then grew still, as if overpowering emotions were actually about extinguishing her life. He bowed with considerable formality, and showed an embarrassed manner.

"I am pleased to meet you again," said he, with less steadiness of voice than he had hoped to maintain.

The lips of Helen moved, but no words came therefrom. There was a welcome, however, in her eyes; and Wellford failed not to see this. He sat down by her, forced a smile to conceal the real agitation he felt, and made some common-place remark, to which she now found voice to reply. How soon each would have regained an easy self-possession, we cannot say. A third party joined them almost immediately — the *husband* of Helen.

The two men, who had met in business circles, and had a slight business acquaintance, bowed formally, as each gave utterance to the other's name. It was at once apparent to Wellford, that the old man was disturbed from some cause; and he did not fail to observe, that with a singular lack of good breeding, he seated himself on the narrow portion of the sofa which intervened between him and Helen.

A few unimportant remarks were made by Wellford, to which Mr. Bullfinch gave constrained answers. Perceiving that his presence was, from some cause, disagreeable — the former soon retired to a distant part of the room, and from an unnoted point of observation, saw that sharp words were passing between the young wife and her husband. Another might not thus have interpreted the manner of Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch; but his knowledge of the past, as well as his peculiar state of mind, gave to Wellford a more than ordinary keenness of vision.

"Did you see that?" said the young man, who had so unwisely, and, we might say, *wickedly*, awakened in the heart of Mr. Bullfinch, the spirit of jealousy. He addressed the friend with whom a previous conversation had been held.

“See what?” asked the other.

“Mr. Wellford, only a moment ago, took a seat near Mrs. Bullfinch; but, scarcely had they entered into conversation, before the old man came up and coolly thrust himself between them.”

“Indeed!”

“That tells the story, doesn’t it?”

“What story?”

“Of a young lover — and a jealous old husband. I thought there was something peculiar in the way Mrs. Bullfinch looked at Wellford, when he sat talking so earnestly with her husband’s niece.”

“You seem to take a singular interest in their affairs,” said his friend, “an *evil* interest, I am afraid. Pardon me for plain speaking.”

“I’m a *student of human nature* you know, and this is one of its phases.”

“It is one thing to study human nature — and another to mar its beauty. I’m afraid the lover was more in your imagination than anywhere else, and that all the cause for jealousy which exists — you created. This is hardly to be justified on any plea.”

“Oh, as to that,” was replied with indifference, “I act pretty much as fancy prompts. As for self-justification, I rarely give it a thought.”

“Some people would say,” remarked the friend, half seriously and half in earnest, “that you had either a *wrong head* — or a *bad heart*.”

“People will say almost anything that suits their fancy. For one, I never give much heed to the *opinions of others* regarding myself. The worst is usually judged of our actions. I seek compensation for these things, in saying and doing pretty much as I desire; and I presume the world thinks quite as well of me, as if I were guarded about the effect of my words, and over precise as to the consequences of my actions.”

“There is something more to be desired, than the *world’s* opinion.”

“So I think.”

“Our own *self-respect*, and consciousness of *right actions*.”

The other merely shrugged his shoulders.

“If we can do no good — let us do no harm. The *casting of an evil seed* may seem a light thing; but, the small acorn becomes, in time, a giant oak. Think of this. You have carelessly sown a *seed of jealousy* in the mind of Mr. Bullfinch. Already it has germinated. The fruit, which must be eaten, will be bitter to the taste; nay, may poison the whole system. Will it add anything to your pleasure in life, to know that you have made others inconceivably wretched? I would think not.”

“You make a serious matter of my little pleasant annoyance of Mr. Bullfinch,” said the other, in a slightly changed tone.

“If I err not, it will prove more than a pleasant annoyance to the old gentleman and his young wife. The *passion of jealousy*, when once excited, rarely burns out. It makes fuel of everything within its reach. Ever suspicious, and prone to misjudge — it becomes insatiate and cruel. Ah! I fear you have put *thorns* in the already uncomfortable pillow, on which the head of that young wife uneasily reposes!”

“Oh, dear! Don’t grow sentimental,” was replied, with forced levity. “Her pillow is soft enough, I’ll warrant you. She’ll sleep sound, for all the thorns my hands have planted.”

As this was said, the piano, which had been silent for some time, was touched by softly falling fingers, and, in a moment after, a clear, sweet, mellow voice arose and filled the room.

“Ah! who is that?” remarked one of the young men.

“It’s Mrs. Bullfinch, as I live,” said the other, as he moved half involuntarily towards the instrument.

There was an instant hush throughout the crowded and buzzing drawing-rooms. Every ear seemed penetrated with the unexpected melody. Several brilliant performers had, from time to time, during the evening, executed some of their best pieces; but, they had played only to a narrow, music-loving circle, while most of those present were rather annoyed than otherwise at the loud, incessant thrumming, which made conversation an effort. But now, an involuntary attention was awarded by all, and soon there was a crowd around the piano.

Piece after piece was played and sung, in accordance with the requests or suggestions of those who gathered near the singer. Yet, all the while, Mrs. Bullfinch played for the ear of only one — though he



never asked for a song, nor even made one of the delighted group which clustered around her. It was not that she designed to play for Wellford; she could not help it. With every note she struck, every skillful modulation of her voice, every expression that was breathed forth — went also a thought as to how his ear would be effected! And so entirely was this the case, that it totally obscured her consciousness of the fact. She played for her old lover, yet knew it not.

Never had the old man been so struck with the charms of his young wife, as now. Never had he observed such a *bewitchery* in her voice. How proud of her he felt! Yet, with this pride, was a feeling of uneasiness not before experienced. The *seed of jealousy* was in his heart; it had already quickened into life, and was sending down its sharp, piercing rootlets. In the eyes of those who looked at her, his newly acquired vision perceived something deeper than mere admiration; and when he saw a mirthful, handsome young man, bending to her ear, and speaking in tones so low that he could not hear them, suspicion imagined the words that were uttered, and *troubled the waters* of his spirit to their deepest depths.

“The fact that Wellford did not join the listeners who had gathered around the piano, was not unobserved by Mr. Bullfinch. The meaning of this, he interpreted in his own way, and made it the nourishment on which to feed his jealousy.

At last Helen retired from the piano, receiving, as she did so, thanks and compliments from many voices, and accompanied by one or two young gentlemen, who were *completely charmed* with her. Mr. Bullfinch tried to get between these and his wife, as the latter was handed to a seat. The effort did not prove so successful as in the case of Wellford. But he remained standing near, unconscious that, in countenance and manner, he was betraying to all eyes, the real state of his mind.

Nor was this state rendered any the more endurable by parts of sentences, over-loudly spoken or whispered, which reached his ears, such as —

“She’s a charming creature!”

“Old Bullfinch had better *cage* her up at home.”

“Somebody will run off with her before a year.”

“The grouchy old fellow — how she must despise him!”

“She can’t love him.”

“A wife, bought with gold.”

At an early hour, Mr. Bullfinch suggested to his wife that it was time for them to return home.

“It is only twelve,” said she, in reply, “and the carriage was not ordered until two.”

“Two — two — so late as that?” he answered, in a confused manner, “I had forgotten.”

Cotillions were now forming, and a young gentleman, whose attentions to Helen had not escaped the keen eyes of her husband, pressed forward, and asked if she would dance with him.

A graceful assent was given, and the couple took their places on the floor.

An ill-concealed gesture of impatience marked the effect of this upon Mr. Bullfinch, who, with a lengthened visage and contracted brow, took his place, moodily, among those who were too old, or disinclined, to dance.

Set after set were formed — in each of these, always with a new partner, Mrs. Bullfinch was to be found. With color warm from exercise, and eyes glittering with excitement, she looked as happy as she was beautiful. None noticed, as she went circling through the mazy evolutions, her quick glance thrown, ever and always, towards a point in the room, where, in close conversation, sat Henry Wellford and Fanny Milnor. Only once during the evening, had she been thrown into the immediate company of Fanny, when they met as strangers.

Nothing more dramatic than the incidents we have chronicled, took place during that evening. Once again Helen and Wellford met and exchanged a few words; but, in doing so, there was no betrayal of feeling on either side. At two o’clock, Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch retired; each with *sharper thorns in the pillows* upon which their heads were to recline hereafter.

In Helen’s *Book of Life*, a *new leaf* had been turned; and, as she brooded over the yet unwritten page, her heart trembled at thought of the probable record. She had *tasted a new cup* — the sweet and bitter exquisitely *mingled* — and she felt that she was destined to drink it to the very dregs!

“It was no seeking of mine,” said she, gloomily, to herself, as she pondered the future. “The consequences rest with those who dragged me into a position fraught with trials and temptations beyond my power to sustain or resist. But the step has been taken, and I must now press onward in the *new and dangerous path* which opens before me. I have pride enough to enable me at least to tread it boldly. No one must see a step falter — and no one shall!”

## Chapter 20.

It was mentioned in a previous Chapter that sharp words had passed between Mr. Bullfinch and his wife, while at Mr. Lane's party, occasioned by the renewal of fellowship between the latter and Mr. Wellford. Such, at least, was the young man's inference — and he did not err. Excited by the rude conduct of her husband, the moment Mr. Wellford retired, Helen said to him, warmly though in a low tone,

"I don't understand you, Mr. Bullfinch! What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning is," was quite as warmly answered, "that I do not wish you to hold any fellowship with *Mr. Wellford*."

"Why not, please?"

"I have good and sufficient reasons, Madam," said the old man.

"They must be good and sufficient to me, before I act from them," replied Helen, firmly. "What have you against him?"

"It should be enough for a wife, that her husband objects to her being on terms of *intimacy* with a particular man."

"It is not enough for *me*, at least," said Helen. "If you know anything wrong of Mr. Wellford, say so."

Beyond this, nothing further had passed between them on the subject, at the time; others were too near, to render a continuance of such a conversation at all prudent.

The *uneasiness* of Mr. Bullfinch during the evening, and his broad exposure of the *jealousy* which had taken possession of him, did not escape the observation of Helen. It produced in her mind, a strange blending of emotions; among which were mortification at his obtrusive weakness, mingled with a flutter of triumph. She, in no degree, pitied his suffering, but felt like adding thereto by acts that would increase, rather than allay, the suspicions which were fretting him. Not that there was any guilty purpose in her mind — she was too pure for that; but a certain *perverseness*, born of unnatural and constrained relations, was beginning to influence her.

Mrs. Bullfinch at Mr. Lane's — and Mrs. Bullfinch immediately on her arrival at home — was another person altogether. A stranger could scarcely be made to believe that the wearied-looking, silent, almost sullen woman, who sat, one glove on the floor, and the other partly drawn — her hood tossed upon the bed, and her elegant shawl just falling from the back of a chair where she had thrown it, with an indifference amounting almost to contempt — was the same with the *brilliant, beautiful, fascinating* creature, who had been for hours, the center of an admiring circle.

"You have met Mr. Wellford *before*, I believe," said Mr. Bullfinch, breaking in upon a state of mind in his wife, which it would have been far wiser for him had he left undisturbed — at least by such a remark. It was thus, that he renewed the subject now nearest to his heart, a subject which the presence of others had interrupted a little while before, and which had not since been a moment absent from his thoughts.

Helen raised her eyes quickly, and with a slight startle, fixed them, in a steady, half-frowning glance upon her husband. In no other way, did she answer his remark. A few moments she continued to look at him, and then her eyes drooped to the floor again, and her mind fell back into reverie.

"Helen!"

The wife looked up again.

"You might at least *reply* to my question. Common politeness, if no higher feeling, should prompt to this," said Mr. Bullfinch, with ill-concealed excitement of feeling.

"What was your question?" asked Helen, again looking up, and now speaking with a coldness of tone which was almost chilling.

"It was in reference to Mr. Wellford. I said that you had met him before."

"In that, you said truly," was the frigid answer.

The whole mind of Mr. Bullfinch was now inflamed. It was with difficulty that he could restrain an outbreak of feeling, or school his voice into anything like calmness of utterance.

"He is an old acquaintance, I believe," he next remarked.

“He is,” was the composed response.

“Well, I now repeat what I said at Mr. Lane’s.”

“And I repeat the *answer* then given,” replied Helen. Her voice had in it not the least perceptible weakness.

“Helen!”

“Sir!”

The whole manner of both husband and wife underwent a sudden change.

“You must be to that man — as a *stranger* from this day henceforth!” said Mr. Bullfinch, speaking with an angry vehemence that it was impossible to restrain.

“This is *your command*, I suppose,” retorted Helen, with a proud, defiant air, which showed a will fully equal to the emergency.

“It is my command, if you will,” said the old man, speaking with undiminished warmth.

“I am your wife and equal,” replied Helen, her former coolness of manner returning; “not your *slave*. If you expect to influence my conduct, you have got to use *reason* — not *command*.”

“Then, Madam,” said the old man, calming down a little, and speaking with mock deference, “I desire you not to hold fellowship with this gentleman in future.”

“A *desire* will have no more influence with me than a *command*, unless accompanied by a *reason*. Do you know anything wrong of Mr. Wellford?”

“He is not the man for you to associate with.”

“Why not?”

There was more of interest in her voice, than Helen wished to betray.

“Is it not enough for you, that such is my impression of the man?”

“No, Mr. Bullfinch, it is not enough for me,” was answered. “He is an old and valued acquaintance; and, until now, not a whisper against him has ever reached my ears. To say to me that we must hereafter be strangers, and this without any assignment of a single reason, does not satisfy me.”

“He is a *bad* man!” exclaimed Mr. Bullfinch; his strong excitement returning.

But the assertion did not, to all external appearances, in the least move his wife.

“A designing, bad man,” repeated Mr. Bullfinch.

“It will be wisest to drop this subject,” said Helen, with a coldness which contrasted strongly with the passionate manner of her husband. “It seems to involve a poor suspicion of your wife, as *weak* as it is *unworthy* of you. You have committed an error, sir, which may be difficult to repair. I did not wish to go to this party. I would have been happier at home; but you dragged me there against my will. It would have ill befit me, as your wife, to carry into such a company, a clouded brow, or to have failed in doing my part towards the general enjoyment of the evening. I, therefore, as best I could, entered into the spirit of the hour; when, strange to say, you insulted our entertainer by a rudeness towards a guest who was polite to me, which nothing can justify; and now add to your fault, by demanding the surrender of an acquaintance partially renewed after the lapse of nearly two years. You have, I repeat, committed an error, Mr. Bullfinch, which it may be difficult to repair.”

In more than one contest with his wife, Mr. Bullfinch had come off far from victorious; and the result was in no way different on the present occasion. There was, to his ear, a *threat* involved in the closing sentence of his wife, which slightly troubled, and caused him to regret having so unguardedly betrayed his awakening suspicions. He made no reply; and both soon relapsed into moody and abstracted silence.

Scarcely a week passed, before invitations were received for another large and fashionable party.

“What is this?” asked Mr. Bullfinch, when the complimentary note was handed to him by his wife.

“Read it,” said she.

The old man’s countenance did not brighten as his eye took in the contents.

“Do you think of going?” said he.

“Certainly I do,” was the prompt reply.

Mr. Bullfinch did not look very happy.

“Consult your own feelings about the matter,” said he. “If you would prefer remaining at home, I shall be content. Don’t go, therefore, simply on *my* account.”

“I thought,” remarked Mrs. Bullfinch, a little maliciously, we are sorry to say, “that you always enjoyed society. I am sure such has been your unvarying declaration. Heretofore I have, I confess, been unjust to you in this respect. All my preferences were for retirement — even seclusion. But, I have learned to overcome this weakness. It is not good for me. We are social beings, and only in mingling with each other socially, can we hope to maintain a cheerful mind.”

“True, very true,” said Mr. Bullfinch. His assent was not made with any heartiness; and he added, “But there is always danger of carrying things too far. All pleasure tends to excess.”

“Two parties, in a season, can hardly be called taking pleasure to excess!” replied Helen, in a way that left little room for dissent on the part of her husband.

“No — no — of course not. Though two fashionable parties in the space of a single week might be thought rather verging on to excess,” was her husband’s answer.

Little more was said on the subject, until Helen asked for fifty dollars. Now, it so happened, that on the very day this request was made, Mr. Bullfinch had a large amount of money to pay, while the sources from which it was to come, were by no means as apparent as he could wish them. In fact, the difficulty of making his payments to the bank, had been on the increase for some time, and he was, naturally enough, rather troubled on this account. His thoughts were busy with the ways and means of raising some ten thousand dollars, when his wife said to him, as he was about leaving the house, on the morning after the invitations just referred to were received —

“I need fifty dollars, Mr. Bullfinch. Will you send it to me in the course of an hour?”

“I can’t do it today,” was replied.

“Oh, but I must have it this morning,” said Helen.

“Is your need so very pressing, Helen?” was coldly inquired.

“Indeed, it is. I must get a new dress for the party at Mrs. Levering’s; and there is no time to be lost. Unless I get it into the hands of the dress-maker, today, there will be danger of disappointment.”

“A new dress, Helen!” said the old man, a little surprised. “Where is the one that was worn at Mr. Lane’s? You could not find anything more befitting.”

“Why, Mr. Bullfinch! Would you have me go to two successive parties in the same dress?”

“And why not?”

“People would think I hadn’t but a single dress fit to appear in. You would hardly like that thought, much less said.”

The old man was thrown altogether aback by this unexpected, and, in his case, rather unanswerable argument.

“Won’t the money do as well tomorrow?” said he, after musing for a little while.

“Oh, no!” promptly answered Helen. “I must buy the dress this morning, so as to be certain of having it made up in time.”

“Very well; I will see about it,” replied Mr. Bullfinch, and then hurried away to his store, there to devise the ways and means for meeting the heavy liabilities which had fallen due.

See about it! In no case, before, had Mr. Bullfinch thus replied to his wife’s applications for money, which, we will say, had never been very extravagant. She did not attribute his reluctance to supply her demand to the true cause, for of that she had no suspicion. She gave it a different explanation altogether. It arose, in her view, from a desire on his part to diminish, if possible, the *personal attractions* of which, a short time before, he had been so proud; and this view determined her, to increase these attractions.

The day proved, to Mr. Bullfinch, one of anxiety and great trial — a day in mercantile life that makes an impression on the mind rarely, if ever, forgotten. Up to one o’clock, he was on the street, in the effort to raise money, or in his counting-room, devising ways and means for the same purpose; and it was not until after this hour, that he began to breathe at all freely. Merchants, who had heretofore given him the usual temporary loans with the utmost readiness, were now all, strangely enough, short of money. His bank, from which he had enjoyed a fair line of discounts, had, this morning, thrown out notes of hand for over five thousand dollars; an event entirely unlooked for, and which added very seriously to the difficulty under which he was laboring.

As a last resort, he was obliged to raise a considerable sum of money, at an exorbitant rate of discount.

It was nearly three o'clock when his last note was taken out of bank, and then, in no comfortable state, he turned his steps homeward. Not since he entered his store, had a thought of the fifty dollars, required by his wife, crossed his mind; and, it may be doubted whether, if it had done so, the sum would have been despatched to meet her need. The pressure of business needs for money would, in all probability, have forced that matter aside.

Not until Mr. Bullfinch was in the act of entering his house, did he remember the omission; and then it flashed upon him with a presentiment of trouble. He doubted not that a clouded brow would meet him on his entrance, and he was not mistaken.

"I declare, Helen," said he, and he spoke in a perplexed, half-troubled manner, "I entirely forgot about the money you asked for. In fact, I have had a very busy day of it, and hardly wonder at myself."

Helen made no answer, but the *look* she gave him said, so plainly, that she regarded this as a mere *excuse*, if not a subterfuge — so plainly, that he could not be mistaken in her thought.

"I assure you, Helen," said he, seriously, "that I meant to bring you this money. If you knew how much worried I have been, you would not blame my omission. But you shall have it tomorrow morning."

No response, whatever, was made to this by Mrs. Bullfinch, nor did the *cloud* on her brow lift itself up, or permit a gleam of light to break through its dark masses.

A cheerless meal was that of which the family partook. Mrs. Lee, who was cognizant of her daughter's disappointment, looked quite as somber and more indignant than Helen. Mr. Lee, who usually made an effort, not always unsuccessful, to introduce pleasant topics of conversation, was, unfortunately, too much indisposed to leave his room. So poor Mr. Bullfinch was left alone to encounter the suffocating sphere of *two injured and indignant women*, who, if they could punish him in no other way, were quite ready to visit on his head the terrors of a moody silence. This was quite as much as he could bear. A shorter time than usual he remained at the table, and then, instead of the half hour's siesta, went immediately from the house. A hurried walk soon brought him to his store.

"How much money is in the drawer?" said he of the clerk who had the cash in charge.

The young man opened his money-drawer, and after counting over a few small bills and loose change, replied —

"About eight dollars, sir."

"Is that all?" Mr. Bullfinch manifested considerable disappointment.

"Yes, sir; we had to scrape pretty close today. How much do you need?"

"Fifty dollars," was replied.

"I can borrow it for you, I presume," said the clerk.

"Do so, if you please, Mr. Williams. I need that sum particularly."

The young man went out, and was gone for over half an hour.

"Really," said he, on coming in, "I never had so much trouble to raise a small amount of money in my life. Everybody's deposits were made, and nobody had anything to loan."

As he spoke he drew three small rolls of bills from his pocket, and laying them on the desk, unfolded and counted them over.

"Just fifty dollars. I had to get it from three different places. I don't know that it will be of any use to you, now."

Mr. Bullfinch took the bills, and with a dubious look, turned them over slowly.

"It will have to do," said he, in mimic desperation. So writing a hurried note — addressed to his wife — he enclosed and sent her, by the hands of his porter, the money.

What remained of the afternoon, was devoted to an examination into the financial resources of the next day, which did not show a very hopeful state of things, although the payments were far from being as heavy as those just made.

When Mr. Bullfinch again took his way homeward, it was not with any pleasing anticipations. He half dreaded to meet his wife, notwithstanding he had sent her the money she wanted; but was a good deal disappointed, on his return, to find that she was out.

"Where has she gone?" he inquired of her mother.

"To Levy's," replied Mrs. Lee.

He asked no further question. The answer was altogether sufficient.

From Levy's, Mrs. Bullfinch went to the dress-maker's, and did not get home until nearly an hour after the usual tea-time, her absence delaying supper, and fretting her husband almost beyond endurance. Their meeting, when she at last came home, was not with any excess of kind words.

## Chapter 21.

For the party at Mrs. Levering's, Mrs. Bullfinch made even more thoughtful preparation than for the one previously attended. Her new dress was of the richest material, and its style and trimming such as to show off her person and complexion to the greatest advantage.

"How beautiful! How attractive!" was the mental exclamation of her husband, as he gazed upon her, when fully attired for the evening, and ready to enter the carriage which was to convey them to Mrs. Levering's. Yet, with this involuntary feeling of admiration — this consciousness of his young wife's charms, Mr. Bullfinch looked forward to the mirthful assemblage in which she was to shine, with a feeling of *uneasiness* so profound, as to rob him of peace entirely. Too fully was he satisfied that Helen did not regard him with any real affection. But, of this, he had no right to complain; for, had she not declared to him, most unequivocally, before marriage, that she possessed *no heart* to give; that, if he took her *hand* — he must be content with that alone? Then, he did not give to her declaration its full force; alas! how fraught with meaning had he since proved it to be! And now, when he saw the admiration she was eliciting, and believed that at least one man, with whom she must come into immediate contact, loved her with the fervor of a first passion, his jealousy became feverish in its intensity.

As for Helen, though she knew it not, the leading impulse from which she was acting sprang from a desire to meet Mr. Wellford. In all her toilette arrangement, now most carefully made, every effect sought to be produced was for his eyes. At Mr. Lane's party, during the earlier portion of the evening, *gratified vanity* fed the flame of excitement, and enabled her to act her brilliant part. But, now, another state had supervened; she felt indifferent to all, except Henry Wellford, whose image was scarcely ever absent from her mental vision. The moment she entered Mrs. Levering's drawing-room, her eyes began ranging about in search of her old lover; and the search did not end until, with a feeling of disappointment, she ascertained that he was not present. Then a certain listlessness came over her, and to many of those who, at Mr. Lane's, had been charmed by her free, social manners and lively conversation — she was dull, distant, and abstracted. By several, the change was noticed and remarked upon. Mr. Bullfinch, who was quite as uninteresting as his wife, remained close by her side, and did his part fully, towards keeping young gallants at a distance.

Suddenly, after the lapse of nearly an hour, the rather pale face of Mrs. Bullfinch was seen to flush and her eyes to light up with a new interest. Those who noticed this, and followed the direction of her glances, saw the handsome person of Henry Wellford, junior partner in the extensive house of Lane, Latta & Co. From that time, Mrs. Bullfinch, to all external seeming, was another creature. A new beauty came into her young face. No longer did she repel those who approached her; and soon, as on the evening at Mr. Lane's, she was the center of an admiring circle. Yet, even beyond this circle, went eyes and thoughts to one who did not approach her; nor, indeed, so far as she was able to detect, seem even to know she was in the room.

Not long after Mrs. Bullfinch became aware of Mr. Wellford's presence, she saw the attractive face of her husband's niece, Fanny Milnor; and almost at the same moment, the young man approached her, and the two were soon engaged in earnest and familiar conversation. Lip and cheek paled for a moment; then, an effort, born of conscious weakness, sent the blood back again. How instantly wretched became the excited woman; while a feeling of bitter dislike towards Fanny took possession of her bosom. It required, now, a far stronger effort on her part than before, to maintain an interested exterior; to meet and adequately respond to the social attentions which were freely accorded. As for Wellford and Miss Milnor, no full minute of time passed, in which Mrs. Bullfinch did not turn her eyes upon them, and note, with a quick instinct, from signs none but a woman can read, the state of feeling that existed between them. Disappointed beyond measure was she, in not receiving from Wellford a single glance. Not once was a look cast towards her; and there was nothing in his manner which indicated a knowledge of her presence. As this manifestation of ignorance or indifference continued, it seemed to Mrs. Bullfinch as if her feelings would suffocate her. In the midst of this unhappy state, she saw Wellford accompany Miss Milnor to the piano, and watched him while he stood by her, as she sung, with skill and fine taste, two or three popular



tunes. She did not hear the complimentary words he uttered; but she imagined them; which was all the same, so far as the effect upon her state of mind was concerned.

“Now, Mrs. Bullfinch,” said a gentleman as soon as Fanny retired from the piano, “you will favor us with a song.”

There was not a moment’s hesitation. The invitation just accorded with her wishes. She arose, and crossing the room, took her seat at the instrument. Never, perhaps, in her life, had Mrs. Bullfinch thrown so much power and expression into her voice, as on this occasion. For a time, conversation was hushed; and, as her voice died away into silence, *murmurs of pleasure and admiration* reached her ears from all sides; but, she listened in vain for the voice of Wellford. What would she not then have given, could she have looked upon him; but too many eyes were on her; she dared not turn herself towards the part of the room where she knew he was standing in company with Fanny Milnor.

The moment Mrs. Bullfinch retired from the piano, she threw a hurried, but stealthy glance, towards Wellford. How her heart sunk and fluttered. His back was towards the instrument at which she had been seated, and he was bending to Miss Milnor, whose countenance manifested the interest she felt in his words.

Soon after this, Mrs. Bullfinch’s absence from the drawing-rooms was remarked. She had complained of *indisposition* to her husband — and he, quite ready to withdraw her from a company so fraught with trial and temptation, suggested their return home, to which she consented. Their retirement was made unobtrusively, and was known, at the time it took place, only to their hostess. Many questions and surmises followed, as soon as they were missed, and, as is usual in all such cases, some of the latter, from a slight suspicion of the truth, took the form of rather distinct affirmations, in which the *presence of an old lover*, and his indifference, or attentions to a new idol, made a pretty broad foundation.

The true cause of Helen’s wish to retire, was a sudden and overwhelming conviction of the *danger and sinfulness* of the thoughts and feelings, which were permitted to rule in her bosom. Some good angel had lifted the veil from her eyes, and enabled her to see herself as she was; the sight produced a fearful shudder, which chilled her whole being.

“Am I not a wedded wife?” she whispered to herself — and as the full meaning of the words stood out in living relief before her, the shudder went, if possible, still deeper.

Crouching beside her husband, a feeling almost like guilt in her heart, the unhappy woman rode home in silence. To his kind, even tender inquiries, and obtrusive suggestions of remedies for her indisposition, Mrs. Bullfinch forced herself to reply gently, and with some small acknowledgment in her tones of the real interest of which she was the subject. That her husband had full cause for the jealous suspicions he had manifested — she acknowledged to herself, with a sense of painful humiliation. This produced something of a new feeling towards him; duty, more clearly seen, became the prompter of different actions, and led to a new, if compelled, external.

But, oh! What a trial was before her! These meetings with Wellford had blown into a flame, the *damped fires* kindled years before, and which could not be permitted to blaze forth again without destroying honor and virtue; and now, though she sought to cover them from view, they burned still, consuming the very altar where they rested.

It was not in Mr. Bullfinch to comprehend the change which, from this time, was apparent in his wife. That it had something to do with Mr. Wellford, he, indeed, suspected, for he had not failed to notice the total indifference manifested by him; as well as his marked attentions to his niece, between whom he most sincerely hoped a matrimonial arrangement might take place. But he was far from giving his wife credit for the real state of mind from which she was acting. He had seen her but a little while before, apparently wholly absorbed in Wellford — and utterly indifferent to himself. Wellford made no return of this interest, while he plainly enough showed that, if he had ever loved her, he was about transferring his affections to another. The change in his wife, therefore, he attributed to no higher sources than disappointment and chagrin; and while he was gratified at her softened manners towards him, respect for her was in no way increased; nor did his jealous feelings lose their active suspicion.

The suddenly awakened *interest in society*, which Mrs. Bullfinch had manifested — as suddenly died out. The social season promised to be unusually mirthful, and invitation after invitation came in, often as

many as two in a single week; but, in every case, regrets were sent, and the old man and his young wife were missed from the festive circles. Thus more than two months passed.

Awakened to a sense of her duty as a wife, Helen had striven, during this time, though in a weak way, to make the home circle more *cheerful* than it had been. Her father's health was growing feebler every day, and it was now but rarely that he could venture abroad into the open air. His spirits, too, were low. A sense of dependence on Mr. Bullfinch, whose manner towards him had never been frank and cheerful; and worse than this, a consciousness that the *food* he ate, and the *house* which covered him, were obtained at the cost of his daughter's happiness — lay ever like a heavy weight upon his bosom. In brooding over the ruin of her own hopes in life, Helen had failed to comprehend, as fully as the case required, her father's state of mind; but, now, her thoughts were turning to him with a wiser appreciation, and a loving desire to brighten, with warmer colors, the later days of his waning life.

Changed in her manner towards her husband, and more *interested* and *cheerful* in the home circle than before; and, at the same time, aware that such was the case — Helen was disappointed at not meeting from Mr. Bullfinch a looked-for *appreciation* of this new and better state of things. He had grown, all at once, silent, abstracted in manner, moody, and often fault-finding. Money was supplied for the use of the family more frugally, and with what seemed a grudging spirit. Frequently he would sit the evening through without speaking a word, unless addressed, and then his replies indicated an entire indifference on the subject to which his attention was called. Everything which did not exactly suit his tastes, was the subject of complaint, while nothing that was agreeable, met with a single word of commendation. How often was his ear greeted with a sigh, that an expected pleasant look or tone would have prevented.

Thus the season was passing away, and Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch had not ventured into any of the fashionable assemblages, since the evening at Mrs. Levering's. But now, invitations were received from a source that made the sending of regrets a doubtful expedient. They could not absent themselves without being misunderstood, and producing a state of coolness in friends particularly regarded.

So, with much reluctance, Mrs. Bullfinch prepared for another evening abroad. Even if she had desired a new dress for the occasion, the recent frugality exhibited by her husband, in regard to money, would have caused her to suppress the desire. That worn at Mrs. Levering's had never been used since, and her present love of appearance was not strong enough to make her desire another. So, making a few changes in this dress, which was of rich material, by which the effect was diminished instead of heightened, she attired herself for the occasion, and in doing so, studied *simplicity* instead of *ornament*, to an extent which, governed as it was by good taste, rendered her appearance really more attractive than before. With the effect produced, Mr. Bullfinch was particularly struck, while, at the same time, he was puzzled. The change in his wife, dating from the evening at Mrs. Levering's, he had never been able clearly to understand, although he had endeavored to account for it, and, at one time, pretty much to his satisfaction. That it had something to do with lack of attention on the part of Mr. Wellford, he still believed. And now, he was at a loss to determine whether the new effects produced in her appearance by his wife, were really the result of indifference or design. Suspicious jealousy favored the latter view, while her total lack of interest in society, manifested for some two months, led to a different conclusion. Be the reason what it might, Mr. Bullfinch resolved to keep an eagle eye upon her.

Much as Mrs. Bullfinch had striven to avoid effect in her dress, she was far from going to this party, at the residence of Mrs. Floyd, in a state of mental indifference. While, under a strong sense of womanly virtue, she was repressing all voluntary interest in her old lover; and had sought, by avoiding society, to shun temptation; now, that there was a prospect of meeting him once more, she could not repress the wish to note the progress of events between him and Fanny Milnor. Hopelessness had produced, on the surface of her feelings, an icy calm — at least in reference to Wellford; and, if the waters beneath were at any time troubled, threatening to break the congelation, a strong effort of the will repressed the agitation. She did not, therefore, wish to attract attention; but rather desired the privilege of an observer, without being observed.

There were few who had met Mrs. Bullfinch at Mr. Lane's and Mrs. Levering's, who were not struck with the marked difference in her appearance, and who were not as much interested in her as before; but the interest was altogether of another kind. Before, there was about her much of the *brilliant woman of the*

*world*, and many, while attracted and admiring, said, in their secret thought, that she was *heartless*. Now, changed states of mind had subdued what before led to a light estimation of her character; and *evidences of suffering* softened towards her, many who, on the previous occasions, would not have hesitated in the utterance of words that would have struck her like barbed arrows.

Wellford was present, and also Miss Milnor, and it was plain to see that a very good understanding existed between them. Not, as before, however, did the former keep entirely aloof from Mrs. Bullfinch. At Mr. Lane's, he had observed her closely, and listened to the observations of others. The character she had *assumed* and the *impression* she made — produced on his mind an unfavorable conclusion. At Mrs. Levering's, he was less pleased than before. In fact, he was shocked at her taking the piano, immediately after Miss Milnor had risen from it, and striving, as was too evidently the case, to *eclipse* her performance. That she was playing and singing for his ears, he understood too well; and while not insensible to the fact that she still regarded him with affection, his virtuous feelings were shocked at her effort to awaken an interest in his mind, when she was the wedded wife of another. Purposely, therefore, did he refrain from manifesting even a knowledge of her presence; and when she so suddenly retired, at an early hour, and he heard her indisposition remarked upon, he did not err in his interpretation of its meaning.

Once drawn from his self-imposed seclusion, Mr. Wellford, after tasting the pleasures of social life, and, more particularly, after making the acquaintance of Miss Milnor, needed no persuasion to induce him to mingle in society. Helen was married; and, in her marriage, violence to *his respect for her* had been committed. Why, then, should he make himself a hermit on her account? She was no longer *anything* to him. An impassable gulf had been thrown between them. Thus he reasoned with himself, and gradually gained accessions of internal sustaining power. He felt that social fellowship was good for him; and from this perception, as well as from inclination, he was led to go much into company.

Wellford did not of course, fail, to notice that, after the evening at Mrs. Levering's, Mrs. Bullfinch, from some cause, no longer went into company. Nor did he fail to notice, on her re-appearance at Mrs. Floyd's, that she had assumed a *new character* altogether; or, rather, had fallen back into her own. After carefully observing her for some time, and remarking an entire absence of what he had before thought a mirthful, almost heartless manner; and also remarking that she no longer fixed on him the strangely penetrating glances that really haunted him at Mrs. Levering's, and which he avoided, by seeming not to be aware of her presence, at Mr. Lane's — he began to feel differently towards her, and very soon made his way to her side.

Even the sharp, suspicious eyes of Mr. Bullfinch saw little in either the manner of his wife or Mr. Wellford, to add fuel to the *flame of jealousy*. Both were guarded carefully, and guarded by the surest protection, that of *virtuous principle*. While the latter had no desire to rob the husband of his wife, the affections of his wife, the former, conscious that every truant thought, or *cherished regard* for her old lover — was sin; kept even, by a powerful effort, the pulsations of her heart.

What a trial — shall we say a triumph? — it was to both! No, not altogether a triumph. "Love never dies. The heart that has once loved truly — loves on forever." The fires may be hidden, but they burn on.

Ashes may lie on the altar, but there is a latent fire beneath them.

For a while they conversed — the old lover and his lost idol — and, to each ear, how full of music, sweet as the songs of childhood, were the voices that filled them! Then, Mr. Wellford, feeling that his soul was going out towards her, as if drawn by a spiritual magnet — forced himself away. The struggle was not apparent, even to Mrs. Bullfinch; nor did the quick ear of her husband detect the *sigh* that breathed from her lips, as the young man withdrew from her side.

And now, for Wellford's eyes, a strange eclipse had come over the face of Fanny Milnor, and her voice had lost many tones of melody. He drew again to her side, but failed to become interested as before. He wondered at this, sighed, yet not audibly, and then experienced a sense of relief, as he remembered that he had not, up to this time, uttered a word for her ears which could be construed into lover-like preference. It did not escape the observation of Fanny, that from this time, during the evening — Wellford was less constant, than heretofore, in his attentions. Why this was so, she had no suspicion, or she would not have been so unwise as to remark, on finding him near her —

“My uncle’s wife looks twenty years older than when married. The *wine* of her life has *soured*. Yet, who *wonders* — or who *pities* her?”

There was, certainly, no pity in the tones of the young lady’s voice, but rather a feeling of triumph. Wellford made no reply; but, in a little while, he left her side, and did not seek her company again during the evening. From that time, she had no attractive power for him. Occasionally he had been a visitor at her residence, but he called there no more; and, when, on the next occasion of her being in company, she searched the crowded rooms for the form now most attractive to her eyes, it was nowhere to be seen. Nor did she meet him again at any of the closing parties for the season.

Winter closed, and spring came with its cordial airs and the fragrance of budding leaf and opening blossom. To Helen, the season had been one of no light trial. Another *page* in the *book of her life* had been turned, and the writing thereon told the story of a new and a bitter experience. And now, *sorrow* was to be added to her cup. She must stoop to the *waters of Marah* — yet untouched by *the leaf of healing*.

Through the long winter, Mr. Lee’s health had been growing worse and worse. To the milder season, his wife and daughter looked forward with anxious interest. It had come, but, to the drooping invalid, it came not with a blessing. Anxiety changed to alarm. Instead of gaining sufficient strength to ride out, the softer air of spring relaxed his system; and now, when he had permission to leave his room — a mere descent to the parlors caused so much fatigue, that it was not again ventured upon.

An occasional walk across his chamber, supported by his wife or daughter, soon made the extent of Mr. Lee’s bodily exertion. This did not long continue. Next, the sitting up for a few hours each day was as much as his strength would bear — then, entire physical prostration came. Life’s pulses beat weaker and less evenly — the end was near.

From some cause, the feelings of Mr. Bullfinch had been greatly soured against Mr. Lee. For months, he had scarcely treated him with common civility. After he was confined to his room, he never visited him, and it was but rarely that he made inquiries as to the state of his health. The beginning of this dislike, was his strong opposition to the marriage of his daughter, and the plainness of his speech prior to that event. Many things then said, had never been forgotten; and, in *treasuring* them, memory had given added force to their meanings.

The declining health of Mr. Lee was to Mr. Bullfinch, therefore, less a source of pain than pleasure. If he thought of his death at all, it was with a sense of relief. His presence was a burden and an annoyance; and he cared not how soon he were rid of both. Such could not be the state of her husband’s mind, without the fact being perceived by Helen. How exquisite the pain it occasioned! It was to secure comfort, and freedom from care and a sense of dependence, for her father — that she had consented to become the wife of Mr. Bullfinch. All, and more than all the dreaded suffering, she had endured twice told, while the hoped-for good was denied! How the fine, manly qualities of her father’s mind had smarted under a sense of dependence, which he had been made to feel!

And was Helen ignorant of this? Alas! no. Her own perceptions were too quick not to comprehend all this. As for the *mother*, her lack of womanly tact and delicacy increased the evil. Towards her, Mr. Bullfinch entertained a most *profound dislike*, which he was at no pains to conceal. Not infrequently warm words passed between them; and more than once he had intimated, pretty broadly, that if she did not interfere less with his views and comforts — he would feel called upon to speak in a way that might not be altogether agreeable. What this meant, Mrs. Lee readily comprehended, and the hint was not lost.

As Mr. Lee grew weaker and weaker, he could not bear to have his daughter away from him a moment; and she had little desire to leave him. They were much alone; for Mrs. Lee took from Helen, the care of the household. As life waned slowly, and drew nearer and nearer its mortal close, the thoughts of Mr. Lee reached themselves more and more *heavenward*; and yet how constantly were these upward soaring thoughts, drawn back to rest upon the earth — how often he sighed, as their wings were folded in his bosom.

Not many words passed between him and Helen, beyond kind inquiries and grateful replies. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Their hearts were full — full to oppression, and struggling for utterance — but they dared not give voice to their thoughts. How often the daughter’s light hand was laid tenderly on the forehead of her father, now resting there with a gentle pressure, and now smoothing away

the thin hair that scarcely hid his temples. How often were her silent lips pressed to his pale forehead — or her cheek, in sudden excess of tender feeling, laid close against his own. And then, how earnestly and lovingly they would gaze at times, into each other's eyes; gaze until their light was dimmed by gathering moisture. Beautiful, yet sad — exquisitely sad — was this daily fellowship between the father and daughter. And all the while their hearts were oppressed for utterance; yet silence was felt to be a sacred duty.

One day, as Helen sat thus by her father, who had been silent, as usual, for some time, he said —  
“There is always *consolation* in the *night*, Helen.”

The remark roused Mrs. Bullfinch from a kind of mental lethargy into which she had fallen. She bent over her father, and looked at him inquiringly.

“There is always *consolation* in the *night*,” repeated Mr. Lee, and he smiled as he spoke.

“From what source?” asked Helen, in partial abstraction of thought.

“The *morning* is sure to break,” was answered, with something of an exultant tone, as if a new truth, or the strong realization of an old one, had come to his mind.

“To give,” returned Helen, unguardedly and bitterly, “a clearer view of the *ruin* which has been wrought in the darkness.”

“Dear child! Say not so!” quickly returned Mr. Lee, in an altered voice. “The morning of which I speak, reveals not wreck nor ruin.”

“Forgive me, dear father!” said Helen, forcing a smile. “I spoke unguardedly. Oh, yes; there is, I trust, such a morning.”

Yet, as she uttered the words “I trust,” there was doubt, and *lingering sadness* in her tones.

“There is such a morning for all who will look, in hopeful trust, to its breaking,” said Mr. Lee. “It is not an *earthly* morning. For me, it will soon break, love; and I trust I am ready to welcome it, when it dawns.”

Helen tried to answer, but her lips quivered, and she remained a few moments voiceless. Then she hid her face on her father's bosom and wept.

“It will break for you, dear father,” said she, on recovering herself. She spoke with composure, and deep feeling. “And it will break, I know, before long. But oh! When you leave me, what shall I have to *lean* upon? When the morning breaks for you — colder and darker will the night close around your unhappy child. My father — ”

Her slender form quivered for a few moments; then she was able to grasp the rein that had left her hand suddenly.

“Oh, my father,” she said, speaking from an impulse that would no longer be governed by any considerations, “before you go, pray that I may have strength to bear my burdens. They are not light, believe me; and, under their pressure, I feel myself growing weaker. Oh! How often have I longed to open my heart to you, dear father! To tell you all I have suffered, to show you with what patience I have striven to bear all and to endure all. Yet how weakly and hopelessly have I struggled! You could have *understood* me — you could have *sympathized* with me; and, in my weakness and ignorance, have *helped* and *instructed* me. Ah! my steps have well near slipped! But, thank God! I have been able to tread the rugged path of duty, though with bleeding feet. How it will be, when your daily presence no longer speaks to me of the right, I cannot tell.”

Mr. Lee had grasped a hand of his daughter, so soon as she began thus to unbosom herself, and was now holding it tightly in both of his. A flood of emotions was sweeping through his mind; but he was able to control himself, and to speak with composure.

“I will still be very, near to you, my sweet one!” said he, and he even smiled as he looked intently at her.

“My guardian angel!” exclaimed Helen, unable to restrain herself, as a new thought flashed into her mind. And she again hid her weeping face on the bosom of her father.

Whispered Mr. Lee, faintly, “Helen, your night shall neither be colder nor darker, because mine has passed away. God bless you, my child!”

Feebler and feebler had grown the voice of Mr. Lee, through this sentence; and his earnest "God bless you!" was but just audible. When Helen lifted her head, as his lips ceased their utterance, she was alarmed at the deathly hue which overspread the countenance of her father. The sudden cry of anguish that burst from her heart, reached her mother's ears in a distant room, which brought her quickly to the chamber. As the two bent, with pale faces, over the husband and father, whose *sands of life* were running low, nature rallied feebly, and he whispered —

"Not yet — not yet. But the *night* will soon come — "

"And the morning!" — she added, while a faint smile lit up his wan features.

An hour later, and Helen was again alone with her father. Mr. Lee had slept for a portion of the time. The curtains were closed that the light might not disturb him. Helen sat near the bedside, her head resting on the back of an easy chair, and her eyes closed. A few rays, which struggled through a small opening in the window drapery, were resting on her forehead, and throwing a mellowed light over her pale countenance. From his brief slumber, Mr. Lee had awakened, and while Helen sat thus, his eyes rested upon her young, but thin and pain-marked features, which were beautiful, though faded. How *early* in life, for the *fading!* What were the father's thoughts and feelings, as he lay there, with his eyes on that suffering countenance, can only be imagined. He gave them no utterance in words. Inexpressibly sad was his face, so sad that its hue was instantly caught by that of Helen, as she suddenly unclosed her eyes, and saw that her father had awakened.

"Dear father!" said she, tenderly, starting forward, and placing, as she was accustomed to do, her hand on his forehead. What pleasure that soft touch ever gave him!

A smile chased, instantly, the sadness away. "The *morning* will soon be here, my love," he faintly murmured.

"Oh, my father! I cannot bear this," said Helen, with an anguish she strove not to conceal. "I try to think of the *morning*; but I see only *night* — dark, starless night!"

"I would not pain you, dear child!" replied Mr. Lee, tenderly, drawing her cheek down, and touching it with his lips, "by turning your thoughts to the approaching change; but in the little while I have to remain with you, I wish, if possible, to impart *strength* to your mind, even though I must sow in tears. May you reap in joy! Amen!"

For a little while, the eyes of the dying man were closed. If to his outward ear came no response, in spirit he heard the fervent "Amen" which answered to his own.

"Helen," said he, as he looked again into her face, "I know your trials, your patient endurance, your long suffering. But out of all these will come, I trust, purification. As *gold* tried in the fire may you be, when our Heavenly Father comes to make up *His jewels*."

"Only what is developed here, can be perfected there. Is this not so, father?" Helen lifted a finger as she spoke, and pointed upwards.

"It is so, I believe," answered Mr. Lee. "But why make this inquiry, my child?"

Helen laid her hand on her bosom, and sighed heavily, but did not reply to the question. Her father partly comprehended her meaning, but it involved a subject that neither felt willing to approach nearer; yet, on which, of all others, Helen most longed to unburden herself to someone who could comprehend her, and who could throw some light on the *dark path of duty*, along which she was moving with *wearied limbs and bleeding feet*.

A long silence followed, yet thought was busy in the minds of both. At last, Helen, with the manner of one who had forced herself into a doubtful utterance, said —

"Father, I do not *love* Mr. Bullfinch — nor did I ever love him. I married him from motives which I see to be wrong. Even the good I expected from the *sacrifice*, has not been attained in anything like the anticipated measure. Daily, since our *unnatural union*, has he grown more and more *repugnant* to me. I have striven against this, but the strife is hopeless. Nature will speak out. Now, father, what is my duty?"

Mr. Lee, while he knew to what his daughter made allusion, in the beginning, was hardly prepared for this broad declaration. He did not reply, immediately, for he saw not clearly how to answer.

"What is my duty, father?" she repeated. "Forgive me for thus disturbing the hours which should be sacred to thoughts of eternal life. But, oh! my father, when you leave me, to whom shall I go for counsel?"

If *words of wisdom* reach not my ears now — they may never come. You have sought my confidence in this sad and solemn time. Shall I give it freely?”

“Freely, my child, freely!” replied Mr. Lee. “Keep nothing back. I am fully prepared to hear. God is giving me *strength for the hour.*”

“What, then, is my duty?” There was now a stern calmness about the daughter. “I do not love Mr. Bullfinch. I have failed to make him happy. The union is altogether external, and of constraint. Had I not better *leave* him?”

“Helen! My child!” exclaimed the father, his wan face flushing, “who has thrown such a thought into your mind? What God has joined together — let not man put asunder,” he added, solemnly.

“This union was not of God,” replied Helen. “It had its origin in *selfishness* and *false principles.*”

“Did you not refer it to God, and invoke His sanction, in your submission to a solemn ordinance of the church? Were you not joined together by his minister and representative? Surely you were! The conjunction was not of external constraint, in a sense which took your consent away from you. Formally and solemnly you presented yourselves, and formally and solemnly wedded each other; and now you cannot abandon the assumed relation without sin.”

Helen bowed her head, while her father was speaking. He paused, but she still bent her head and listened.

“Did you not promise Mr. Bullfinch to be to him all that a wife should be, even until the end of life?”

“A wife should *love* her husband,” said Helen. She spoke without raising her head.

“True.”

“I promised *love* — promised it when I knew I could not give it.”

“Love does come at the bidding; but *outward obedience* to a known duty is possible. You promised to keep your husband in sickness and in health. If you fail in part, fail not in all, my child. If, as a wife, love is an utter impossibility; yet, in an unselfish seeking of your husband’s good; in a daily, earnest endeavor to make him happy, something of interest may and will be awakened. You cannot do this, without softening and humanizing his character, and making him better fitted for a higher and purer life than he has yet lived. In *brooding over the ruins* which fill the chambers of your heart, you only neglect the offices which are required of one in your position. The trial is great, I know; but having assumed such momentous responsibilities — do not abandon them, as you value your soul’s safety. God has joined you together, not in the orderly union He would have provided, but in the disorderly one provided by your own mistaken judgments. The bond is just as sacred, and must be kept whole until the end. This is the divine law; not made arbitrarily, but for the good of those who are to live in obedience to what it requires. Better, far better will it be for your own spiritual good — and this is, in fact, the only real good — to *bear the cross* that you have taken up, and bear it even to the end. It will be *sowing in tears*, I know, my child; but there will come a *harvest of joy.*”

The father ceased speaking, but Helen neither raised her head nor replied. Deeply had his words penetrated her heart, and with a strong sense of conviction; yet, so intently had her mind brooded over the thought of a *separation* from her husband, that she had already come to think of it with a kindling sense of pleasure. All this was now extinguished. The dim light — the false light which had burned in the dark chambers of her mind, flickered and went out. How *cold* and *gloomy* was all before and around her! And yet, her father’s dying words, while they swept away a false hope, gave *new strength* for greater endurance.

“Though rough and thorny be the way,

My strength, proportion to my day.”

In these words, familiar from childhood, she lifted, almost involuntarily, her suffering heart upwards, and as she did so, a better light dawned upon her, a light felt to be the true precursor of a coming *day.*

“You have spoken truly, my father,” said Helen, breaking at length, the long silence. “I cannot, innocently, abandon the position I so unwisely assumed.”

“Not while your husband remains faithful to his vows at the marriage altar. Mere *alienation of mind*, is no warrant for breaking so holy a bond.”

“There is something that I can do, father.” Helen’s voice was warmer in its tones, as she said this, while a flush lighted, dimly, her face.

“What is it, my love?”

“I can forget myself more than I have done, and be more thoughtful of my husband. In many things I can promote his comfort. Ah! I have been too indifferent. How strong the conviction strikes me now! Dear father! How blind to duty a *selfish brooding* over my own disappointed feelings, has made me. I have not denied myself for another’s good. But, God helping me, I will live differently in the future.”

“My spirit leaps with pleasure to hear you thus speak, my good, my true-hearted child,” said Mr. Lee, tenderly. “God will help you. The very wish to bend action to duty, brings Him near with His *sustaining* power; and the silent prayer for strength is never uttered in vain. He will keep you. May His blessing rest upon you! Amen!”

Mr. Lee placed his hand on the bent head of his daughter, and lifted his eyes upward. Silently, for some moments, he prayed for her. Then his lids drooped slowly; the light of thought faded from his countenance, and he seemed unconscious of the present. The minutes glided by, and Helen, who knew that but *few sands of life* remained, began to feel a breathless suspense. A slight moving of the chest showed that respiration still continued. But a low, shuddering sense of fear was creeping along every nerve, and she was about laying her hand heavily upon him and uttering his name in a quick voice, when his eyes slowly opened, and he looked up into her face with a quiet, heavenly smile.

“Peace — peace,” he whispered, but so faintly that Helen bent low to hear him, “All is peace. I go down into the waters, yet fearing no evil; for I can see across the *dark river*. There are *shining ones* on the other side. They wait to receive me. Already my feet are on the brink — the waters have touched them. One parting kiss, dear child!”

They were his last words. As he uttered them, the door opened and the mother of Helen came in. With an effort, the dying man stretched his hands towards her, partly raised himself up, and fell forward on her bosom. When she laid him back on the pillow, his spirit was at rest forever.

As quickly as she could get away from the *chamber of death*, Helen fled to her own room, locked the door, and, sinking on her knees, lifted her *bruised and suffering heart* upwards, aspiring to Heaven on the wings of prayer. For a long time she remained thus, now weeping in abandonment of grief, now communing with her own heart, and now imploring strength for the future.

Word was sent to Mr. Bullfinch of the sudden death of Mr. Lee. On hurrying home from his store, he found his wife singularly composed. Her countenance, it is true, was inexpressibly sad, and her eyes red from weeping; but there was none of that wild abandonment of grief, that he had expected to see — no irrational wailings; none of that utter prostration of body and mind which so often accompanies deep affliction. He could not but wonder at this, nor help feeling an involuntary respect. He doubted not the *suffering* — in the *endurance*, therefore, was something which struck him as sublime, and gave him a new impression of her character. Tenderly he spoke to her, and, with a kindness that she gratefully felt, offered brief, yet fitting words of condolence.

This bereavement, destined, now, to harmonize many antagonisms — to make somewhat *smoother the path* they were treading — would, but for the dying interview between father and daughter, have been the signal for a violent disruption of the bonds which held together this ill-matched couple. An *evil seed* had been cast into the mind of Mrs. Bullfinch; it had found life there, and was sending up its first tender leaves. Watered and nourished, it would soon have attained size and vigor. Amid its branches, *night-birds* would have found shelter; and beneath its gloomy shadows, the green things of her heart would have perished utterly. But, the father’s dying hand had plucked the evil plant, and the tender roots lay sapless in the sunshine.



## Chapter 22.

There are few to whom *affliction* does not come as an *angel of mercy*; few, who do not rise out of the fiery trial *purified*, in some degree, from the dross of worldly-mindedness or self-seeking. This was eminently so in the case of Mrs. Bullfinch. The *starless night* she had feared, did not come. The morning that broke upon her father, lent a few rays which struggled through the clouds darkly curtaining her horizon; and threw light on the *rugged path* which she was destined to tread, thus helping her to step between the *flinty rocks* on which her feet would have been torn, had she groped in the darkness. To her mind, the dying words of her father were ever present; the tones in which they were uttered, still sounded in her ears with a solemn impressiveness. Though dead, he yet spoke to her in a living voice.”

New states of mind never exist without producing a corresponding external change. The *state* inspires the *thought* — and *thought* flows into *action*. Deeply conscious of having been thus far, unfaithful to the pledges involved in her marriage, and earnestly purposing now to do her duty to her husband as far as in her lay, it was not strange that Mr. Bullfinch soon perceived a *change in his wife*, which affected him agreeably. The moodiness, and sharp ill-nature, which she had from time to time exhibited, were no longer apparent. Upon his fretfulness, under slight disappointments, or fault-finding spirit when things did not please him — she no longer reacted as of old; but, to his surprise, meekly bore his reproachful words. Moreover, little discomforts, from which he so often suffered, were no longer apparent. And what was quite as agreeable to him, his rather epicurean tastes were consulted to a degree not known since Fanny Milnor resigned the care of his household.

In the orderly progress of cause and effect — a change soon showed itself in Mr. Bullfinch. His former cheerfulness did not return — there were reasons outside of his domestic relations affecting this — but, the ill-nature from which his family had suffered, disappeared; and the deference that his wife manifestly extended to his wishes, excited in him an inclination to *defer* also. Thus, constrained good will, and consequent good offices — produced good offices in return. The death of her husband greatly subdued Mrs. Lee, and so removed her disturbing influence.

If, in this new order of things, Mrs. Bullfinch did not find the beginnings of *genuine affection* for her husband — she yet experienced the birth of a new interest, which induced a closer observation. Much of the time she saw that his brow was clouded, and his mind either deeply abstracted, or evidently disturbed. More earnestly she sought to *know* his wishes; more sedulously strove to *meet* them in every particular. That she was successful in her desire to make his home pleasant, she had many reasons to conclude; still, the troubled aspect of his countenance remained; and his silence and abstraction grew deeper. A few times she sought to penetrate the cause of this change, but he gently repelled or evaded her inquiries.

In the *sunless sky* bending over Mrs. Bullfinch, the moon had risen to give its mellow, guiding light; but that sky was not long to remain cloudless. Either her closer observation of her husband revealed causes of anxiety, if not alarm — or he was beginning to acquire a habit exceedingly dangerous to all ages, but more particularly so, for one at his time of life. Both wine and brandy, he had always used on his table. Of the propriety of this, Helen had never, up to the present time, seen anything to awaken a doubt. But, now, she began to remark the frequency with which he filled his glass, and the stupor that often came after dinner. Could it be possible, she asked herself, and with a feeling of alarm, that he was becoming inordinately fond of alcoholic drinks? The very question gave a new excitement to her fears, and quickened her observation.

It was not long before all *doubts* gave place to *painful certainty*. Occasionally Mr. Bullfinch went out in the evening to spend an hour with some old friend. From one of these visits he returned rather later than usual, and so much under the influence of drink, as to be exceedingly foolish. In less than a week the same thing occurred again. From these, as well as other indications, it was but too apparent where his overindulged appetites were carrying him. He had pampered them until they were too strong for the *rein*, which, in times past, he was able to hold with a vigorous hand.

Morning usually found Mr. Bullfinch silent and troubled, his mind brooding over something, of which he showed no inclination to speak; while, it too often happened, that evening found him so heavy with excess of wine, as to be utterly stupid. As time wore on, this increased.

At length his manner became unusually excited, while his countenance showed the existence of intense anxiety. His breakfast would be taken hurriedly, and often fully half an hour elapsed, beyond the dining period — usually so promptly observed — before he returned from his store. Let us make the cause of this change more apparent to the reader.

Mr. Bullfinch had taken his silent and hastily eaten breakfast, one morning, during the time of which we are speaking, and was on his way to his store, when a mercantile friend overtook him.

“Have you seen the morning paper, Mr. Bullfinch?” inquired this gentleman.

“No,” was answered. “I never see the papers until I get to my store.

“Any news of interest?”

“Another bad failure in New York is reported.”

“Who?”

“L & J.”

“Impossible!”

“Too true, I fear. They have been, for some time, greatly extended.”

“I declare! It begins to look frightful,” said Mr. Bullfinch, his manner indicating great uneasiness of mind.

“It does, indeed,” was the equally concerned reply.

“Do they owe you anything?” asked Mr. Bullfinch.

“No, thank fortune. The owing part is on the other side this time.”

“Ah! you’re lucky.”

“So I think. But, how is it with you?”

“I wish I could say the same. But, I sold them a bill just four months ago. The note fell due in New York yesterday. If they have actually failed, the protest will come to hand this morning.”

“What amount?”

“Twenty-three hundred dollars!”

“Bad. Was the note discounted?”

“Yes, and this makes it so much the worse. I shall have to provide for it, on a day which is already burdened quite heavily enough.”

The other shook his head, and put on a very grave countenance.

“How will you stand, today?” asked Mr. Bullfinch, after a pause. “Should this note come back under protest, I shall need to raise a couple of thousand dollars. Are you likely to have anything over?”

“Not a cent,” was the unequivocal reply. “Not a cent, I’ve been on the borrowing list for a week, and see no prospect of getting off of it for a month to come.”

The two men parted here, their ways diverging. With a quickened step, Mr. Bullfinch hurried on to his place of business. The news of L & J’s failure, proved to be too true. Letters from New York not only confirmed it, but the protest on their unpaid note made assurance doubly sure.

Without this additional weight, Mr. Bullfinch had quite as much to carry for that day, as he could well bear. Intently as he had pondered the ways and means within his power — he was not yet able to see how his other payments were to be made; nor, after much thought and effort continued for some two hours, did the prospect before him grow any brighter. At length, after one or two heavy sacrifices, which, of late, he had been obliged too frequently to make, he obtained sufficient money to lift his own notes, but the protested note of L & J was yet unprovided for. This bid fair to prove the “last straw to break the camel’s back.” Every dollar of paper he had received, up to this time, for sales of goods, had been either passed through bank, or was in the hands of private moneylenders. No resource was left but that of borrowing money from mercantile friends, to be returned in a day or a week, as the case might be; and he had, already, made application in all quarters likely to afford the needed relief, in the effort to meet his legitimate payments.

Time flew by on rapid wings, and banking hours were fast drawing to a close; still the needed supply of money came not into the hands of Mr. Bullfinch. The old man's heart began to faint. That terrible ultimate in a merchant's life, failure — loomed up before his mental vision in its most frightful aspects, causing a *shudder* to reach his very heart.

It was past two o'clock, yet the deficit in his money matters for the day was just twenty-three hundred dollars, the amount of the protested note. To a merchant, who had been in the habit of lending him freely, but who had that morning failed to accommodate him as usual, he made application a second time.

"You must raise a couple of thousand dollars for me," said Mr. Bullfinch. "That note of L & J's is still in the notary's hands, and my regular payments for the day, have exhausted all the day's resources.

"Impossible," was the firm answer; "utterly impossible. We had five thousand dollars in protested drafts to provide for, besides our usual payments, which were very heavy."

"Has any body got anything over today?" asked Mr. Bullfinch, in a half-despairing tone.

"Nobody that I have heard of, except Lane, Latta & Co. They are as easy as an old shoe. Someone told me yesterday, that their bank account always showed a balance to their credit of over ten thousand dollars."

"Possible!" The old man seemed partially stupefied by this declaration.

"Try them," said the merchant. Mr. Bullfinch shook his head.

"You'll get what you need for today, I have not the smallest doubt. See Mr. *Wellford*. He has most to do with the financial concerns of the establishment, and will lend you all you need at a word."

"No — no — I can't go there." There was a quickness of tone, and an unusual mark of feeling in the old man's voice.

"Why not? You need the money, and can get it for the asking."

"I'll try somewhere else," said Mr. Bullfinch, turning from the merchant, and walking hurriedly away. As he reached the street, his eyes rested on the face of a clock. What a large segment of a circle the minute hand had described since he last marked the hour! The old man's heart beat quicker and stronger. Two evils were before him: mercantile dishonor — or an application to *Wellford* for a temporary loan. He had no time now to cast about for any other resource; and, even the one which seemed to offer, must be used quickly if used at all.

It would be hard to describe the feelings of Mr. Bullfinch, as he dragged himself along in the direction of Lane, Latta & Co.'s. No physical suffering could have been so dreaded, as was the meeting with Mr. *Wellford*, to whom he knew the application for money must be made.

"Is Mr. *Wellford* in?" he asked, in a voice far from being as composed as he could wish, on entering the store.

"You will find him back in the counting-room," was answered, and the old gentleman moved down the store. It so happened that *Wellford* was alone in the counting room. He saw Mr. Bullfinch approaching, and, having heard that he was a loser by the failure in New York, inferred at once the purpose of his visit.

"Mr. Bullfinch. How are you?" said he kindly, as he advanced to meet him. Seeing that the old man was much embarrassed, he anticipated his request by saying —

"Can we do anything for you, today?"

"If you have some twenty-three hundred dollars over, you can," was stammered out.

"We can check for as much," said *Wellford* cheerfully. "How long will you need it?"

"For three or four days, if you can spare it so long," replied Mr. Bullfinch.

"Say for a week," replied *Wellford*, as he stepped back to a desk, and took down the check-book.

A few minutes after Mr. Bullfinch entered the store, he came out with a check in his hand for the sum needed. In one respect, his mind was relieved; but, in another, it was heavily burdened. There was not a man living from whom an obligation could have been received with more reluctance. Nothing but the fearful consequences just ready to be visited upon him, would ever have driven him to this resort.

It did not escape the observation of Mrs. Bullfinch, when her husband came in, much later than usual, to dinner, that he was suffering from more than ordinary disturbance of mind; nor did she fail to remark that while he ate with none of his accustomed relish for food — he *drank wine* almost as freely as if it were water. The consequence she dreaded, came. When he arose, at length, from the table, he was so

much affected by the unusual quantity of wine taken, that Helen had to assist him upstairs. Insensibility followed, from which he was not aroused until a late tea hour, when he took a single strong cup of coffee, and then went out for the evening. At eleven o'clock he came home, in little better condition than when he left the dinner table. In the morning, he was himself again, and prepared for another day's struggle with fortune. A too distinct remembrance of the previous day's trials, and especially the mode in which he had saved himself from ruin, in no way tended to the promotion of a cheerful spirit. Heavily contracted his brow, as he sat at the unenjoyed and silent breakfast.

"Can you let me have some money, today?" asked Mrs. Bullfinch, as he arose from the table.

The words of his wife seemed most unwelcome, for his already knit brows gained instantly a few more lines, and he said, rather impatiently —

"Money! For what? How much do you need?"

"None for myself," replied Mrs. Bullfinch, in a voice which showed that she was hurt by his manner. "The bread bill and the milk bill have not yet been paid, and the waiter needs twenty dollars which are due her."

"Very well — milk man, bread man, and waiter, can't be accommodated," said Mr. Bullfinch, gruffly.

"I told them all that they would have their money today," said Mrs. Bullfinch, in some perplexity of manner.

"Can't help it. They must wait. Money don't always come when you *call* for it. At least, not to me."

And without waiting a reply from his wife, whose flushing face warned him that he had spoken too unguardedly, Mr. Bullfinch turned off abruptly, and left the house.

## Chapter 23.

We need not linger to trace, successively, the *downward steps* taken by Adam Bullfinch, whether as a man or a merchant. Accumulating years and sensual indulgence — had united to dim the clearness of his intellect. A merchant of the old school, if he had been wise enough to keep to the old school doctrines of caution, close calculation, and contentment with moderate, but sure returns — all would have been well with him in respect to worldly goods. But, having taken a young wife, Mr. Bullfinch felt himself quite a young man, and must needs act as he felt. “The mind,” he vainly said to himself, “never grows old. The body may bend with accumulating years; but the immortal soul knows not the touch of time. I have now a brighter and stronger intellect, a clearer reason, than I possessed twenty years ago, and am more capable of doing business — and more far-seeing as a merchant.”

And so, Mr. Bullfinch, pulling up the old landmarks — despising the old-fashioned lessons of wisdom, by an adherence to which he had slowly accumulated a fortune — threw himself forward in a contest with the sharp, shrewd, unscrupulous, *nothing-ventured-nothing-gained* class of merchants, and in an astonishing brief period, came out of the struggle an *utterly ruined man*.

Having broken the ice with Mr. Wellford, Mr. Bullfinch, as his efforts to save himself grew more and more desperate, forced himself to make repeated applications in that quarter, and in most cases with success.

“I’m afraid,” said the resident senior partner of the house, speaking one day to Mr. Wellford, “that old Bullfinch is not in a safe condition.

“I begin to have some doubts myself,” was answered.

“Someone told me, this morning, that he takes too much wine.”

A shadow passed over the young man’s face, as he said —

“O no. That must be a mistake.”

“I hope so; but his appearance rather confirms the assertion.”

A mercantile acquaintance coming in at the time, the subject was continued, and the question asked as to his opinion of the old gentleman’s habits.

“I’m told, on good authority,” was unhesitatingly answered, “that he *drinks like a fish* — never goes to bed a night in his life that he is not *stupid as a beast*.”

Wellford sighed deeply. His thoughts were with *Helen*; and his *sympathy* for her painfully excited.

“What do you think of his business?” inquired Mr. Lane.

“He’s sound, I suppose.”

“He seems hard run for money just now,” said Mr. Lane.

“I know; and, what is more, has been paying enormous rates for some months past.”

“No man is safe in these times,” was remarked.

“That’s true enough. Men who seemed firm as the eternal hills, have toppled over, involving numbers below them in utter ruin. As for Bullfinch, I have, between you and me and the post, my own private opinion for my own private action.”

“What is that?” inquired Wellford.

“As to the *opinion*, I need not speak; the *action* will be sufficiently demonstrative. In a word then, I declined selling him a bill of goods yesterday.”

“You did?”

“It’s true.”

“Of what amount?”

“Five thousand dollars. Do you want to know why?”

“Of course.”

“This, then, for *your ears*. Two or three days ago I saw certain packages, just arrived from New York, taken to his store; and, yesterday morning, I saw the same packages sold at auction, below the market price. Do you understand?”

“Clearly.”

“An hour afterwards he wanted to make a good round bill with me, but I declined.”

“And you were right,” said Mr. Lane, firmly. We are obliged to you for the hint. We have been lending him pretty freely of late; but shall have to be less liberal of our favors.”

Scarcely had the neighbor left the store, when Mr. Bullfinch was seen to enter.

“You mustn’t lend him *anything* more,” said Mr. Lane.

“Very well,” replied the younger partner, averting his face.

Mr. Lane retired to his own private counting-room, and Wellford met the old man, who came up to him in a half cringing manner, yet, evidently, under a strong feeling of reluctance.

“How are you off for money today?” inquired Mr. Bullfinch in a low voice.

“Nothing to spare,” was the firmly spoken answer.

“Will you need the three thousand I was to return this morning?”

Wellford reflected for a few moments, and then replied:

“If it will be any accommodation to you, that may be deferred until tomorrow. But we will certainly need it then.”

“Thank you — thank you. I will bring it around in the morning. Are you certain you can’t spare a thousand today?”

“Quite certain.”

“Good day;” and the old gentleman with a disappointment he could not conceal, retired from the store.

It was after two o’clock, and Wellford was about leaving to go home and dine, when Mr. Bullfinch confronted him again, and said, with a beseeching earnestness —

“You *must* help me once more, my young friend.”

“Impossible.” And Wellford shook his head.

“Don’t say that. If you haven’t a thousand dollars in bank, lend me your check dated two or three days ahead — that will answer my purpose just as well.”

Wellford repeated his negative.

“You *must* help me,” said Mr. Bullfinch, much excited. “I am just one thousand dollars short, and have tried every possible means to raise the money. Frankly and confidentially” — he bent close to Wellford’s ear, “I have come to you as my *last resort*. If you do not help me now — I shall be protested.”

There was something in the old man’s voice that Wellford could hardly withstand. It would have been withstood, however, had not a vision of *Helen* came to his mind. Silently he turned to his desk, and filling up a check for a thousand dollars, handed it without a word, to Mr. Bullfinch, who, grasping it nervously, hurried away to prolong, for a brief season, the unequal struggle he was endeavoring to maintain.

On the next day, he did not call to return the three thousand dollars, as he had promised Wellford. The loan of an additional thousand, after what had passed between Mr. Lane and his junior partner, displeased the former a good deal, and caused him to speak so plainly that the latter was hurt and slightly offended. Some rather sharp words passed between them, which, but for the good sense of both parties, might have led to an open rupture, and a consequent withdrawal of Wellford from the business.

On the day but one following, the mercantile community was startled by the announcement of another failure — that of *Adam Bullfinch*; and a very bad failure it proved to be. When, under an assignment, his affairs were subjected to investigation, it was found that he was *hopelessly insolvent*. Nor were his creditors at all satisfied with the reckless manner in which he seemed to have been doing business for some time. Goods had been purchased on credit, in large quantities, and sent immediately to neighboring cities and sold at auction, for cash, at less than the purchase prices; enormous discounts had been submitted to on temporary loans; and other doubtful and reckless expedients resorted to, by which means, thousands and thousands of dollars had been wasted. This was his new mode of doing business, in accordance with the *more enterprising spirit* of the times, into which the increasing vigor and clearness of his mental powers were enticing him!

Had Mr. Bullfinch stopped payment six months before, he would have come out with a clear surplus of over fifty thousand dollars. But, in struggling, and sacrificing, and hoping for some *new turn of fortune*, under the impulse of his modernized views of business, he wasted everything to such a degree, that even borrowed money debts were unprovided for, while his whole estate was so impoverished, that the most

expectant would have sold out their claims against it for *forty cents* on the dollar! His business indebtedness to Lane, Latta & Co. was five thousand dollars, and his obligations to the same business, for borrowed money, six thousand more.

So utterly insolvent was the estate of Mr. Bullfinch, that his application for an extension of time, in order that he might go on and recover himself, was at once voted down in the meeting of creditors. His assignment was accepted, and the net value of the estate realized as quickly as possible.

The house in which Mr. Bullfinch resided was his own, and was worth about ten thousand dollars. It was, however, under mortgage for nearly its full value. Two or three smaller houses were also included in the deed of assignment. Through the personal influence of Mr. Wellford, one of these, with the household effects of the debtor, were presented by the creditors to Mrs. Bullfinch. But for the fact that one or two of the creditors, who had heard something of Wellford's former relation to Mrs. Bullfinch, and who not only highly respected the young man, but were men enough to appreciate his motives and feelings in the present case; but for the fact that these, we say, seconded the generous proposal — the family of the broken merchant would have been left *homeless* as well as *penniless!*

## Chapter 24.

Mr. Bullfinch was not the man to pass through so terrible an ordeal, and bear the pain with but few external marks of suffering. The degree of agitation exhibited, when no eye but that of his wife saw the anguish of his spirit, was, at times, fearful to look upon. And yet, almost to the last, he hid from her the cause, notwithstanding she appealed to him, again and again, in the tenderest manner, to make her the sharer of his trouble. At last, the truth could no longer be concealed. Up to the final moment, he struggled to sustain himself with a tenacity of mercantile life rarely shown. All was activity, and profound agitation, until hope spread out her pinions and flew away! Then a deep calm fell upon his spirit.

"It is all over," said he in a composed voice, to his confidential clerk. "I have done all in human power to accomplish. The crash is coming at last. Whether I shall come out alive from beneath the ruins, or be crushed to death by the fall, is more than our weak foresight can determine. I think I am prepared for the worst; but we are only mortal at best."

The state of mind in which her husband had, for weeks, returned from his business, caused Mrs. Bullfinch to look, daily, for his coming, with something of *dread*. On this particular occasion, the dinner hour had long passed, yet he was still away. This, as it was not an unusual thing, caused her no greater concern than she had been daily suffering. At last, she heard him enter, and listened with more interest, perhaps, than common to his deliberate step, as he moved along the passage, and ascended the stairs. It was the *old, familiar tread*, to which her ear had become accustomed; and yet, there was something in it that marked a change in her husband's state of mind — whether favorable, or otherwise, her instincts were not informed — and she waited, with partially suspended respiration, his entrance. One glance sufficed. She saw that — whatever had been the causes from which he had suffered so profoundly of late — the *struggle was over*. His *brow*, where deep lines had fixed themselves for months past, was smooth, as if anxious care had never laid thereon a finger; but, as smooth as it was, it reflected not a single ray of light. His eye had lost its quick motion, and now looked heavy and fireless. His lips, long so tightly drawn together, or arched with earnest thought, were gently parted, and almost expressionless. His body, usually erect, was slightly bent forward. He was an *impersonation of hopeless, yet patient endurance*.

"Mr. Bullfinch!" exclaimed Helen, starting forward, and laying her hand, with an earnest pressure, on his arm, "what has happened?"

"Sit down," said he, in a voice so strangely unfamiliar to the ears of his wife, that the tones chilled her, "and I will tell you all. Concealment are no longer a virtue."

Helen allowed him to lead her to a chair. Taking one beside her, and still holding her hand, he continued —

"Helen — when I asked you to become my wife, I was rich. I offered you all the comforts and elegancies which wealth could buy. Even with these to lay at your feet, I have failed to make you happy. Heaven knows the pleasure it has ever given me to see a *smile* light up your countenance — alas! how few and feeble they have ever been."

He uttered the last words quickly, and with a slight unsteadiness in his voice. A moment he averted his face, and then resumed —

"Helen, as I have just said, when I asked you to become my wife, I was *rich*. But, this day, I am a *beggar!*"

He paused, and looked anxiously into the face of his wife. The change he had expected was not visible. She did not startle, nor grow pale, nor weep.

"Did you *understand* me, Helen? I said that I was a *beggar*. When I married you, I promised all the good things that wealth could procure. This day, I am reduced to *poverty*."

"Wealth alone!" replied Helen, in a composed voice, "never made a heart happy. True satisfaction of mind has its source in a higher spring."

The old man was greatly moved by so unexpected a reception of his communication. He had long since let go the delusion, that, for any other attraction than his *wealth* — his wife had consented to wed. She had plainly enough declared this in the beginning, but, in his blind self-delusion, he would not



believe the assertion. Alas! in what *rigid and unmistakable forms* had the truth been since presented to his mind. Now that wealth was gone, he felt that the only uniting bond was severed, and in the hopeless spirit of a martyr, he made this declaration of his changed fortunes.

No wonder such an unexpected reception of his announcement moved him deeply.

“Did you *understand* me, Helen?” he asked.

“I believe so,” she answered.

“I am rich no longer. This day, I have failed to meet my payments — and tomorrow, all I have in the world must be surrendered to my creditors. Do you comprehend the meaning of all this?”

“Clearly,” said Helen.

“But can you bear the *change* that comes inevitably?”

“I have borne it once,” she replied. “I can bear it again.”

“Once!”

For an instant, Mr. Bullfinch did not comprehend his wife. But memory quickly made all clear. Her father had, from wealth, been reduced to extreme poverty. How well he remembered all the events connected with Mr. Lee’s failure, and the not over-generous part that he had acted as a creditor for a small amount.

“Ah! now I remember,” he said, his voice falling.

“I have borne *reverse of fortune*, once,” repeated Helen, “and I can bear it again; with some fortitude, I trust, for I am stronger now.”

Mr. Bullfinch gazed upon his wife in silent wonder. There were no marks of *pain* or *fear* on her countenance, which wore an elevated, truly dignified aspect. With what a shrinking reluctance had he looked to this stern necessity — how he had dreaded the effect upon his wife of the announcement she had received so calmly! For a little while, he was sustained by her fortitude. This, however, was but temporary. The consequences to himself were too direct and all-embracing; and he had too long rested for happiness in the *external things* that wealth and social position gave, to meet such utter ruin with any heart resignation whatever.

It was soon apparent to Mrs. Bullfinch, that her husband had fallen, never to rise again. That, in the destruction of his earthly fortune, self-control, under the pressure of appetite and habit, and self-respect also — were both to a great extent involved. If the announcement of his loss of property had in no way appalled her, the too certain signs of this personal abandonment, as they became more and more visible, day after day, began to startle, and alarm her with glimpses of a profounder depth of suffering, if that were possible, than any she had yet been called on to endure.

A week or two elapsed before Mrs. Bullfinch began to comprehend the exact position of her husband’s business. Finding that, under the pressure of a great calamity, he was fast losing all manly control of himself — in fact, drowning thought, daily, in excessive quantities of wine or brandy — she took direct means for ascertaining the state of his affairs. That is, she called upon a merchant who had frequently visited at their house, and in whose good feeling and truthfulness she had entire confidence. From him she learned, that the declaration of Mr. Bullfinch, to the effect that he was a *beggar*, was no figure of speech. It was then that she began to feel dizzy, as her eyes wandered down the *dark chasm* which had suddenly opened at her feet, and she could see *no bottom*. Had her husband retained his balance of intellect, personal activity, and entire control of his appetites — she would have met the change with few emotions strong enough to leave an external sign.

But, unhappily, this was not so. Each recurring day made but the more apparent, the rapidity with which he was sinking all the manly qualities of his nature — drowning everything of good that remained — in the cup of utter confusion. Morning found him sober and serious enough. A few hours were then devoted to the business of conferring and acting with the assignees of his property. Dinner-time brought him home usually the worse for repeated glasses of brandy; while the afternoon, and often the evening, were spent in sleeping off the effects of deeper drafts.

One day he came home greatly agitated.

“All gone!” he exclaimed, on meeting his wife. “Everything swallowed up. Ruin! utter ruin!”

“I know the worst,” said Helen.

“They will leave us nothing! House — household effects — everything is to be swept away! I never saw such rapacity — such lack of humanity.”

It is scarcely to be wondered that the face of Mrs. Bullfinch grew paler now; nor, that her lips were tremulous as she said —

“They will at least spare us *these*.” And her eyes glanced around the room in which they were sitting.

“Nothing. All must go! It is dreadful! Let a man once become unfortunate, and his fellow men hunt him to the death as if he were a criminal.”

Mrs. Bullfinch replied not. But her thoughts were busy with new images, that took more fearful and repulsive forms.

As it had been for weeks before, it happened on this afternoon, Mr. Bullfinch sought temporary oblivion in wine.

## Chapter 25.

The day had nearly closed, and Mrs. Bullfinch was alone, brooding over the dark prospect which opened to view in the future, and striving to find strength for what was before her, in considerations of duty, when she was informed that two gentlemen had called and wished to see her. Their names were sent up, and she remembered them as merchants and friends of her husband. After a few hurried changes in her dress, and a strong effort to compose her exterior — she descended to the parlors. She was met by the two gentlemen — both of whom were struck with her womanly dignity and repose of manner — with a deferential courtesy, that, under the circumstances, was grateful to her feelings.

“Our visit, Mrs. Bullfinch,” said one of them, “is painful, and yet pleasant. In your husband’s misfortunes we sympathize, and we sympathize with you in particular, as being necessarily a sharer in any evil that affects him. Of the extent of his losses, you are, of course, aware.”

Mrs. Bullfinch bowed.

“You know that his estate will not pay the claims against it?”

She bowed again.

“Creditors,” he resumed, “are never over considerate of debtors. The first impression of a loss sours the feelings and creates hardness. Therefore, in dealing summarily with a *debtor*, they are apt to be uninfluenced by any considerations of humanity. But I am pleased to say that, in the present case, some better feelings have prevailed. Your husband’s creditors, called back to right considerations, by one of their number, have instructed us to present you, as your own property, one of the *houses* included in his estate. This pleasant duty, we have now called to perform — here are the *title deeds* duly authenticated.”

And he handed the papers to Mrs. Bullfinch, who took them in silence. She was too much affected to reply.

“And we are further instructed to say, that all your household furniture, belongings, jewelry, etc., are likewise presented to you.”

“Say to them in return,” replied Mrs. Bullfinch, as soon as she could command her voice, “that one who has a second time in life felt the *iron hand of misfortune* — thanks them with a grateful heart.”

She spoke with feeling, and yet with a degree of self-possession, and evidence of fortitude, that filled them with admiration. As they arose to depart, one of them said —

“A creditor of your husband’s was alluded to as having instigated the others to this act. I don’t know *why* I should mention his name; but it seems as if he should get the credit of his generous impulse. I am not aware that you ever met him personally; or that he is a particular friend of Mr. Bullfinch. His name is *Wellford* — one of the firm of Lane, Latta & Co.”

The sudden flush that came into the face of Helen, was not unmarked by her visitors. But its meaning, they did not comprehend.

From their elegant home, the broken merchant and his family in due time retired. The small house, remote from their old place of abode, which the generous consideration of the creditors of Mr. Bullfinch had reserved for his wife, received them, and there they began their new life; rather be it said — there *Helen* began her new life. As for Mr. Bullfinch, he lived little more than the life of a *beast*; and Mrs. Lee, the mother of Helen, when reverse of fortune came, found good reasons for deserting her daughter and seeking another home, in a distant city, with a wealthy relative.

A year sufficed to exhaust nearly all the resources of Mr. and Mrs. Bullfinch. Surplus furniture and silverware had been sold, and on the money this yielded, they had lived. No employment had been sought by Mr. Bullfinch; and, for a portion of nearly every day during the year, he was unfit for intelligent duty.

At last, articles of *necessity* had to be parted with in order to procure the daily supply of food and drink — the drink costing, usually, more than the food. And so it went on, until *extremity* came. Before this was reached, Mrs. Bullfinch had anxiously debated the question of personal effort on her part for the support of herself and husband. She had the same ability to earn money, as before her marriage; but, pride and womanly delicacy both took alarm the moment the thought came into her mind, and both argued strongly against the suggestion. But, *necessity* toys not with *inclination*. Sternly she bends all to her will.

“Let me have a dollar,” said Mr. Bullfinch, one morning, to his wife, as he was preparing, soon after breakfast, to go out.

Helen opened her purse, with a kind of half involuntary movement — showed him the inside, and answered, gloomily —

“I have nothing.”

“Nothing!” He looked surprised.

“Not a single cent,” was answered.

“I gave you twenty dollars of the money for which the clock, sofa and ottoman sold.”

“I know; but half of it was owed at the store; and the remainder has been expended to keep the table.”

“What are we to do?” said the old man as he took off his hat, laid aside his cane, and sat down with an air of despondency.

“I do not know,” Helen sighed as she spoke.

“We can’t starve,” said Mr. Bullfinch, fretfully.

Helen did not answer.

“I’ve tried hard to get into some employment,” continued the old man, still in a fretful voice. “But it’s all been of no use. Oh, dear! What is to become of us? We must live.”

Still his wife remained silent. She knew the thought was in his mind; and momentarily expected what came next —

“The fact is, Helen,” said he, firmly and positively, “we shall have to sell this house. It will bring three thousand dollars. It’s no use to keep it, if we must starve.”

Mrs. Bullfinch shook her head.

“What are we to do? Have you any money with which to buy bread?”

“Not now.” It was plain from her manner, as well as from the altered tone of her voice, that her mind had come to a sudden conclusion. “But I will get what we need, at least for the present.”

“Where?” inquired her husband.

“I can’t answer your question now. Enough, that I will procure money for the supply of immediate needs. As to parting with our home, there must be greater extremity than now exists before I consent to the sale. While we have that in possession, there is a place where we can, at least, hide ourselves from the world.”

“And *starve*,” said the old man, impatiently.

“I will take care that we do not starve.”

“You? Where are your resources? Have you money hidden away? I thought you said, just now, that you had not a penny.”

“Nor have I. But I will, as I said, *procure* enough to supply present needs.”

As to how and where she expected to get money, Mrs. Bullfinch would give her husband no satisfaction. Soon after, the old man went out, and took his way to the business quarters of the city. He had tasted no stimulating drink since the night before, and was now burning with an intense desire for a glass of brandy. But he had no money with which to procure the wished for indulgence. All at once a suggestion came to his mind. At first he pushed it aside with a feeling of shame. It returned, and was now dwelt upon. The expedient proposed was simple and almost certain of success; yet the old manliness and independence of feeling fought against its adoption. But, resistance grew feebler and feebler, as *thirst for alcohol* became stronger. At last appetite gained the advantage. Then, with a quickened pace, he moved forward, and kept on until he reached Front Street, near Chestnut. There were few merchants in that neighborhood with whom he was not well acquainted. Into one of these stores he entered.

“How are you, Mr. Bullfinch?” The salutation was cordial, as the person addressing him held out his hand.

“Pretty well, thank you,” said the old man, in no very cheerful voice.

“What are you doing now? I haven’t seen you in this neighborhood for months.”

“Not a great deal. When men at my age are pushed aside, it is pretty much all over with them. The sooner they are out of the world — the better, perhaps, for them and the world too.”

“Don’t talk in that way, Mr. Bullfinch.”

“How can I help it? But, I won’t worry you with my grumbling. I’ve called to ask a small favor.”

“Well, what is it? Let me hear?”

“Will you lend me five dollars?”

“Certainly,” replied the merchant. And he took from his pocket book a bill and handed it to Mr. Bullfinch. The act was prompt and cheerful.

“Thank you! Thank you!” said the old man, his partly averted countenance flushing with both pleasure and shame. “You are very kind. I will return it tomorrow.”

“Don’t trouble yourself. It will do at any time,” was kindly answered.

Mr. Bullfinch went quickly from the store. Soon after, he was sitting in a neighboring *tavern* with a bottle of wine before him.

As soon as her husband left the house, Mrs. Bullfinch went to her chamber, and unlocking a private drawer, took therefrom a small ebony box, richly inlaid with gold. Within, were a few articles of jewelry, and a gold watch. The intrinsic value of these was not great, but, to Mrs. Bullfinch, they had a value not estimated by common standards. The watch had belonged to her father. There was a plain gold ring in the box, a gift from Henry Wellford, which she never could find it in her heart to return, though, after her breach of faith, she no longer considered herself privileged to wear it. A cameo breast-pin, from the same source, had also been preserved; and, likewise, a pair of neat agate earrings. These were the *last lingerers* in her jewel-box. All else had gone, to meet the common needs of nature.

With what a fixed, sad look, did Mrs. Bullfinch sit and gaze on these memorials! And must she part with them now? The thought was more than she could bear. Suddenly shutting the box, and restoring it to the drawer, she commenced moving about the room in a quick manner, her countenance showing earnest thought. Was there no other temporary resource but this? How earnestly was her mind searching about for a way to escape the sacrifice! After a while, she paused, and bent her head, as if debating some new thought. A light came into her face.

“That may do,” was breathed audibly. She then dressed herself to go out, and, after removing from her jewel-box the ring, breast-pin, and earrings, and restoring them to the drawer, she took the elegant box and the gold watch and left the house. To the store of a well-known jeweler, in Chestnut Street, where she had, not a very long time previously, made liberal purchases, she went direct. Something in the manner of Mr. Carney, the owner of this store, had left on her a favorable impression as to his kindness of heart, and this had determined her to ask of him the particular favor she wished granted. He was engaged with some ladies, when she entered, and she, therefore, retired towards the back part of the store, to wait until he was at leisure. One of the ladies she immediately recognized as an acquaintance, with whom a few formal visits had been reciprocated. Drawing her veil closer, she avoided a recognition, had the lady been disposed to remember her. From a momentary abstraction of mind, the words, “Bridal presents,” uttered by one of the ladies, drew her attention.

“Oh, do let me see them, Mr. Carney,” was eagerly asked.

The jeweler took from the case, a few costly and elegant articles, and exhibited them to his customers.

“Beautiful! exquisite! charming!” and similar words of admiration reached the ears of Mrs Bullfinch.

“Who is the bride?” was next inquired.

The tones of the jeweler were low, but the name — “Miss Morgan,” was distinctly heard by Mrs. Bullfinch.

“Indeed! Oh! I had heard of her intended marriage,” said one of the ladies.

“I wonder how her family are pleased with the match? Not wonderfully well, I would think,” gossiped the other.

“Why not? He bears an excellent character, and is connected with one of the wealthiest houses in the city.”

“And yet,” was replied, with a half contemptuous toss of the head, “his family is nothing. He was a poor young man of whom nobody had heard, when taken into his present business. For my part, I wonder at Sally Morgan. She has had better offers; and could, at any time, get a husband in the first social rank. But there is no accounting for *tastes*.”

"In my opinion," said the other lady, "he is quite good enough for her, and, if I dared say it, too good. Hers is an old family, it is true, but not without its *blemishes*. There's some blood in it I wouldn't like to have in my veins. Her uncle, as everybody knows, made a wonderfully narrow escape. Most people don't hesitate to say, that if he had his deserts, he would be well acquainted with the walls of a state prison. But people will talk."

"Yes, people will talk; but it doesn't do to pay much attention to what they say. With me, such things usually go in at one ear and out at the other. As for Sally Morgan, if she likes him, why, I suppose it's nobody's business. She's got to *live* with him."

"He'll make her a good husband, without doubt," was replied.

"There's no question of that," now remarked the jeweler. "I've known *Henry Wellford* for some years, and know him to be a true man. As for Miss Morgan, I think she's made a wise choice."

Every word of this conversation was heard distinctly by Mrs. Bullfinch. Its effect was marked by the fact that she arose up, and, with a hand grasping tightly her veil, went quickly from the store.

"What lady was that?" inquired one of the gossiping customers, following with her eyes the retiring form of Helen. "There's something familiar in her style and manner."

"I don't know," replied Mr. Carney. "Who was it, James?" addressing a clerk.

"A lady who wished to speak with you," was answered.

"What did she want?"

"She wished to see you, personally, about something."

"You don't know her?"

"I'm not positive, sir; but I think it was *Mrs. Bullfinch*."

"Mrs. Bullfinch!" ejaculated both of the ladies at once. "I wonder if it was her!"

"Most probably," said Mr. Carney. "I now recognize the manner and appearance, although I did not see her face. Poor woman! Fortune has played her falsely."

"She's served right, and I'm glad of it," remarked one of the ladies. "I've no respect nor pity for a young girl who marries an old man for his *money*."

"It's a little strange that she did not wait until I was disengaged," said the jeweler.

"I rather think I can explain this," said the last speaker. "We mentioned the approaching marriage of Miss Morgan and Mr. Wellford. It is said that Wellford was an old lover, and that she *jilted* him because he was poor, and wedded old Bullfinch. It must have cut her to the very core, when she heard that he was about to marry into one of the best families in the state."

"And she is in poverty and neglect," remarked the other. "So it goes. The *wheel of fortune* keeps turning. No one who is at the top today — can tell how soon he will be at the bottom."

But enough of their remarks. When Mr. Bullfinch came home at dinner-time, he found his wife lying on the bed, in a state of mental and bodily prostration so alarming, that he deemed it best to send immediately for a physician. Of little use, however, were medical prescriptions. Days went by before she rallied from the state in which her husband found her, and weeks before she was able once more to get sufficient command of her feelings to enter the path of duty, and move, with a firm step, along the rugged way.

Why the intelligence of Mr. Wellford's approaching marriage should have told so disastrously on the mind of Mrs. Bullfinch, we will not attempt to inform the reader. That such an event was one, of all others, among the likeliest to occur, she must have known. If the *hope*, scarcely acknowledged to herself, of freedom, by the death of her husband, from her present bonds, and an ultimate union with the only being ever *truly loved* as woman can love — really existed in her heart, it had received a total extinguishment.

When, at length, she awoke, once more, to a partial interest in external things, and to a dim sense of duty, she found that an extremity existed which made immediate action, on her part, necessary. During the time in which her mental paralysis continued, Mr. Bullfinch had procured temporary supplies of money, by *borrowing* small sums from old mercantile friends, after the manner indicated in the preceding Chapter. But, a failure to *return* the little obligations, as promised, soon exhausted that resource, and absolute lack of food made his proposal to raise a sum of money, by mortgage on their house, one that

Mrs. Bullfinch could not disregard. But for the news received by her at the jeweler's, or rather the effect of that news — she would have made an effort to get a few music scholars, and thus removed the necessity for selling or mortgaging their home. To do this, was still her purpose; but she had not yet sufficient strength, either of body or mind, to undertake the work, and so, after a few feeble objections, consented to the execution of a mortgage on the house for the sum of five hundred dollars. Her husband proposed a thousand, and, for some time, contended for that amount. But, in this, Mrs. Bullfinch was decided; so, finding further parley useless, the old man contented himself with the smaller amount, on receipt of which, he placed half the money in the hands of his wife, retaining the rest to pay off, as he alleged, sums borrowed during the preceding three months, to meet the cost of living. It was quite true that he had borrowed, and to the extent declared; but, as to the *repayment* — that was neither designed nor accomplished.

Scarcely a month elapsed, during which time Mr. Bullfinch was in a more *besotted* state than usual, before the whole of his share of the five hundred dollars had disappeared; and he applied to his wife for money. She had only one hundred dollars left; servant's wages, sundry little amounts due to baker, milkman, and grocer, with actual cost of living during the time, having drawn heavily upon her resources. On hesitating to comply with his wishes, he became very angry, and used such threatening and abusive language, that under the excitement of indignation and alarm, Mrs. Bullfinch took from a drawer the purse containing all the money she possessed, and tossing it to her husband, said —

“There! Take the whole of what remains. But don't expect me to keep the table any longer. If you come home at any time, and find no dinner prepared, don't ask me for a reason.”

“I said,” growled the old man, as he thrust the purse into his pocket, “that five hundred dollars was too small a sum. The mortgage should have been for a thousand.”

Scarcely had the money passed from the hands of Mrs. Bullfinch, before she saw and repented of the hasty act, which left her without so much as a single dollar. In a little while after, her husband left the house. During the afternoon, he sent home a barrel of flour, half a dozen hams, a basket of wine, a gallon of brandy, and sundry articles of groceries. On the next morning, he went to market, and made some liberal purchases in the provision line. But, beyond this, no further account was made of the hundred dollars. How he was using the remainder, his daily condition too plainly made manifest.

Again Mrs. Bullfinch aroused herself from the state of mental inactivity into which she had fallen. Not since the day of her visit to Mr. Carney's store, had she been abroad. Whether the marriage of Mr. Wellford had taken place or not, she had never heard. It was the same to her, however, for she regarded the event as past. Once more she took her jewel-box, and the gold watch that had been her father's, and again visited the store of Mr. Carney. She found the jeweler disengaged.

He recognized her, and spoke with such real kindness of manner, that she was encouraged to utter freely her request, which was, that he would purchase of her the jewel-box at as fair a price as he could afford to pay; and, also, lend her the sum of twenty-five dollars on the gold watch, he having the privilege of selling it in order to repay himself, if she did not return the money in six months. To this Mr. Carney, whose feelings were touched by the great change he saw in the young and still beautiful face of Mrs. Bullfinch, consented without an instant's hesitation. For the jewel-box, he paid her twenty-five dollars.

As, with a lighter heart, Mrs. Bullfinch turned to leave the store, she found herself face to face with *Henry Wellford*, and his happy young bride, who were just entering the jeweler's. For a moment, the eyes of Wellford and Helen rested on each other. Heart-secrets, the volumes could not have expressed, were read by both in that instant of time. Their paths crossed not again for many years!

Other purposes were to have been accomplished by Mrs. Bullfinch on this the first occasion of her venturing abroad for many weeks; but, the sudden meeting with Wellford, and visible confirmation of his marriage, so deeply disturbed her, that she hurried home, and once more, in solitude, let the *rising floods of emotion* sweep over her spirit. When, in a measure, their force was spent, she gathered anew her mental energies, and proceeded to put in execution a purpose for some time entertained, which was to endeavor to procure music scholars; or, if need be, give lessons in French and Spanish. She had some pride left, but not a great deal; the little that remained, kept her from going among any of those with whom, during the prosperous days of her husband, she was brought in social contact. To whom, then, should she make

known her purposes? From whom seek the aid and encouragement she needed? Towards one lady her thoughts turned, when first this expedient was thought of, and towards her they still turned.

That lady was *Mrs. Barker*. Helen had never met her since her unhappy union with Mr. Bullfinch; and now the thought of calling upon her produced a painful shrinking. To expose, personally, and to Mrs. Barker in particular, the utter failure of all her marriage hopes — based upon the *sand* as they were — was a trial from which all her womanly instincts drew back. Yet, as she revolved the subject, and considered all other resources and expedients, the trial of calling on Mrs. Barker, and soliciting her interest, seemed the least of all that were presented. And so, a few days after her visit to the jeweler's, she went to see that lady.

"Mrs. Bullfinch?" said Mrs. Barker, speaking to herself, as the servant retired, after announcing a visitor. "Mrs. Bullfinch? Can it be Helen Lee!"

She arose instantly and went down to the parlors. The countenance of the pale, slightly-formed lady who came forward to meet her, as she entered, was that of a stranger in which is seen something familiar. A hand was hesitatingly extended, which was taken by Mrs. Barker.

"You do not remember me?" said the lady.

"Why, Helen!" exclaimed Mrs. Barker. "Is it possible? Your voice is unchanged, but I would have passed you in the street a dozen times without recognition."

"I am a good deal changed, I believe," Mrs. Bullfinch replied, striving to speak calmly, yet betraying the disturbed state of her feelings.

"Your father is —"

"In a *better land*," was answered, in a failing voice.

A few moments of silence on both sides gave Mrs. Bullfinch time to regain her self-control. As soon as she had done so, she said,

"I have always believed, Mrs. Barker, that you felt an interest in my welfare."

"You have believed right, Helen," replied Mrs. Barker, with much kindness of manner, "and if there is *anything* in which I can now serve you, speak of it freely."

"You are, no doubt, aware that Mr. Bullfinch has failed in business."

"I have heard as much; but never learned any particulars."

"The loss of property was total; and with the exception of a small house, which the creditors generously presented to me, everything passed from our possession."

"How unfortunate!" was the lady's simple remark.

"The misfortune," continued Helen, "took from Mr. Bullfinch all mental energy. Since then, he has not attempted to do business. Already we have mortgaged our house, and spent the money obtained therefor. Another mortgage, or a *sale* of the house, will produce temporary aid; but, unless I make some effort to obtain a regular income, the *end* can easily be seen — *hopeless destitution*."

"My poor child!" said Mrs. Barker, in a voice so full of real sympathy, that Helen's constrained feelings gave way, and bursting into tears, she sobbed and wept for several minutes.

How vividly, in that brief time, came the past before the eyes of Mrs. Barker! The progress of events had left her in no ignorance of Helen's purpose on a former visit, made a few years before. How distinctly she saw her now, as she turned from her in that very room, with such a hopeless air, and almost fled from the house. A kind reception of the poor girl then, and a patient hearkening to her petition — what *years* of almost *unimaginable suffering* would it not have saved!

"And you wish me to aid you in this purpose?" said Mrs. Barker, after Helen had grown calm.

"That is the object of my present visit, Mrs. Barker."

"Speak to me freely then, and with the assurance that all in my power to do, shall be done."

"Simply, then, I wish to resume my former vocation. You know my abilities as a teacher. May I hope, through your aid, to obtain a few scholars?"

"You may, Helen. My own daughters, as you may suppose, no longer take lessons either in music or French. But, in my large circle of friends, are many, I do not doubt, who would be glad to avail of your services. I will call on two or three, during today; and tomorrow see others. On day after tomorrow, I hope to be able to make a good report. Will you call back then?"



“O yes. How kind you are! I will never forget you, Mrs. Barker. In our extremity, how rarely do we meet with a *friend!*”

Mrs. Bullfinch did not know how sharply these words smote upon the ears of her auditor. Never forget her! How could the memory of the one who, with scarcely an effort, might have saved her from a life of misery, ever retire a moment from conscious thought?

In a week from that time, Mrs. Bullfinch resumed her old vocation of teacher, under the efficient patronage of Mrs. Barker. It was not long before she had scholars enough to occupy all the hours she could give to instruction. How earnestly and patiently she applied herself; and how insensibly but surely, did she win her way into the regard of all with whom she became associated. Her unhappy marriage relation, while it repelled those who did not know her personally, as evidencing *something wrong in her character* — excited in those who did know her, a *kindly sympathy*.

Ah! With what different feelings from those of old experienced, did she now prosecute her daily tasks! Filial love and duty then inspired her efforts, and *sweet* was her daily reward. Now, she toiled to support an old, ill-natured, besotted husband — the very sight of whom was repugnant to her. Urged by a stern sense of *duty*, she went forth, each morning, and resumed her uncheered tasks, and nightly returned to shiver beside the *domestic altar*, on which an *unhallowed sacrifice* had long since been burned to ashes!

And thus the days, weeks, months and years moved on. Tears! Who would not shrink from turning the leaves in Helen's *book of memory* during this long time, and reading the record? Our hand, at least, shall not attempt the painful task.

## Chapter 26.

Nearly *fifteen years* have passed. Few beyond ordinary changes have taken place during this period. Mr. Bullfinch still cumbers the ground. More and more, daily does his life become that of a *beast*, which merely seeks *sensual gratification*. To eat and drink to excess — is his only enjoyment. Mrs. Bullfinch goes forth daily, in patience, and from a deeply grounded sense of duty, earning the food and clothing which both consume. So close was the relation between income and expenses for some years, that she was not able to redeem the gold watch which had belonged to her father. It had been pledged for a certain time. When that time passed, she considered the dear relic forfeited; and, with many secret tears, resigned it, as among her *heart's lost treasures*.

One day about this time, Mrs. Barker, who had remained the fast friend of Mrs. Bullfinch, said to her

—  
“Mrs. Wellford was asking me about you today. She has two dear little girls, whose musical education it is now time to commence. She has heard you spoken of so frequently, and has formed so high an opinion of your ability and character, that she is particularly desirous to have them under your care. Of course, I had nothing to say but what was in your favor. The only question is, as to your engaging any more scholars at present. You are doing too much, for health, now.”

No change was visible in the countenance or manner of Mrs. Bullfinch, when this communication was made. She merely bent her eyes to the floor, in thought, for some moments. Then looking up, she replied

—  
“I hardly know what to say, Mrs. Barker. Nearly all my available time is now occupied, and it scarcely seems right to crowd in any more engagements.”

“Very true. But think it over for a day or two. If you can undertake to give lessons to Mrs. Wellford’s children, I think you will find the task an easy one, for, from what I have seen of them, they appear to be bright and teachable. As I said, their mother is particularly desirous to have you instruct them. She remarked to me while speaking of the matter, that if she could get them in your care, she should feel entirely satisfied.”

“I will see what can be done, and let you know in a few days,” replied Mrs. Bullfinch. Her manner was more abstracted than at first — yet no signs of *emotion* were visible; none, in fact, was felt. Years since, her heart had acquired an even pulsation not to be easily disturbed by memories of the past.

The first inclinings of Mrs. Bullfinch, were against accepting the office of teacher to Mr. Wellford’s children. But, as she dwelt on the subject, her mind favored the proposition; and, in the end, she engaged to give them musical instruction. In arranging the hours, and acting from an *instinct of delicacy* — she fixed upon those during which the father of the children would be occupied in business, and, therefore, away from home.

“Don’t you think I’m fortunate?” said Mrs. Wellford to her husband, after she had made an arrangement with Mrs. Bullfinch.

“In what respect?” he inquired.

“In regard to Maggy and Ella. Mrs. Bullfinch was here this morning, and has agreed to undertake their musical education.”

“She has!”

Mr. Wellford spoke with a degree of *surprise* that caused his wife to say —

“Why, what has possessed you to believe that she wouldn’t teach our children?”

“I understood that she already had more scholars than she was able to attend to,” replied Mr. Wellford, smiling. “Even you were in doubt as to whether her services could be procured.”

“True enough. And yet there seemed to be, in your mind, some reason *beyond* this. However, we won’t quarrel about that,” Mrs. Wellford added, in a pleased tone of voice. “She has promised to come, and, from all I have heard of her, I think, as I said at first, we’re fortunate. There’s something very interesting about her; and I don’t wonder that she attaches almost everyone. I was drawn towards her at

first sight. So gentle, so retiring, yet so self-possessed and lady-like. I wonder what could have induced her to marry that old man?"

"His money, it is said," remarked Mr. Wellford.

"It doesn't seem possible that she could have been so mercenary. If that were her reason, how sadly she has been disappointed!"

"Sadly enough, without doubt," replied Mr. Wellford, speaking partly to himself.

"I am sure she never could have *loved* him."

"Loved him! No. She must have *loathed* him in her heart!"

"I can scarcely believe that of her," said Mrs. Wellford. "If she had *loathed* him — she never would have married him."

"I don't know. The pressure upon her may have been very great. Her father was poor and in ill-health. From her slender income as a teacher, came the entire support of the family. *Filial love* alone, I am sure, prompted the act. For the sake of her parents — she sacrificed herself."

"That was an error," remarked Mrs. Wellford.

"An error!" said her husband, warmly. "Nay, it was more than an error — it was a crime!"

"You speak strongly."

"Not too strongly, as I view these matters. To wed thus — where there was neither sympathy nor respect on her part, to say nothing of love — was an act so directly in violation of every law of nature, that I can designate it by no word of softer import than *crime*."

"If you were to look into her face," said Mrs. Wellford, smiling, "you would hardly find it in your heart to call her a criminal."

"Perhaps not. Doubtless, she has long since *repented in dust and ashes*. Poor thing! If all that is said of her husband's habits and conduct are true, she has led a *sad life* of it. But, when is she to commence giving Maggy and Ella lessons?"

"She will begin the day after tomorrow."

"At what hour?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Does that suit you best?"

"It will suit Mrs. Bullfinch best."

"Your expectations are high," said Mr. Wellford. "I hope all will come out to your satisfaction."

I have no fears on that score. Wherever, among my acquaintances, she has given lessons, everyone is pleased. That I shall be so likewise, I do not, in the least, doubt."

"Nor do I," remarked her husband. "She is spoken of in the highest terms by people in whose judgment we ought to have every confidence. With you, I think we are fortunate in securing her services for our children."

A few days afterwards, Mr. Wellford said to his wife —

"What about Mrs. Bullfinch? Did she come according to engagement?"

"No."

"Did not come?"

"I've seen nothing of her since she was here to make arrangements about the lessons."

"A little singular, is it not?"

"I think so."

"She may be sick."

Mrs. Wellford did not reply, and her husband, after musing for some time, opened the morning paper, which a servant had just handed in, and commenced running his eyes over the columns. Suddenly, he made an ejaculation of surprise. Then, looking up, he said —

"I can explain this absence of Mrs. Bullfinch."

"In what way?" asked his wife.

"Her husband is dead!"

"Dead!"

"Yes, here it is: '*Died, suddenly, Adam Bullfinch, late merchant of Philadelphia.*'"

“Not many tears will fall over his grave,” said Mrs. Wellford. “Even if his wife stood, with dry eyes, beside it — no one would feel surprised.”

Mr. Wellford made no answer. A short time his mind seemed lost in reverie. Then he resumed the reading of his newspaper.

## Chapter 27.

And so the bond was severed at last — the *chain*, whose heavy links had galled and fretted for over twenty years, was broken. Twenty years — and every cycle was an *age of misery*! Twenty years! Begun in paralyzing fear, continued in disgust, and ending in horror! What a history! Yes, ending in horror — for Adam Bullfinch died the most terrible of all deaths.

We will not take you, reader, to his *bedside*, as he wrestled in the last agony, nor pain your ears with his cries of terror as he vainly strove to escape the *haunting demons* created in that wild delirium — the drunkard's madness. No — no. Over that, we must throw a veil. Enough, that, to the very *dregs*, Mrs. Bullfinch drank the *bitter cup* her own hands had placed to her lips. Faithful even to the end did she remain, as *few* could have remained faithful. It would be idle to say that the death of her husband caused an emotion of grief. She wept not when the earth went rattling down upon his coffin lid — she sighed not as she turned from his half-filled grave. But, oh! how sad — how unutterably sad was her *heart*! Compared with her frozen, desolate state of feeling — grief for the loss of an intensely loved object, would be a luxury of the mind!

Duty had sustained her. In patient obedience to what she saw to be right, she had found strength to bear the almost *crushing weight* which was laid upon her. And now that her husband was dead — now that there existed no longer a necessity for unremitting effort on her part, the first impulse was to fold her arms, and sink into inactivity. This, however, was but the weakness of an hour. She had not been so long in the school of obedience, without learning some lessons of duty which went beyond the narrow circle of home. Valued as a wise and judicious teacher, and aware of the important use she was performing, she was quick to see that, neither in justice to herself nor society, could she now retire from her position. And so, after the few days' seclusion that a decent respect for the memory of her husband prompted her to observe, she went forth again, and resumed her duties. But little change beyond another shadow on her quiet, sober face, was visible. No one made allusion to the death of her husband, and to none she spoke of it. Not even in the case of Mrs. Wellford, was a reason asked or given as to why the first engagement was not kept.

Until now, Mrs. Bullfinch had not seen the two little girls of Mr. Wellford, the oldest in her thirteenth year, who were to come under her immediate instruction. When presented to her, she was struck with the peculiar sweetness and innocence of their faces. They had the large, dark eyes, broad forehead and slightly receding under lip and chin of their father, with the fair complexion of the mother. As she took their hands, and gazed into their faces, she felt her heart leap towards them, and a gentle glow of love pass with its delightful warmth throughout her entire being.

"They are good children, Mrs. Bullfinch," said the mother, speaking aside, and in a voice low enough not to reach their ears. Then she added, aloud, "I'm sure they will be obedient and attentive. And I shall expect them to learn very fast. You will give them a lesson this morning?"

"I have come for that purpose," replied Mrs. Bullfinch.

"As your time is valuable, I will leave you to begin at once," said Mrs. Wellford, rising. "Now, try your best, dears," she added, in a voice blending affection and pride. A little while the mother stood looking at her children, and then left the room. Upon her retreating form, the eyes of Mrs. Bullfinch lingered, with a look of interest; and even after she had withdrawn, her gaze remained fixed, for some moments, upon the door through which she had passed. A deeper inspiration than usual marked the return of thoughts to a more direct perception of the present and its duties.

Never, perhaps, had she felt a deeper interest in pupils committed to her care; never, perhaps, imparted instruction with a purer sense of pleasure. And the children seemed conscious of something that made her more to them than a stranger. Their manner of fixing their large, soft, loving eyes, with an intense, inquiring gaze upon her face, embarrassed her at times, while it stirred her heart more deeply.

Once or twice, during the hour devoted to the first lessons, Mrs. Wellford came in to observe their progress. She, too, as well as the children, felt drawn towards Mrs. Bullfinch by an internal and irresistible attraction.

“How do you like your new teacher?” asked Mr. Wellford, when, on coming home, at dinner-time, his children crowded around him.

“Oh, she’s elegant!” exclaimed little Ella, gaily. “I do like her so.”

“Elegant? What do you mean by that?” said her father.

“She’s good and nice; and I like her,” replied the child, warmly.

“And what do you say, Maggy?”

“I like her very much,” replied the elder of the two children. “She is so kind and patient. I’m sure we shall learn very fast.”

“I’m sure you will,” said Mr. Wellford.

“There’s something very interesting about her,” remarked Mrs. Wellford. “I never met a stranger who, at first, attracted me so strongly. I think her a very superior woman.”

Mr. Wellford did not reply, but he gazed into his wife’s face with a look of tenderness, and laying his open hand on her forehead, smoothed with a caressing motion, the glossy hair that covered her snowy temples.

In a little while, the topic of conversation was changed.

And, now, in the common course of events, Mrs. Bullfinch came to the house of Mr. Wellford as often as twice in each week; and, at each renewed visit, the children grew more and more into her affection, while her coming was ever hailed by them with pleasure. And so it went on for months — even years; yet not once, during the time, had the father of Maggy and Ella met their teacher, of whom they always had so much to say.

Frequently had Mrs. Wellford sought to draw her within the social sphere of the family: but she would only come professionally, and lingered scarcely a moment after her duties were done. In her manner, Mrs. Wellford often thought there was something strange — something that indicated a motive for not wishing to remain an instant longer than was necessary to give her lessons. Several times she had observed her startle, and listen, as if off her guard, when the street door opened. And once, in particular, she remarked that a sudden flush came into her face, as the voice of Mr. Wellford was heard in the passage. But, happily, she was in total ignorance of the fact that her husband and Mrs. Bullfinch had ever met, except casually, and as strangers.

## Chapter 28.

“Forty-five years old. Oh, life! life! How *smoothly*, for some, the stream glides — how *roughly* for others!”

It was early in an autumnal day; a thin, golden haze was in the atmosphere; no breeze stirred in the maple branches which spread themselves before the window, near which Mrs. Bullfinch was sitting, yet leaf after leaf, yellow from the first touch of frost, was dropping away, and fluttering to the ground.

“Forty-five years old, today,” she repeated. “At sixty, my heart should not have been so *withered* and *sapless*. Oh! what a desecration of a whole life!”

She struck her hand hard upon her bosom, adding — “Such a trampling down, and tearing up of the roots of luxuriant affection! Long before this, the vine would have spread itself over the very topmost branches of its sustaining tree!”

“But, peace, peace!” she murmured, her whole manner growing calmer under a strong effort of the still potent will. “Poor heart! Be done with your futile throbbings.”

And, saying this, she arose, and commenced making preparations to go out, and enter upon her daily round of duties as a teacher. After giving lessons at two places, she went to Mr. Wellford’s. She had *three* scholars there now. A well-known physician’s carriage stood at the door. On entering, she noticed that the servant who admitted her looked unusually sober.

“Is anyone sick?” inquired Mrs. Bullfinch.

“Oh, yes ma’am,” was replied. “Mrs. Wellford is very ill.”

“Not dangerously, I hope.”

“I’m afraid so, ma’am,” answered the servant. “The doctor has been here for two hours; and Mrs. Wellford looks dreadfully.”

“What ails her?” asked Mrs. Bullfinch.

“She’s been poorly, and drooping about, you know, for some time, Mrs. Bullfinch. Poor thing! She’s lost weight amazingly of late, as you’ve no doubt seen. Well, yesterday was Ella’s birthday, and the children had a little party last night. They were all very happy; and I never saw Mrs. Wellford enjoy herself more in my life. The party broke up about ten o’clock, and soon after the company went away, all the children were in bed. It was near eleven o’clock when Mr. and Mrs. Wellford left the parlors. In a little while after they were in their room, I heard a noise upstairs, as if a chair had been knocked over, and then Mr. Wellford called for the waiter in such a quick, loud voice, that we were all frightened, and ran to see what was the matter. On going into their chamber, I saw Mrs. Wellford lying on the bed, her face as white as a sheet, and the blood running out of her mouth. I was so frightened that I screamed and ran downstairs. ‘Run for the doctor!’ I heard Mr. Wellford say. And, in a minute, the waiter came flying downstairs, and out at the front door as fast as he could run.”

“She had broken a blood vessel!” said Mrs. Bullfinch.

“Yes, ma’am. That is what ailed her. The doctor stayed with her all night; and came again early this morning. They say he hasn’t much hope of her.”

“No one is allowed to see her, of course?”

“O, no, ma’am. She’s too sick for that. We all go about on tip-toe, as it were; and nurse keeps the children as still as little mice.”

“I’m very sorry,” said Mrs. Bullfinch, who was startled and deeply pained by this alarming news. The longer and more intimately she had known Mrs. Wellford, the higher had been her estimation of her character. Almost as a sister she loved her; though never with the freedom of a sister had she felt privileged to give voice to her affections.

“I am very sorry,” she repeated.

Then adding, “Of course no lessons can be given here today; so I will return home. But, if I could be of any use — ”

This last sentence was spoken in an earnest voice, so earnest, that, unconsciously, the tones were slightly elevated, and reached the ears of Mr. Wellford, who at the moment was passing one of the

landings on the stairway, but a little distance from the place where she stood, in the hall. He came down immediately, calling her name as he did so. His countenance was pale and haggard, his eyes humid, and everything about him showed anxiety and alarm.

“Of use, Mrs. Bullfinch?” he said, “O yes, you can be of great use. Will you not come up and stay with my poor wife, if it is only for a little while? She has whispered your name several times.”

“Will not my presence disturb her?” asked Mrs. Bullfinch.

“O no; it will prevent disturbance from others. Oh, if you could only remain with her, how thankful I would be!”

There was no resisting this appeal of the distressed husband. Mrs. Bullfinch removed her shawl and bonnet, and with light steps passed up to the sick chamber. As she entered the door, the white face of Mrs. Wellford, white almost as the snowy pillow on which she lay, startled her with its deathliness, even prepared, as she was, for the change. A faint smile was instantly visible, and the lips of the invalid moved; but Mrs. Bullfinch placed a finger on her own lips to enjoin silence. Coming softly to the bedside, she stooped down, and kissed her. The tender impulse that prompted this act, was too sudden and too strong to be resisted. It was the token of a deeper love than she had ever been free to express. The hand that lay in hers — taken as she bent to her lips — gave back a quick pressure; and in a faint whisper, Mrs.

Wellford said —

*“Don’t leave me.”*

“I will not leave you,” was the low but earnest reply, which was answered by a grateful look. And Mr. Wellford said —

“We shall ever remember your kindness, Mrs. Bullfinch.”

In a little while, the appearance of the room, the bed, and the person of the invalid underwent a change; and this, without apparent effort or obtrusiveness on the part of Mrs. Bullfinch. As she moved about, in her quiet way, the eyes of the physician were on her. A slight forward motion of his head, showed that he was satisfied with the observation.

“Mr. Wellford,” said he, on leaving the room, “a good nurse is more to the doctor, often, than his medicine. It will be more in this case. As you hope for the recovery of your wife, retain this lady with her; at least for a few days.”

“She will not leave her, I am sure,” replied Mr. Wellford. “But, at your next visit, will you not, yourself, say how much depends on her remaining with my wife?”

“I shall not fail in that,” said the doctor, as, after promising to return in a couple of hours, he went away.

But, it was neither in the power of medicine nor good nursing to save the failing wife and mother. The vital forces, already running low, had been too much exhausted by this bleeding from the lungs. Instead of rallying, it was soon too evident, that the time of her departure was near at hand — that a few days, at most, must close her earthly pilgrimage. Five children, the youngest but a year old, made up the number of *bright jewels* in the mother’s crown. To leave these, even with a father who tenderly loved and wisely cared for them — Oh, what a trial! When first the painful truth was communicated, it seemed, for a time, more than she could bear.

“My dear, dear husband!” she sobbed, as, with her arms clasped tightly around his neck, she drew his face down to hers, and wet it with her tears. “I cannot leave you. And my children — my babe! — Oh, Henry!

How weak are *words of consolation* offered at such an hour, and in view of a separation like this? After the-first gush of feeling was over, Mr. Wellford whispered —

“We must look upwards. God will give us strength for the trial.”

As he spoke, the tremor in his voice, if it betrayed not his lack of confidence in the Divine aid to which he referred, showed the weakness of nature.

The certainty of approaching dissolution, usually brings calmness of feeling, and clearness of thought. It is a wise and merciful provision, that death, which we view at a *distance* with so much dread — loses its terrors in drawing *near*. It is no longer a *grim monster* — but an *angel of mercy*, to take us lovingly by the hand and lead us safely along the dark passage which opens into the brighter world of spirits. How



rarely, in the closing hour, dwells the mind on dissolution — how insensibly it rises into thoughts of eternal life! Words of consolation come with higher meanings; and there is given a *trust in Him* who does all things well, profound enough to still the tempest of emotion even in a mother's bosom.

And it was so in the present case.

True to her promise, Mrs. Bullfinch did not leave the wasting invalid, during the two weeks that she lingered among the beloved ones who, even while they clung to her, felt their hold gradually giving way. Other friends, and near and dear relatives, were with her; but, to the dying one, no hand was laid upon her with such a gentle, loving pressure, no voice was so soothing, no ministrations so satisfying as that of Mrs. Bullfinch. And yet, how unobtrusively all was done!

One day, it was near the closing hour, Mrs. Wellford found herself, for a short time, alone with her gentle attendant. A few minutes before, little Henry, her youngest born, was taken from the room. She had kissed him, and then shut her eyes tightly to keep tears from flowing over her cheeks. Opening her eyes at length, she said, her tones slightly tremulous,

"It is a hard, hard trial, my kind, good friend! How can I leave these dear ones? Who can fill my place to them?"

"I can give but this answer, replied Mrs. Bullfinch, in her low even tones. "There is One who loves them with a love exceeding even that of a mother."

"I know, I know. Yet, is not my love to be an instrument for their good? While life remains, should not my thoughts regard their future?"

"It should."

"My friend" — Mrs. Wellford took the hand of Mrs. Bullfinch, pressing it tightly in her own, while her eyes were fixed intently upon her face. "If I could know that they were in *your* care! At Maggy's age, the wisdom of a mother's love is needed, quite as much as its tenderness at the age of dear little Henry. They love you, they confide in you; and love and confidence would make them obedient to your every word. Oh! Mrs. Bullfinch, if I knew they would henceforth be in your wise and loving guardianship, I could pass away without a sigh."

Mrs. Wellford felt the low thrill that came instantly into the hand she clasped so tightly. But, she did not know its meaning, nor comprehend the change of expression that passed over the face of her companion.

What a request to make, and that, too, of one who had, for more than twenty years, loved, with a hopeless, yet undying love, the father of the children she now wished to leave in her keeping! Mrs. Bullfinch were more than mortal not to have experienced a profound agitation. But what could she reply?

The disturbance of feeling bewildered her thought. Moreover, as the disturbance went deeper, she clearly saw its origin in a yet unextinguished interest in Henry Wellford; and a wave, burdened with anguish from a sense of guilt, swept across her mind. Closing her eyes, she looked up, and, in silence, prayed for strength and guidance.

"You do not answer me," said Mrs. Wellford, in a voice of suspense.

"How can I answer you?" replied Mrs. Bullfinch. Then she added, with less feeling —

"You leave them in a safer and wiser guardianship — that of their own father."

"I know — I know!" was quickly answered. "But — you understand all I can and would say. A father cannot supply the mother's place to his children. They ever need a woman's care, a woman's love. I know my husband will confide in you entirely — that he will trust to your judgment — and the children — they all love you. Sometimes I have been almost jealous of their attachment; and half jestingly, half in earnest, said that they loved you better than they loved their mother. So far as your worldly interests are concerned, be sure they will not suffer. I have property in my own right — say that you will become the *personal guardian of my children*, and I will endow you with a liberal income."

"Speak not of that!" said Mrs. Bullfinch, putting up a hand, and averting her face, that the pleading mother might not see its expression. "With me, these selfish and worldly considerations have long since, I trust, ceased to have influence."

"Then why not give your promise?"

“Because,” replied she, in a voice that was very low — only in the diminished tone was steadiness acquired, “another *will* than ours must give consent.”

“Another! whose? O, yes. I see! My husband!”

“Yes.”

“If,” said Mrs. Wellford, slowly and solemnly, “when I am no more among these household treasures, he asks you to take my place with them, as far as that may be, will you answer yes?”

Many minutes passed before there was any answer. The dying mother saw not her countenance — dreamed not of what was passing in her heart. At last Mrs. Bullfinch said, feebly, and as if the answer had cost a powerful struggle —

“It shall be as you wish.”

“Thank God! I can die in peace!” came exultingly from the mother’s lips. “Thank God!” she repeated. “Thank God!”

Motionless, almost as a statue, Mrs. Bullfinch remained. A *path* was opening before her, the very thought of treading which half suspended her respiration. When, at length, she turned to meet the grateful, confiding looks of Mrs. Wellford, her eyes sunk beneath the earnest gaze that was fixed upon her; while she felt the warm blood mounting to her face. The entrance of Mr. Wellford, at the moment, gave her a fitting opportunity to retire. Alone, in earnest self-communion, she remained for some time. When she entered the sick chamber again, her heart was beating with even pulses.

## Chapter 29.

The night that followed this solemn interview, broke not again for the wife and mother — not again in *this world*. To her, there came a better and a brighter morning, than dawned for the sorrowing ones she left behind.

The last act of Mrs. Wellford made the way plain for Mrs. Bullfinch. She dictated a will, by the provisions of which a generous income for life was secured to her, and in which she solemnly committed her children to her care. Mrs. Bullfinch had already given her promise that, if desired by Mr. Wellford to do so, she would meet the mother's dying wishes. That desire was expressed in language not to be misunderstood.

In a little more than a month after the death of Mrs. Wellford, Mr. Latta came home from England, with his health so much impaired that his physician said he must, for the present, give up all earnest application to business. It being necessary for the house to be represented abroad, it was determined that Mr. Wellford should take his place for a few months.

As short as the time had been since Mrs. Bullfinch assumed her new position in his family — short as the time had been, it was yet long enough to give birth in the mind of Mr. Wellford to certain emotions which disturbed and pained him. Tenderly as he loved his wife, and faithful to her in every thought as he had been — he discovered, already, a newly awakening interest in her for whom his heart had *first* poured out the gushing waters of affection. Not that, in any respect, Mrs. Bullfinch sought to bend a single thought to herself. Faithful to her trust, as the guardian and friend of his children, she was devoting her life to them with a tenderness and assiduity that never for a moment grew weary. Towards him, she was reserved, though not cold; deferential, but not constrained. None knew better than she, the virtues, the sweet attractions, the loving qualities of her who had been taken from him; and had she thought, that, in so brief a time after her removal, his heart was turning to her with a single pulse beating with old emotions, instantly her high respect for his character would have been dimmed.

"Mrs. Bullfinch," said he, one day, about six weeks after the death of his wife, "I shall be obliged to leave, almost immediately, for England. Mr. Latta has come home in very bad health, and the doctor enjoins positive relaxation from business. The interests of the business require a resident partner abroad; I must, therefore, take his place for a short time. It will leave on you additional care and responsibility, which I regret; but I hope to be home again in two or three months. I have concluded to take Maggy with me. She is not only old enough to enjoy a trip across the water, but to receive benefit therefrom."

An expression of regret came to the lips of Mrs. Bullfinch, but she checked its utterance, and remained silent.

"My only trouble about Maggy is, the lack of a suitable companion to accompany her. I shall, for the greater part of almost every day, be necessarily absent from her — business being the object of my visit."

"She is just at that age," said Mrs. Bullfinch, "when she ought not to be thrown among strangers without a judicious companion of her own gender."

"You are right there," replied Mr. Wellford, in a voice that showed a sudden conviction of the truth involved in her remark. "Right — right" — he added. Then he sighed, and remained lost in thought for some time.

"I wish I could take *all* with me," he said, in some animation, as if he were really serious in the suggestion. And, for the moment, he was.

"Had not all better remain?" said Mrs. Bullfinch. "You will not be gone a very long time. Maggy is still at school; and, though passed seventeen, but a school girl, and ignorant of the world and its wiles. Will it be wise to interrupt her studies now — in fact, to end them, for she will not be able to study again — or safe to trust her alone, as she must so much of her time be, and among strangers, of whose characters you can never be sure?"

"No, Mrs. Bullfinch, it will not," was the father's emphatic answer. "You are right — right. I thought more of myself than of my child, when I proposed to take her with me. "Well" — and he sighed, "I must

go alone. The separation from my children will be painful. Yet I shall have one comfort; she, with whom I leave them, will be faithful to her trust.

“If tempted to unfaithfulness,” said Mrs. Bullfinch, solemnly, “I will think of their mother, as present, and remember the hour when her *treasures* were committed, in tears, to my keeping.”

“I thank you, in her name, for your earnest love, and untiring faithfulness,” said Mr. Wellford, with emotion. “It will take away much of the pain of separation to know, that even a mother’s love could not more wisely guard my household treasures.”

Fortunately, Mr. Wellford had not spoken to his oldest daughter of his wish to have her accompany him to England. The more he reflected on the matter, the more clearly he saw that Mrs. Bullfinch was right; and the more thankful did he feel that his children had come under the immediate guardianship of one whose love made her so jealous over them for good.

In the short period that elapsed before Mr. Wellford bade adieu to his family, it became necessary for him to have frequent, earnest, and familiar conference with Mrs. Bullfinch. Many directions had to be given, and on many subjects information was sought. Necessarily their minds came into closer contact, and each saw, without the effort to see, more deeply into the other’s thoughts.

“There is one thing that I must require of you,” said Mr. Wellford, on the day he was to leave, “and that is a weekly letter, telling me all about my children. It will be some compensation for the weary absence I shall suffer.”

“Maggy will write to you,” replied Mrs. Bullfinch.

“True; but, she can only write her own thoughts and feelings. She can only speak of home from the point of view at which she sees it. You can tell me a hundred things of interest that she would never notice. I will write to you my views and wishes in regard to my children, and you must give me *pictures of home*.”

Mrs. Bullfinch hesitated still, but he extorted the promise. When the hour of parting at length came, and the father, melted into unusual tenderness as he kissed and embraced his children for the last time, took finally, the hand of Mrs. Bullfinch, he said, as he grasped it tightly —

“I leave all with you — I trust all to your keeping — I do not say be faithful. The word would wrong you. Farewell!”

The close pressure of his hand was but slightly returned. She did not lift her eyes to his face, nor trust her voice in response.

“Farewell; and God bless you all!” added Mr. Wellford, with deep emotion, as he turned away, and hurried from the presence of his family.

## Chapter 30.

Month after month went by, and still Mr. Wellford remained abroad. The health of Mr. Latta continuing feeble, his physician still enjoined relaxation from business, or, at most, a very moderate devotion of thought and effort in that direction. He could not, therefore, relieve Mr. Wellford. More than a year had elapsed, and yet the father was absent from his family, though yearning in heart to be with his beloved ones again. From loneliness and home-sickness, he had suffered greatly — this separation adding to the pain of his sad bereavement.

Mrs. Bullfinch had been true to her promise, in writing once a week. Every steamer brought him a letter, in which were faithful pen-pictures of what was passing at home. The progress of each child in its education, and most of its sayings and doings that were at all likely to interest the absent father, were recorded. Little faults and defects of character were, likewise, at times, set forth to view, and his advice sought as to the best modes of correction. She gave him, too, an account of household matters, and a monthly statement of expenses. Of the latter, he more than once said, in his letters, that it was needless, as he had every confidence in her, and knew that she was faithful and conscientious in all things. Still the statements were never omitted.

In regard to the *tone* of her letters, Mr. Wellford was, in some respects, not altogether so well pleased. They had always struck him as cold; but this coldness seemed, as time wore on, to increase. Her letters, too, became briefer, and more formal, while, in writing to her, his own had, almost unconsciously to himself, acquired a greater freedom and a warmer familiarity.

As the time of his absence was still prolonged, Mr. Wellford wrote to have a photograph of each of his children taken and sent to him. This was accordingly done. With what eager and trembling hands, did the father open the welcome package when it came. There were five separate pictures, one of each of his children, from Maggy, the oldest, a beautiful young woman, down to dear, dear, little Harry, the youngest born, and, if that were possible, best beloved. If tears dimmed the father's eyes, as he gazed upon the faces of his children, thus pictured for him to the very life, it was no unmanly weakness. Most of all, the youngest seemed changed. A year in a baby's life is a long period. He looked a great deal older, yet, oh, how much more beautiful! His large, heavenly eyes, his wealth of soft curls, clustering about his neck, and falling over his shoulders, his arching lips that seemed just about to speak to him — all came upon him like a living reality.

But there was another small package, carefully tied and sealed, and Mr. Wellford knew the writing thereon, to be in the hands of his oldest daughter. Opening this, he found, within, a letter from Maggy, and what startled and thrilled him with a strange, yet exquisitely pleased, emotion, another photograph, containing two figures, those of Mrs. Bullfinch and little Harry!

The child was sitting in her lap, with his head partly turned, so that he could look into her face, and the look was full of confiding love. But it was the face of Mrs. Bullfinch which more particularly attracted and *chained* the eyes of Mr. Wellford. So calm, so pure, so elevated, so spiritual in its beauty! It reminded him of one of Raphael's *Madonnas*. Instantly, there flowed back upon his heart, in a strong flood, the waters which, for so many years, had been pent up. He kissed, fervently, the pictured face, and, as he did so, murmured —

“Helen! Helen! There has been a great gulf. But it is bridged over at last!”

Opening now the letter of Maggy, he read —

“My Dear, Dear Father: If dear, good Mrs. Bullfinch knew what I was doing, she would scold me dreadfully — no, not scold, for she never spoke a cross word in her life, I'm sure. But if she knew what I was doing, she would be displeased and hurt. I send you her photograph, with our sweet little Harry sitting on her lap. I asked her to let me send it, but she looked half frightened, and said, '*No, indeed, Maggy; not for the world!*' But I was bent on your seeing it, so I went out, one day, and had a duplicate made — and here it is! Doesn't she look beautiful? How we all do love her!

“And now let me tell you how it came, that her picture was taken. We all went to sit for our daguerreotypes, to be sent to you. When it came to Harry's turn, he was so frightened that we couldn't get

him to sit in the chair. We tried for some time. At last, without thinking what would be the result, Mrs. Bullfinch sat down, and took him on her lap. The picture was taken, and, of course, we had Mrs. Bullfinch as well as Harry. We all said that was just as it should be; but she — and I never saw her face in such a beautiful glow as it was then — said *no*.

“Do you know, dear father, that Harry always calls her ‘Mamma?’ She tried a long time to make him say ‘Aunty,’ but it was no use. He would call her ‘Mamma’ — his ‘own, sweet Mamma,’ he says, sometimes. We all encourage him. I’m sure our own dear mother, of whom she often talks to us, never could have loved him more or taken better care of him.

“The other day, and I’ve thought strange of it ever since, I handed Mrs. Bullfinch the key of your private secretary, and asked her if she wouldn’t get me a seal out of one of the little drawers. Thinking, soon after she left me, of something else that I wanted, I went over to your chamber. I had on light slippers, which made no sound on the carpet. Her back was towards me, but I saw that she had that beautiful *ebony jewelry box* in her hand, and had taken from it the *old-fashioned gold watch* which it contained, on which she was gazing. A side glance at her face, reflected in a mirror, showed me that she was *weeping*. I retired without being observed. She stayed a good while. When she brought me the seal, her eyes were red and her face very sober. She has looked more thoughtful than usual ever since. What does it mean?

“On opening the box *afterwards*, I found in it a note, in your hand-writing — the address was not given — but the note said, briefly — ‘A friend restores them to you.’ On the watch is engraved the word ‘Lee.’ Wasn’t that her maiden name? There’s something about this that I don’t understand. Can you tell me what it means, father?

“Yesterday, a lady called to see Mrs. Bullfinch. She came in a handsome carriage, and was very richly dressed. She called Mrs. Bullfinch ‘aunt,’ and kissed her. Both shed tears at meeting. The lady remained a long time. When she went away, the face of Mrs. Bullfinch looked brighter than it had been for a long time. I asked her who the lady was, and she said that she was a niece of her husband’s, who had, some years before, married a wealthy Southern merchant, and now resided at New Orleans. That it was twenty years since they had met.

“I have a good deal more to write about, but, must put it off until the next steamer. Good by, dear father. When are you coming home? Oh, how we long to see you once more. Love, Maggy.”

*Three months later.*

Word had come that Mr. Wellford would be home in the next steamer. What joy there was in his household! Even little Harry caught the infection, and would clap his hands, and cry “Papa coming! Papa coming!” although his infantile memory held but a faint picture of his absent parent.

A close observer would have remarked a very decided change in the countenance and manner of Mrs. Bullfinch, after this news came. Her eyes had in them a different light, her cheeks flushed with a warmer hue, her voice was lower, and her air, at times, that of one whose thoughts dwelt not in the present. Far, very far was she from being at ease in her mind — far from thinking of the return of Mr. Wellford, unaffected by a personal interest. Earnestly had she striven to keep down every heart-throb born of old affections — to turn her thoughts away from the absent one, when his image came before her, as it would often come, with eyes that seemed gazing into her very soul. But all was in vain. He was her *first and her only love* — the polar star of her woman’s life; and, now, when to think of him and to love him were no longer a sin, there was no power in earth strong enough to subdue her leaping pulses — to say to her heart — which trembled at the lowest whisper of his name, *peace, be still!*

It was time for the steamer to arrive, by which Mr. Wellford was to come home. Hourly his family were in expectation of news from New York, by telegraph, that he had reached that city, and would be with them in a few hours. All were on the tip-toe of expectation.

It was late in the afternoon, and Mrs. Bullfinch was alone with little Harry, who was in one of his playful and affectionate humors.

“Dear mamma!” he would say, as he entwined his arms tightly about her neck, and pressed his lips to hers. “Dear mamma! Aren’t I your little dove? Aren’t I your sweet darling? Papa coming home?”

“Dear papa!” said Mrs. Bullfinch, in a tender, affectionate tone.

“Yes, dear papa!” responded the child.

“You love him very much, don’t you?”

“O yes; and I love you — sweet, good mamma!” And again the fond creature clasped her neck.

How little dreamed the waiting one — waiting with a heart so burdened with feeling, it had scarcely power to perform its office — that Henry Wellford had entered the room where she was sitting, and was a witness of this scene!

“Helen! Helen! Dear Helen!” he exclaimed, utterly unable to control himself and springing to her side, he drew his arms about her and his child, and clasped them together to his heart. Trembling and sobbing from excess of joy, she lay there, not making a motion to withdraw herself — she had no power for that — but shrinking closer and closer into his bosom.

“The long night is over — the trial past — dear Helen!” whispered Mr. Wellford, as he began to acquire some command over his feelings. “To my children, you have been faithful even as a mother. They love you as a mother. Be to me, as well as to them, the sunshine of life — the joy of our dwelling.”

Slowly Helen raised her head, looked him for a moment, with glad eyes, in the face, and then buried it again in his bosom.

He was answered.

A few weeks later, and *undying love* found its long delayed consummation.

*THE END.*