

# “Set Not Thy Foot on Graves”

By Julian Hawthorne

*New York, April 29th.*—Last night I came upon this passage in my old author: “Friend, take it sadly home to thee—Age and Youthe are strangers still. Youthe, being ignorant of the wisdom of Age, which is Experience, but wise with its own wisdom, which is of the unshackled Soule, or Intuition, is great in Enterprise, but slack in Achievement. Holding itself equal to all attempts and conditions, and to be heir, not of its own spanne of yeares and compasse of Faculties only, but of all time and all Human Nature—such, I saye, being its illusion (if, indeede, it be illusion, and not in some sorte a Truth), it still underrateth the value of Opportunitie, and, in the vain beleefe that the City of its Expectation is paved with Golde and walled with Precious Stones, letteth slip betwixt its fingers those diamondes and treasures which ironical Fate offereth it. . . . But see nowe what the case is when this youthe becometh in yeares. For nowe lie can nowise understand what defecte of Judgmente (or effecte of insanitie rather) did leade him so to despise and, as it were, reject those Giftes and golden chaunces which come but once to mortal men. Experience (thet saturnine Pedagogue) hath taught him what manner of man he is, and that, farre from enjoying that Deceptive Seeminge or mirage of Freedome which would persuade him that he may run hither and thither as the whim prompteth over the face of the Earthe—yea, take the wings of the morninge and winnowe his aerie way to the Pleiadies—he must e’en plod heavilie and with paine along that single and narrowe Path whereto the limitations of his personal nature and profession confine him—happy if he arrive with mucche diligence and faire credit at the ende thereof, and falle not ignobly by the way. Neverthesse—for so great is the infatuation of man, who, although he acquireth all other knowledge, yet arriveth not at the knowledge of Himself—if to the Sage of Experience he proffered once again the gauds and prizes of youthe, which he hath ever since regretted and longed for—what doeth he in his wisdom? Verilie, so longe as the matter remaineth *in nubibus*, as the Latins say, or in the Region of the Imagination, as oure speeche hath it, he will beleefe, yea, take his oathe, that he still is master of all those capacities and energies whiche, in his youthe, would have prompted and enabled him to profit by this desired occurrence. Yet shall it appeare (if the thinge be brought still further to the teste, and, from an Imagination or Dreame, become an actual Realitie), that he will shrinke from and decline that which he did erste so ardently sigh for and covet. And the reason of this is as follows, to-wit: That Habit or Custome hath brought him more to love and affect those very ways and conditions of life, yea, those inconveniences and deficiencies which he useth to deplore and abhorre, than that Crown of Golde or Jewel of Happiness whose withholding he hath all his life lamented. Hence we may learne, that what is past, is dead, and that though thoughte be free, nature is ever captive, and loveth her chaine.”

This is too lugubrious and cynical not to have some truth in it; but I am unwilling to believe that more than half of it is true. The author himself was evidently an old man, and therefore a prejudiced judge; and he did not make allowances for the range and variety of temperament. Age is not a matter of years, and scarcely of experience. The only really old persons are the selfish ones. The man whose thoughts, actions, and affections center upon himnself, soon acquires a fixity and crustiness which (if to be old is to be “strange to youth”) is old as nothing else is. But the man who makes the welfare and happiness of others his happiness, is as young at three-score as he was at twenty, and perhaps even younger, for he has had no time to grow old.

*April 30th.*—The Courtneys are in town! This is, I believe, her first visit to America since he married her. At all events, I have not seen or heard of her in all these seven years. I wonder . . . I was going to write, I wonder whether she remembers me. Of course she remembers me, in a sort of way. I am tied up somewhere among her bundle of recollections, and occasionally, in an idle moment, her eye falls upon me, and moves her, perhaps, to smile or to sigh. For my own part, in thinking over our old days, I find I forget her less than I had supposed. Probably she has been more or less consciously in my mind throughout. In the same way, one has always latent within him the knowledge that he must die; but it does not follow that he is continually musing on the thought of death. As with death, so with this old love of mine. What a difference, if we had married! She was a very lovely girl—at least, I thought so then. Very likely I should not think her so now. My taste and knowledge have developed; a different order of things interests me. It may not be an altogether pleasant thing to confess; but, knowing myself as I now do, I have often thanked my stars that I am a bachelor.

Doubtless she is even more changed than I am. A woman changes more than a man in seven years, and a married woman especially must change a great deal from twenty-two to twenty-nine. Think of Ethel Leigh being in her thirtieth year! and the mother of four or five children, perhaps. Well, for the matter of that, think of the romantic and ambitious young Claude Campbell being an old bachelor of forty! I have married Art instead of Ethel, and she, instead of being Mrs. Campbell, is Mrs. Courtney.

It was a surprising thing—her marrying him so suddenly. But, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, I have never quite made up my mind that Ethel was really fickle. She did it out of pique, or pride, or impulse, or whatever it is that sways women in such cases. She was angry, or indignant—how like fire and ice at once she was when she was angry!—and she was resolved to show me that she could do without me. She would not listen to my explanations; and I was always awkward and stiff about making explanations. Besides, it was not an easy matter to explain, especially to a girl like her. With a married woman or a widow it would have been a simple thing enough. But Ethel Leigh, the minister's daughter—innocent, ignorant, passionate—she would tolerate nothing short of a public disavowal and discontinuance of my relations with Mrs. Murray, and that, of course, I could not consent to, though heaven knows (and so must Ethel, by this time) that Mrs. Murray was nothing to me, save as she was the wife of my friend, during whose enforced absence I was bound to look after her, to some extent. It was not my fault that poor Mrs. Murray was a fool. But such are the trumpery seeds from which tragedies grow. Not that ours was a tragedy, exactly: Ethel married her English admirer, and I became a somewhat distinguished artist, that is all. I wonder whether she has been happy! Likely enough; she was born to be wealthy; Englishmen make good husbands sometimes, and her London life must have been a brilliant one. . . . I have been looking at my old photograph of her—the one she gave me the morning after we were engaged. Tall, slender, dark, with level brows, and the bearing of a Diana. She certainly was handsome, and I shall not run the risk of spoiling this fine memory by calling on her. Even if she have not deteriorated, she can scarcely have improved. Nay, even were she the same now as then, I should not find her so, because of the change in myself. Why should I blink the truth? Experience, culture, and the sober second thought of middle age have carried me far beyond the point where I could any longer be in sympathy with this crude, thin-skinned, impulsive girl. And then—four or five children! Decidedly, I will give her a wide berth. And Courtney himself, with his big beard, small brain, and obtrusive laugh! I shall step across to California for a few months.

*May 1st.*—Called this morning on Ethel Leigh—Mrs. Deighton Courtney, that is to say. She is not so much changed, but she has certainly improved. When I say she has not changed much, I refer to her physical appearance. Her features are scarcely altered; her figure is a little fuller and more compact; in her bearing there is a certain quiet composure and self-possession—the air of a woman who has seen the world, has received admiration, and is familiar with the graceful little arts of social intercourse. In short, she has acquired a high external polish; and that is precisely what she most needed. Evidently, too, there is an increased mental refinement corresponding to the outward manner. She has mellowed, sweetened—whether deepened or not I should hesitate to affirm. But I am quite sure that I find her more charming to talk with, more supple in intercourse, more fascinating, in a word, than formerly. We chatted discursively and rather volubly for more than an hour; yet we did not touch on anything very serious or profound. They are staying at the Brevoort House. Courtney himself, by-the-by, is still in Boston (they landed there), where business will detain him a few days. Ethel goes on a house-hunting expedition tomorrow, and I am going with her; for New York has altered out of her recollection during these seven years. They are to remain here three years, perhaps longer. Courtney is to establish and oversee an American branch of his English business.

They have only one child—a pretty little thing: Susie and I became great friends.

Mrs. Courtney opened the door of the private sitting-room in which I was awaiting her, and came in—beautifully! She has learned how to do that since I knew her. My own long residence in Paris has made me more critical than I used to be in such matters; but I do not remember having met any woman in society with manners more nearly perfect than Mrs. Courtney's. Ethel Leigh used to be, upon occasion, painfully abrupt and disconcerting; and her movements and attitudes, though there was abundant native grace in them, were often careless and unconventional. Of course, I do not forget that niceties of deportment, without sound qualities of mind and heart to back them, are of trifling value; but the two kinds of attraction are by no means incompatible with each other. Mrs. Courtney smiles often. Ethel Leigh used to smile rarely, although, when the smile did come, it was irresistibly winning; there was in it exquisite significance and tenderness. It is a beautiful smile still, but that charm of rarity (if it be a charm) is lacking. It is a conventional smile more than a spontaneous or a happy one; indeed, it led me to surmise that she had perhaps not been very happy since we last met, and had learned to use this smile as a sort of veil. Not that I suppose for a moment that Courtney has ill-treated her. I never could see anything in the man beyond a superficial comeliness, a talent for business, and an affable temper; but he was not in any sense a bad fellow. Besides, he was over head and ears in love with her; and Ethel would be sure to have the upper hand of a nature like his. No, her unhappiness, if she be unhappy, would be due to no such cause, she and her husband are no doubt on good terms with each other. But—suppose she has discovered that he fell short of what she demanded in a husband; that she overmatched him; that, in order to make their life smooth, she must descend to him? I imagine it may be something of that kind. Poor Mrs. Courtney!

She addressed me as “Mr. Campbell,” and I dare say she was right. Women best know how to meet these situations. To have called me “Claude” would have placed us in a false position, by ignoring the changes that have taken place. It is wise to respect these barriers; they are conventional, but, rightly considered, they are more of an assistance than of an obstacle to freedom of intercourse. I asked her how she liked England. She smiled and said, “It was my business to like England; still, I am glad to see America once more.”

“You will entertain a great deal, I presume—that sort of thing?”

“We shall hope to make friends with people—and to meet old friends. It is such a pleasant surprise to find you here. I heard you were settled in Paris.”

“So I was, for several years; the Parisians said nice things about my pictures. But one may weary even of Paris. I returned here two years ago, and am now as much of a fixture in New York as if I’d never left it.”

“But not a permanent fixture. Shall we never see you in London?”

“My present probabilities lie rather in the direction of California. I want to make some studies of the scenery and time atmosphere. Besides, I am getting too old to think of another European residence.”

“No one gets old after thirty—especially no bachelor!” she answered, with a smile. “But if you were ever to feel old, the society of London would rejuvenate you.”

“It has certainly done you no harm. But you have the happiness to be married.”

She looked at me pleasantly and said, “Yes, I make a good Englishwoman.” That sounded like an evasion, but the expression of her face was not evasive. In the old days she would probably have flushed up and said something cutting.

“You must see my little girl,” she said, after a while.

The child was called, and presently came in. She resembles her mother, and has a vivacity scarcely characteristic of English children. I am not constitutionally a worshiper of children, but I liked Susie. She put her arms round her mother’s arm, and gazed at me with wide-eyed scrutiny.”

“This is Mr. Campbell,” said mamma.

“My name is Susan Courtney,” said the little thing. “We are going to stay in New York three years. Not here—this is only an hotel—we are going to have a house. How do you do? This is my dolly.”

I saluted dolly, and thereby inspired its parent with confidence: she put her hand in mine, and gave me her smooth little cheek to kiss. “You are not like papa,” she then observed.

I smiled conciliatingly, being uncertain whether it were prudent to follow this lead; but Mrs. Courtney asked, “In what way different, dear?”

“Papa has a beard,” replied Susie.

The incident rather struck me; it seemed to indicate that Mrs. Courtney was under no apprehension that the child would say anything embarrassing about the father. Having learned so much, I ventured farther.

“Do you love papa or mamma best?” I inquired.

“I am with mamma most,” she answered, after meditation, “but when papa comes, I like him.”

This was non-committal. She continued, “Papa is coming here day after to-morrow. To-morrow, mamma and I are going to find a house.”

“Your husband leaves all that to you?” I said, turning to Mrs. Courtney.

“Mr. Courtney never knows or cares what sort of a place he lives in. It took me some little time to get used to that. I wanted everything to be just in a certain way. They used to laugh at me, and say I was more English than he.”

“Now that you are both here, you must both be American.”

“He doesn’t enjoy America much. Of course, it is very different from London. An Englishman can not be expected to care for American ways and American quickness, and—”

“American people?” I put in, laughingly.

“Don’t undress dolly here,” she said to Susie. “It isn’t time yet to put her to bed, and she might catch cold.”

Was this another evasion? The serene face betrayed nothing, but she had left unanswered the question that aimed at discovering how she and her husband stood toward each other. After all, however, no answer could have told me more than her no answer did—supposing it to have been intentional. I soon afterward took my leave, after having arranged to call to-morrow and accompany her and Susie on their house-hunting expedition.

Upon the whole, I don't think I am sorry to have renewed my acquaintance with her. She is more delightful—as an acquaintance—than when I knew her formerly. Should I have fallen in love with her had I met her for the first time as she is now? Yes, and no! In the old days there was something about her that commanded me—that fascinated my youthful imagination. Perhaps it was only the freshness, the ignorance, the timidity of young maidenhood—that mystery of possibilities of a nature that has not yet met the world and received its impress for good or evil. It is this which captivates in youth; and this, of course, Mrs. Courtney has lost. But every quality that might captivate mature manhood is hers, and, were I likely to think of marriage now, and were she marriageable, she is the type of woman I would choose. Yet I do not quite relish the perception that my present feminine ideal (whether it be lower or higher) is not the former one. But, frankly, would I marry her if I could? I hardly know: I have got out of the habit of regarding marriage as among my possibilities; many avenues of happiness that once were open to me are now closed against me. Put it, that I have lost a faculty—that I am now able to enjoy only in imagination a phase of existence that, formerly, I could have enjoyed in fact. This bit of self-analysis may be erroneous; but I would not like to run the risk of proving it so! Am I not well enough off as I am? My health is fair, my mind active, my reputation secure, my finances prosperous. The things that I can dream must surely be better than anything that could happen. I can picture, for example, a state of matrimonial felicity which no marriage of mine could realize. Besides, I can, whenever I choose, see Mrs. Courtney herself, talk with her, and enjoy her as a reasonable and congenial friend, apart from the danger and disappointment that might result from a closer connection. I think I have chosen the wiser part, or, rather, the wiser part has been thrust upon me. That I shall never be wildly happy is, at least, security that I shall never be profoundly miserable. I shall simply be comfortable.

Is this sour grapes? Am I, if not counting, then discounting my eggs before they are hatched? To such questions a practical—a materialized—answer would be the only conclusive one. Were Mrs. Courtney ready to drop into my mouth, I should either open my mouth, or else I should shut it, and either act would be conclusive. But, so far from being ready to drop into my mouth, she is immovably and (to all appearances) contentedly fixed where she is. I suppose I am insinuating that appearances are deceptive; that she may be unhappy with her husband, and desire to leave him. Well, there is no technical evidence in support of such an hypothesis; but, again, in a matter of this kind, it is not so much the technical as the indirect evidence that tells—the cadences of the voice, the breathing, the silences, the atmosphere. There is no denying that I did somehow acquire a vague impression that Courtney is not so large a figure in his wife's eyes as he might be. I may have been biased by my previous conception of his character, or I may have misinterpreted the impalpable, indescribable signs that I remarked in her. But, once more, how do I know that her not caring for him would postulate her caring for me? Why should she care for either of us? Our old romance is to her as the memory of something read in a book, and it is powerless to make her heart beat one throb the faster. Were Courtney to die to-morrow, would his widow expect me to marry her? Not she! She would settle down here quietly, educate her daughter, and think better of her departed husband with every year that passed, and less of repeating the experiment that made her his! I may be prone to romantic and elaborate speculations,

but I am not exactly a fool. I do not delude myself with the idea that Mrs. Courtney is, at this moment, following my example by recording her impressions of me at her own writing-desk, and asking herself whether—if such and such a thing were to happen—such another would be apt to follow. No; she has put Susie to bed, and is by this time asleep herself, after having read through the “Post,” or “Bazar,” or the last new novel, as her predilection may be. It is after midnight; since she has not followed my example, I will follow hers; it is much the more sensible of the two.

*May 2d.*—What a woman she is! and, in a different sense, what a man I am! How little does a man know or suspect himself until he is brought to the proof! How serenely and securely I philosophized and laid down the law yesterday! and to-day, how strange to contrast the event with my prognostication of it! And yet, again, how little has happened that might not be told in such a way as to appear nothing! It was the latent meaning, the spirit, the touch of look and tone. Her husband may have reached New York by this time; they may be together at this moment; he will find no perceptible change in her—perceptible to him! He will be told that I have been her escort during the day, and that I was polite and serviceable, and that a house has been selected. What more is there to tell? Nothing—that he could hear or understand! and yet—everything! He will say, “Yes, I recollect Campbell; nice fellow; have him to dine with us one of these days.” But I shall never sit at their table; I shall never see her again; I can not! I shall start for California next week. Meanwhile I will write down the history of one day, for it is well to have these things set visibly before one—to grasp the nettle, as it were. Nothing is so formidable as it appears when we shrink from defining it to ourselves.

I drove to the hotel in my brougham at eleven o’clock, as we had previously arranged. She was ready and waiting for me, and little Susie was with her. Ethel was charmingly dressed, and there was a soft look in her eyes as she turned them on me—a look that seemed to say, “I remember the past; it is pleasant to see you, so pleasant as to be sad!” Susie came to me as if I were an old friend, and I lifted the child from the floor and kissed her twice.

“Why did you give me two kisses?” she demanded, as I put her down. “Papa always gives me only one kiss.”

“Papa has mamma as well as you to kiss; but I have no one; I am an old bachelor.”

“When you have known mamma longer, will you kiss her too?”

“Old bachelors kiss nobody but little girls,”

I replied, laughing.

We went down to the brougham, and after we were seated and on our way, Ethel said, “Already I feel so much at home in New York, it almost startles me. I fancied I should have forgotten old associations—should have grown out of sympathy with them; but I seem only to have learned to appreciate them more. Our memory for some things is better than we would believe.”

“There are two memories in us, I remarked; “the memory of the heart and the memory of the head. The former never is lost, though the other may be. But I had not supposed that you cared very deeply for the American period of your life.”

“England is very agreeable,” she said, rather hastily. She turned her head and looked out of the window; but after a pause she added, as if to herself, “but I am an American!”

“There is, no doubt, a deep-rooted and substantial repose in English life such as is scarcely to be found elsewhere,” I said; “but, for all that, I have often thought that the best part of domestic happiness could exist nowhere but here. here a man may marry the woman he loves, and their affection for each other will be made stronger by the hardships they may have to pass through.

After all, when we come to the end of our lives, it is not the business we have done, nor the social distinction we have enjoyed—it is the love we have given and received that we are glad of.”

“Mamma,” inquired Susie, “does Mr. Campbell love you?”

We both of us looked at the child and laughed a little. “Mr. Campbell is an old friend,” said Ethel. After a few moments she blushed. She held in her hand some house-agents’ orders to view houses, and these she now began to examine. “Is this Madison Avenue place likely to be a good one?” she asked me.

“It is conveniently situated and comfortable; but I should think it might be too large for a family of three. Perhaps, though, you don’t like a close fit?”

“I don’t like empty rooms, though I prefer such rooms as there are to be large. But it doesn’t make much difference. Mr. Courtney moves about a good deal, and he is as happy in a hotel as anywhere. These American hotels are luxurious and splendid, but they are not homelike to me.”

“I remember you used to dislike being among a crowd of people you didn’t know.”

“Yes, and I haven’t yet learned to be sociable in that way. A friend is more company for me than a score of acquaintances. Dear me! I’m afraid New York will spoil me—for England!”

“Perhaps Mr. Courtney may be cured of England by New York.”

She smiled and said, “Perhaps! He accommodates himself to things more easily than I do, but I think one needs to be born in America to know how to love it.”

Under the veil of discussing America and things in general, we were talking of ourselves, awakening reminiscences of the past, and discovering, with a pleasure we did not venture to acknowledge, that—allowing for the events and the years that had come between—we were as much in accord as when we were young lovers. Yes, as much, and perhaps even more. For surely, if one grows in the right way, the sphere of knowledge and sympathy must enlarge, and thereby the various points of contact between two minds and hearts must be multiplied. Ethel and I, during these seven years, had traveled our round of daily life on different sides of the earth; but the miles of sea and land which had physically separated us had been powerless to estrange our spirits. Nothing is more strange, in this mysterious complexity of impressions and events that we call human existence, than the fact that two beings, entirely cut off from all natural means of association and communion, may yet, unknown to each other, be breathing the same spiritual air and learning the same moral and intellectual lessons. Like two seeds of the same species, planted, the one in American soil, the other in English, Ethel and I had selected, by some instinct of the soul, the same elements from our different surroundings; so that now, when we met once more, we found a close and harmonious resemblance between the leaves and blossoms of our experience. What can be more touching and delightful than such a discovery? Or what more sad than to know that it came too late for us to profit by it? Oh, Ethel, how easy it is to take the little step that separates light from darkness, happiness from misery! Remembering that we live but once, and that the worthy enjoyments of life are so limited in number and so hard to get, it seems unjust and monstrous that one little hour of jealousy or misunderstanding should wreck the fair prospects of months and years. Why is mischief so much readier to our hand than good?

We got out at a house near the Park. I assisted Ethel to alight, and, as her hand rested on mine, the thought crossed my mind—How sweet if this were our own home that we are about to enter!—and I glanced at her face to see whether a like thought had visited her. She maintained a subdued demeanor, with an expression about the mouth and eyes of a peculiar timid gentleness, and, as it were, a sort of mental leaning upon me for support and protection. She felt, it may be, a little fear of herself, at finding herself—in more senses than one—so near to me; and, woman-

like, she depended upon me to protect her against the very peril of which I was the occasion. No higher or more delicate compliment can be paid by a woman to a man; and I resolved that I would do what in me lay to deserve it. But such resolutions are the hardest in the world to keep, because the circumstance or the impulse of the moment is continually in wait to betray you. Ethel was more fascinating and lovely in this mood than in any other I had hitherto seen her in; and the misgiving, from which I could not free myself, that the man whom Fate had made her husband did not appreciate or properly cherish the gift bestowed upon him, made me warm toward her more than ever. I could scarcely have believed that such blood could flow in the sober veins of my middle age; but love knows nothing of time or age!

"I do not like this house," Susie declared, when we had been admitted by the care-taker. "It has no carpets, nor chairs, nor pictures; and the floor is dirty; and the walls are not pretty!"

"I suppose one can have these houses decorated and furnished at short notice?" Ethel asked me.

"It would not take long. There are several firms that make it their specialty."

"I have always wanted to live in a house where the colors and forms were to my taste. I don't know whether you remember that you used to think I had some taste in such matters. Mr. Courtney, of course, doesn't care much about art, and he didn't encourage me to carry out my ideas. A business man can not be an artist, you know."

"You yourself would have become an artist if—" I began; but I was approaching dangerous ground, and I stopped. "This dining-room might be done in Indian red," I remarked—"the wood-work, that is to say. The walls would be a warm salmon color, which contrasts well with the cold blue of the china, which it is the fashion to have about nowadays. As for the furniture, antique dark oak is as safe as anything, don't you think so?"

"I should like all that," said she, moving a little nearer me, and letting her eyes wander about the room with a pleased expression, until at length they met my own. "If you could only design our decoration for us, I'm sure it would be perfect; at least, I should be satisfied. Well, and how should we . . . how ought the drawing-room to be done?"

"There is a shade of yellow that is very agreeable for drawing-rooms, and it goes very well with the dull peacock-blue which is in vogue now. Then you could get one of those bloomy Morris friezes. There is some very graceful Chippendale to be picked up in various places. And no such good furniture is made nowadays. But I am advising you too much from the artist's point of view.

"Oh, I can get other sort of advice when I want it." She looked at me with a smile; our glances met more often now than at first. "But it seems to me," she went on, "that the way the house is built does not suit the way we want to decorate it. Let us look at a smaller one. I should think ten rooms would be quite enough. And it would be nice to have a corner house, would it not?"

"If the question were only of our agreement, there would probably not be much difficulty," I said, in a tone which I tried to make merely courteous, but which may have revealed something more than courtesy beneath it.

In coming down-stairs she gathered her dress in her right hand and put her left in my arm; and then, in a flash, the picture came before me of the last time we had gone arm-in-arm together down-stairs. It was at her father's house, and she was speaking to me of that unlucky Mrs. Murray; we had our quarrel that evening in the drawing-room, and it was never made up. From then till now, what a gulf! and yet those years would have been but a bridge to pass over, save for the one barrier that was insurmountable between us.

“What has become of that Mrs. Murray whom you used to know?” she asked, as we reached the foot of the stairs. She relinquished my arm as she spoke, and faced me.

I felt the blood come to my face. “Mrs. Murray was in my thoughts at the same moment—and perhaps by the same train of associations.” I answered, “I don’t know where she is now; I lost sight of her years ago—soon after you were married, in fact. Why do you ask?”

“You had not forgotten her, then?”

“I had every reason to forget her, except the one reason for which I have remembered her—and you know what that is! Have you mistrusted me all this time?”

“Oh, no—no! I don’t think I really mistrusted you at all; and long ago I admitted to myself that you had acted unselfishly and honorably. But I was angry at the time; you know, sometimes a girl will be angry, even when there is no good reason for it. I have long wished for an opportunity to tell you this, for my own sake, you know, as well as for yours.”

“I hardly know whether I am most glad or sorry to hear this,” I said, as we moved toward the door. “If you had only been able to say it, or to think it, before . . . there would have been a great difference!”

“The worst of mistakes is, they are so seldom set right at the time, or in the way they ought to be. Come, Susie, we are going away now. Susie, do you most like to be American or English?”

“English,” replied Susie, without hesitation.

Her mother turned to me and said in a low tone:

“I love her, whichever she is.”

I understood what she meant. Susie was the symbol of that inevitable element in our lives which seems to evolve itself without reference to our desires or efforts; but which, nevertheless, when we have recognized that it is inevitable, we learn (if we are wise) to accept and even to love. Save for the estrangement between Ethel and myself, Susie would never have existed; yet there she was, a beautiful child, who had as good a right to be as either of us; and her mother loved her, and, as it were, bade me love her also. I took the little maiden by the hand and said, “You are right, Susie; the Americans are the children of the English, and can not expect to be so wise and comfortable as they. But you must remember that the Americans have a future before them, and we are not enemies any more. Will you be friends with me, and let me call you my little girl?”

“I shouldn’t mind being your little girl, if I could still have the same mamma,” was Susie’s reply. “Papa is away a great deal, and you could be papa, you know, until he came back.”

I made some laughing answer; but, in fact, Susie’s frank analysis of the situation poignantly kindled an imagination which stood in no need of stimulus. Ah, if this were the Golden Age, when love never went astray, how happy we might be! But it is not the Golden Age—far from it! Meanwhile, I think I can assert, with a clear conscience, that no dishonorable purpose possessed me. I loved Ethel too profoundly to wish to do her wrong. Yet I may have wished—I did wish—that a kindly Providence might have seen fit to remove the disabilities that controlled us. If a wish could have removed Courtney painlessly to another world, I think I should have wished it. There was something exquisitely touching in Ethel’s appearance and manner. She is as pure as any woman that ever lived; but she is a woman! and I felt that, for this day, I had a man’s power over her. Occasionally I was conscious that her eyes were resting on my face; when I addressed her, her aspect softened and brightened; she fell into little moods of preoccupation, from which she would emerge with a sigh; in many ways she betrayed, without knowing it, the secret that neither of us would mention. I do not mean to imply that she expected me to mention it. A pure woman does not realize the dangers of the world; and that very fact is itself her strongest security

against them. But, had I spoken, she would have responded. It was a temptation which I could hardly have believed I could have resisted as I did; but such a woman calls out all that is best and noblest in a man; and, at the time, I was better than I am!

When we were in the brougham again, I said, "If you will allow me, I will drive you to a house I have seen, which belongs to a man with whom I am slightly acquainted. He is on the point of leaving it, but his furniture is still in it, and, as he is himself an artist and a man of taste, it will be worth your while to look at it. He is rather deaf, but that is all the better; we can express our opinions without disturbing him. Perhaps you might arrange to take house and furniture as they stand."

"Whatever you advise, I shall like to do," Ethel answered.

We presently arrived at the house, which was situated in the upper part of the town, a little to the west of Fifth Avenue. It was a comely gabled edifice of red brick, with square bay-windows and a roomy porch. The occupant, Maler, a German, happened to be at home; and on my sending in my card, we were admitted at once, and he came to greet us in the hall in his usual hearty, headlong fashion.

"My good Campbell," he exclaimed, in his blundering English, "very delighted to see you. Ah, dis will be madame, and de little maid! So you are married since some time—I have not know it! Your servant, Madame Campbell. I know—all de artists know—your husband: we wish we could paint how he can—but it is impossible! Ha, ha, ha! not so! Now, I am very pleased you shall see dis house. May I beg do honor of accompany you? First you shall see de studio; dat I call de stomach of de house, eh? because it is most important of all de places, and make de rest of de places live. See, I make dat window be put in—you find no better light in New York. Den you see, here we have de alcove, where Madame Campbell shall sit and make her sewing, while do husband do his work on de easel. How you like dat portiere? I design him myself—oh, yes, I do all here; you keep them if you like; I go to Germany, perhaps not come back after some years, so I leave dem, not so? Now I show you my little chamber of the piano. See, I make an arched ceiling—groined arch, oh?—and I gild him; so I get pretty light and pretty sound, not? Ah! madame, I have not do happiness to be married, but I make my house so, dat if I get me a wife, she find all ready; but no wife come, so I give him over to Herr Campbell and you. Now we mount up-stairs to de bed-rooms,

In this way he went over the entire house with us. His loud, jolly voice, his resounding laugh, his bustling manner, his heedless, boy-like self-confidence, and his deafness, made it impossible to get in a word of explanation, and, after a few efforts, I gave up the attempt.

"Let him suppose what he likes," I said aside to Ethel, "it can make no difference; he is going away, and you will never see him again. After all these years, it can do no great harm for us to play at being Mr. and Mrs. Campbell for an hour!"

"It is a very beautiful house," she said, tacitly accepting what I had proposed. "It is such a house as I have always dreamed of living in. I shall not care to look at any others. Will you tell him that we—that I will take it just as it stands. You have made this a very pleasant day for me—a very happy day," she added, in a lower tone. "Every room here will be associated with you. You will come here often and see me, will you not? Perhaps, after all, you might use the studio to paint my—or Susie's portrait in."

"I shall inflict myself upon you very often, I have no doubt," was all I ventured to reply. I could not tell her, at that moment, that we must never see each other again. She—after the manner of women—probably supposes that a man's strength is limitless; that he may do with himself and make of himself what he chooses; and she supposes that I could visit her and

converse with her day after day, and yet keep my thoughts and my acts within such bounds as would enable me to take Courtney honestly by the hand. But I know too well my own weakness, and I shall leave her while yet I have power to do so. Tomorrow—or soon—I will write to her one last letter, telling her why I go.

Sudden and strange indeed has been this passionate episode in a life which, methought, had done with passion. It has lasted hardly so many hours as I have lived years; and yet, were I to live on into the next century, it would never cease to influence me in all I think and do. I can not solve to my satisfaction this problem—why two lives should be wasted as ours have been. Courtney could have been happy with another wife, or with no wife at all, perhaps; but, for Ethel and me, there could be no happiness save in each other. But were she free to-day, the separation that has already existed—long though it has been—would only serve to render our future union more blissful and complete. We have learned, by sad experience, the value of a love like ours, and we should know how to give it its fullest and widest expression. But oh! what a blank and chilly road lies before us now!

I drove her back to her hotel; we hardly spoke all the way; my heart was too full, and hers also, I think; though she did not know, as I did, that it was our last interview. It must be our last! Heaven help me to keep that resolution!

Susie was not at all impressed by the pathos of the situation; she babbled all the time, and thus, at all events, afforded us an excuse for our silence. At parting, one incident occurred that may as well be recorded. I had shaken hands with Ethel, speaking a few words of farewell, and allowing her to infer that we might meet again on the morrow; then I turned to Susie, and gave her the kiss which I would have given the world to have had the right to press on her mother's lips. Ethel saw, and, I think, understood. She stooped quickly down, and laid her mouth where mine had been. Through the innocent medium of the child, our hearts met; and then I saw her no more.

*May 3d.*—Of course, it may not be true, probably it is not; mistakes are so easily made in the first moments of such horror and confusion; the dead come to life, and the living die. Or, at the worst, he may be only wounded or disabled. At all events, I decline to believe, save upon certain evidence, that the poor fellow has actually been killed. Were it to turn out so, I should feel almost like a murderer; for was not I writing, in this very journal, and perhaps at the very moment the accident occurred, that if my wish could send him to another world, I would not spare him?

*Later.*—I have read all the accounts in the newspapers this morning, and all agree in putting Courtney's name among the killed. There can be no doubt about it any longer; he is dead. When the collision occurred, the car in which he was riding was thrown across the track, and the other train crashed through it. Judging by the condition of the body when discovered, death must have been nearly instantaneous. Poor Courtney! My conscience is not at ease. Of course, I am not really responsible; that is only imagination. But I begin to suspect that my imagination has been playing me more than one trick lately.

And now, with this new state of affairs so suddenly and terribly brought about, what is to be done? I am as yet scarcely in a condition to reflect calmly; but a voice within me seems to say that something else besides my conscience has been awakened by Courtney's death. Can it be that imagination, dallying with what it took for impossibilities, could so far mislead a man? Well, I shall start at once for the scene of the disaster, and relieve the poor fellow's widow of whatever pain I can. Ethel Courtney a widow! Ah, Ethel! Death sheds a ghastly light upon the idle vagaries of the human heart.

*May 15th.—Denver, Colorado.*—Magnificent weather and scenery; very different from my own mental scenery and mood at this moment. I am sorely out of spirits; and no wonder, after the reckless and insane emotion of the first days of this month. One pays for such indulgences at my age.

I have been re-reading the foregoing pages of this journal. Was I a fool or a coward, or was I merely intoxicated for eight-and-forty hours? At all events, Courtney's tragic end sobered me, and put what I had been doing in a true light. I am glad my insanity was not permitted to proceed farther than it did; but I have quite enough to reproach myself with as it is. So far as I have been able to explain the matter to myself, my prime error lay in attributing, in a world subject to constant change, too much permanence to a given state of affairs. The fact that Ethel was the wife of another man seemed to me so fixed and unalterable that I allowed my imagination to play with the picture of what might happen if that unalterable fact were altered. Secure in this fallacy, I worked myself up to the pitch of believing that I was actually and passionately in love with a woman whose inaccessibility was, after all, her most winning attraction. Moreover, by writing down, in this journal, the events and words of the hours we spent together, I confirmed myself in my false persuasion, and probably imported into the record of what we said and did an amount of color and hidden significance that never, as I am now convinced, belonged to it in reality. Deluded by the notion that I was playing with a fancy, I was suddenly aroused to find myself imbrued in facts. The whole episode has profoundly humiliated me, and degraded me in my own esteem.

But I am not at the bottom of the mystery yet. Was I not in love with Ethel? Surely I was, if love be anything. Then why did I not ask her to marry me? Would she have refused me? No. That last look she gave me from under her black veil, when I told her I was going away. . . . Ah, no, she would not have refused me. Then why did I hesitate? Was not such a marriage precisely what I have always longed for? During all these seven years have I not been bewailing my bachelorhood, and wishing for an Ethel to cheer my solitary fireside with her gracious presence, to be interested in my work and hopes, to interest me in her wifely and maternal ways and aspirations? And when at last all these things were offered me, why did I shrink back and reject them?

Honestly, I can not explain it. Perhaps, if I had never loved her before, I might have loved her this time enough to unite my fate with hers. Or, perhaps—for I may as well speak plainly, since I am speaking to myself—perhaps, by force of habit, I had grown to love, better than love itself, those self-same forlorn conditions and dreary solitudes which I was continually lamenting and praying to be delivered from. What a dismal solution of the problem this would be were it the true one! It amounts to saying that I prefer an empty room, a silent hearth, an old pair of slippers, and a dressing-gown to the love and companionship of a refined and beautiful woman that I love even my own discomforts more than the comfort she would give me! It sounds absurd, scandalous, impossible; and yet, if it be not the literal truth, I know not what the truth is. It is amazing that an educated and intelligent man can live to be forty years old and still have come to no better an understanding of himself than I had. Verily, as my old author said, thought is free, but nature is captive, and loveth her chain. Yes, my old author was right.