

***AUGUSTA
J. EVANS***



***AT THE MERCY
OF TIBERIUS***

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CHAPTER I.

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"You are obstinate and ungrateful. You would rather see me suffer and die, than bend your stubborn pride in the effort to obtain relief for me. You will not try to save me."

The thin, hysterically unsteady voice ended in a sob, and the frail wasted form of the speaker leaned forward, as if the issue of life or death hung upon an answer.

The tower clock of a neighboring church began to strike the hour of noon, and not until the echo of the last stroke had died away, was there a reply to the appeal.

"Mother, try to be just to me. My pride is for you, not for myself. I shrink from seeing my mother crawl to the feet of a man, who has disowned and spurned her; I cannot consent that she should humbly beg for rights, so unnaturally withheld. Every instinct of my nature revolts from the step you require of me, and I feel as if you held a hot iron in your hand, waiting to brand me."

"Your proud sensitiveness runs in a strange groove, and it seems you would prefer to see me a pauper in a Hospital, rather than go to your grandfather and ask for help. Beryl, time presses, and if I die for want of aid, you will be responsible; when it is too late, you will reproach yourself. If I only knew where and how to reach my dear boy, I should not importune you. Bertie would not refuse obedience to say wishes."

The silence which followed was so prolonged that a mouse crept from its covert in some corner of the

comfortless garret room, and nibbled at the fragments of bread scattered on the table.

Beryl stood at the dormer window, holding aside the faded blue cotton curtain, and the mid-day glare falling upon her, showed every curve of her tall full form; every line in the calm, pale Sibylline face. The large steel gray eyes were shaded by drooping lids, heavily fringed with black lashes, but when raised in a steady gaze the pupils appeared abnormally dilated; and the delicately traced black brows that overarched them, contrasted conspicuously with the wealth of deep auburn hair darkened by mahogany tints, which rolled back in shining waves from her blue veined temples. While moulding the figure and features upon a scale almost heroic, nature had jealously guarded the symmetry of her work, and in addition to the perfect proportion of the statuesque outlines, had bestowed upon the firm white flesh a gleaming smoothness, suggestive of fine grained marble highly polished. Majesty of mien implies much, which the comparatively short period of eighteen years rarely confers, yet majestic most properly describes this girl, whose archetype Veleda read runic myths to the Bructeri in the twilight of history.

Beryl crossed the room, and with her hands folded tightly together, came to the low bed, on which lay the wreck of a once beautiful woman, and stood for a moment silent and pre-occupied. With a sudden gesture of surrender, she stooped her noble head, as if assuming a yoke, and drew one long deep breath. Did some prophetic intuition show her at that instant the Phicean Hill and its dread tenant, which sooner or later we must all confront?

"Dear mother, I submit. Obedience to your commands certainly ought not to lead me astray; yet I feel that I stand at the cross-roads, longing to turn and flee from the way whither your finger points. I have no hope of accomplishing any good, and nothing but humiliation can result from the experiment; but I will go. Sometimes I believe; that fate maliciously hunts up the things we most bitterly abhor, and one by one sets them down before us—labelled Duty. When do you wish me to start?"

"To-night, at nine o'clock. In the letter which you will take to father, I have told him our destitution; and that the money spent for your railway ticket has been obtained by the sacrifice of the diamonds and pearls, that were set around my mother's picture; that cameo, which he had cut in Rome and framed in Paris. Beryl so much depends on the impression you make upon him, that you must guard your manner against haughtiness. Try to be patient, my daughter, and if he should seem harsh, do not resent his words. He is old now, and proud and bitter, but he once had a tender love for me. I was his idol, and when my child pleads, he will relent."

Mrs. Brentano laid her thin hot fingers on her daughter's hands, drawing her down to the edge of the bed; and Beryl saw she was quivering with nervous excitement.

"Compose yourself, mother, or you will be so ill that I cannot leave you. Dr. Grantlin impressed upon us, the necessity of keeping your nervous system quiet. Take your medicine now, and try to sleep until I come back from Stephen & Endicott's."

"Do not go to-day."

"I must. Those porcelain types were promised for a certain day, and they should be packed in time for the afternoon express going to Boston."

"Beryl."

"Well, mother?"

"Come nearer to me. Give me your hand. My heart is so oppressed by dread, that I want you to promise me something, which I fancy will lighten my burden. Life is very uncertain, and if I should die, what would become of my Bertie? Oh, my boy! my darling, my first born! He is so impulsive, so headstrong; and no one but his mother could ever excuse or forgive his waywardness. Although younger, you are in some respects, the strongest; and I want your promise that you will always be patient and tender with him, and that you will shield him from evil, as I have tried to do. His conscience of course, is not sensitive like yours—because you know, a boy's moral nature is totally different from a girl's; and like most of his sex, Bertie has no religious instincts bending him always in the right direction. Women generally have to supply conscientious scruples for men, and you can take care of your brother, if you will. You are unusually brave and strong, Beryl, and when I am gone, you must stand between him and trouble. My good little girl, will you?"

The large luminous eyes that rested upon the flushed face of the invalid, filled with a mist of yearning compassionate tenderness, and taking her mother's hands, Beryl laid the palms together, then stooping nearer, kissed her softly.

"I think I have never lacked love for Bertie, though I may not always have given expression to my feelings. If at times I have deplored his reckless waywardness, and expostulated with him, genuine affection prompted me; but I promise you now, that I will do all a sister possibly can for a brother. Trust me, mother; and rest in the assurance that his welfare shall be more to me than my own; that should the necessity arise, I will stand between him and trouble. Banish all depressing forebodings. When you are strong and well, and when I paint my great picture, we will buy a pretty cottage among the lilacs and roses, where birds sing all day long, where cattle pasture in clover nooks; and then Bertie, your darling, shall never leave you again."

"I do trust you, for your promise means more than oath and vows from other people, and if occasion demand, I know you will guard my Bertie, my high-strung, passionate, beautiful boy! Your pretty cottage? Ah, child! when shall we dwell in Spain?"

"Some day, some day; only be hopeful, and let me find you better when I return. Sleep, and dream of our pretty cottage. I must hurry away with my pictures, for this is pay day."

Tying the strings of her hat under one ear, and covering her face with a blue veil, Beryl took a pasteboard box from a table, on which lay brushes and paints, and leaving the door ajar, went down the narrow stairs.

At the window of a small hall on the next floor, a woman sat before her sewing-machine, bending so close to her work that she did not see the tall form, which paused before her, until a hand was laid on the steel plate.

"Mrs. Emmet, will you please be so good as to go up after a while, and see if mother needs anything?"

"Certainly, Miss, if I am here, but I have some sewing to carry home this afternoon."

"I shall not be absent more than two hours. To-night I am going South, to attend to some business; and mother tells me you have promised to wait upon her, and allow your daughter Maggie to sleep on a pallet by her bed, while I am gone. I cannot tell you how grateful I shall be for any kindness you may show her, and I wish you would send the baby often to her room, as he is so sweet and cunning, and his merry ways amuse her."

"Yes, I will do all I can. We poor folks who have none of this world's goods, ought to be rich at least in sympathy and pity for each other's suffering, for it is about all we have to share. Don't you worry and fret, for I will see your ma has what she needs. I was mothered by the best woman God ever made, and since she died, every sick mother I see has a sort of claim on my heart."

Pausing an instant to adjust the tucker of her machine, Mrs. Emmet looked up, and involuntarily the women shook hands, as if sealing a compact.

It was a long walk to the building whither Beryl directed her steps, and as she passed through the rear entrance of a large and fashionable photograph establishment, she was surprised to find that it was half-past two o'clock.

The Superintendent of the department, from whom she received her work, was a man of middle-age, of rather stern and forbidding aspect; and as she approached his desk, he pointed to the clock on the mantel-piece.

"Barely time to submit those types for inspection, and have them packed for the express going East. They are birthday gifts, and birthdays have an awkward habit of arriving rigidly on time."

He unrolled the tissue paper, and with a magnifying glass, carefully examined the pictures; then took from an envelope in the box, two short pieces of hair, which he compared with the painted heads before him.

"Beautifully done. The lace on that child's dress would bear even a stronger lens than my glass. Here Patterson, take this box, and letter to Mr. Endicott, and if satisfactory, carry them to the packing counter. Shipping address is in the letter. Hurry up, my lad. Sit down, Miss Brentano."

"Thank you, I am not tired. Mr. Mansfield, have you any good news for me?"

"You mean those etchings; or the designs for the Christmas cards? Have not heard a word, pro or con. Guess no news is good news; for I notice 'rejected' work generally travels fast, to roost at home."

"I thought the awards were made last week, and that to-day you could tell me the result."

"The awards have been made, I presume, but who owns the lucky cards is the secret that has not yet transpired. You young people have no respect for red tape, and methodical business routine. You want to clap spurs on fate, and make her lower her own last record? 'Bide awee. Bide awee'."

"Winning this prize means so much to me, that I confess I find it very hard to be patient. Success would save me from a painful and expensive journey, upon which I must start to-night; and therefore I hoped so earnestly that I might

receive good tidings to-day. I am obliged to go South on an errand, which will necessitate an absence of several days, and if you should have any news for me, keep it until I call again. If unfavorable it would depress my mother, and therefore I prefer you should not write, as of course she will open any letters addressed to me. Please save all the work you can for me, and I will come here as soon as I get back home."

"Very well. Any message, Patterson?"

"Mr. Endicott said, 'All right; first-rate;' and ordered them shipped."

"Here is your money, Miss Brentano. Better call as early as you can, as I guess there will be a lot of photographs ready in a few days. Good afternoon."

"Thank you. Good-bye, sir."

From the handful of small change, she selected some pennies which she slipped inside of her glove, and dropping the remainder into her pocket, left the building, and walked on toward Union Square. Absorbed in grave reflections, and oppressed by some vague foreboding of impending ill, dim, intangible and unlocalized—she moved slowly along the crowded sidewalk—unconscious of the curious glances directed toward her superb form, and stately graceful carriage, which more than one person turned and looked back to admire, wondering when she had stepped down from some sacred Panathenaic Frieze.

Near Madison Square, she paused before the window of a florist's, and raising her veil, gazed longingly at the glowing mass of blossoms, which Nineteenth Century skill and wealth in defiance of isothermal lines, and climatic

limitations force into perfection, in, and out of season. The violet eyes and crocus fingers of Spring smiled and quivered, at sight of the crimson rose heart, and flaming paeony cheeks of royal Summer; and creamy and purple chrysanthemums that quill their laces over the russet robes of Autumn, here stared in indignant amazement, at the premature presumption of snowy regal camellias, audaciously advancing to crown the icy brows of Winter. All latitudes, all seasons have become bound vassals to the great God Gold; and his necromancy furnishes with equal facility the dewy wreaths of orange flowers that perfume the filmy veils of December brides—and the blue bells of spicy hyacinths which ring "Rest" over the lily pillows, set as tribute on the graves of babies, who wilt under August suns.

From early childhood, an ardent love of beauty had characterized this girl, whose covetous gaze wandered from a gorgeous scarlet and gold orchid nodding in dreams of its habitat, in some vanilla scented Brazilian jungle, to a bed of vivid green moss, where skilful hands had grouped great drooping sprays of waxen begonias, coral, faint pink, and ivory, all powdered with gold dust like that which gilds the heart of water-lilies.

Such treasures were reserved for the family of Dives; and counting her pennies, Beryl entered the store, where instantaneously the blended breath of heliotrope, tube-rose and mignonette wafted her across the ocean, to a white-walled fishing village on the Cornice, whose gray rocks were kissed by the blue lips of the Mediterranean.

"What is the price of that cluster of Niphetos buds?"

"One dollar."

"And that Auratum—with a few rose geranium leaves added?"

"Seventy-five cents. You see it is wonderfully large, and the gold bands are so very deep."

She put one hand in her pocket and fingered a silver coin, but poverty is a grim, tyrannous stepmother to tender aestheticism, and prudential considerations prevailed.

"Give me twenty-five cents worth of those pale blue double violets, with a sprig of lemon verbena, and a fringe of geranium leaves."

She laid the money on the counter, and while the florist selected and bound the blossoms into a bunch, she arrested his finishing touch.

"Wait a moment. How much more for one Grand Duke jasmine in the centre?"

"Ten cents, Miss."

She added the dime to the pennies she could ill afford to spare from her small hoard, and said: "Will you be so kind as to sprinkle it? I wish it kept fresh, for a sick lady."

Dusky shadows were gathering in the gloomy hall of the old tenement house, when Beryl opened the door of the comfortless attic room, where for many months she had struggled bravely to shield her mother from the wolf, that more than once snarled across the threshold.

Mrs. Brentano was sitting in a low chair, with her elbows on her knees, her face hidden in her palms; and in her lap lay paper and pencil, while a sealed letter had fallen on the ground beside her. At the sound of the opening door, she lifted her head, and tears dripped upon the paper. In her faded flannel dressing-gown, with tresses of black hair

straggling across her shoulders, she presented a picture of helpless mental and physical woe, which painted itself indelibly on the panels of her daughter's heart.

"Why did you not wait until I came home? The exertion of getting up always fatigues you."

"You staid so long—and I am so uncomfortable in that wretchedly hard bed. What detained you?"

"I went to see the Doctor, because I am unwilling to start away, without having asked his advice; and he has prescribed some new medicine which you will find in this bottle. The directions are marked on the label. Now I will put things in order, and try my hands on that refractory bed."

"What did the Doctor say about me?"

"Nothing new; but he is confident that you can be cured in time, if we will only be patient and obedient. He promised to see you in the morning."

She stripped the bed of its covering, shook bolster and pillows; turned over the mattress, and beat it vigorously; then put on fresh sheets, and adjusted the whole comfortably.

"Now mother, turn your head, and let me comb and brush and braid all this glossy black satin, to keep it from tangling while I am away. What a pity you did not dower your daughter with part of it, instead of this tawny mane of mine, which is a constant affront to my fastidious artistic instincts. Please keep still a moment."

She unwrapped the tissue paper that covered her flowers, and holding her hands behind her, stepped in front of the invalid.

"Dear mother, shut your eyes. There—! of what does that remind you? The pergola—with great amber grape clusters—and white stars of jasmine shining through the leaves? All the fragrance of Italy sleeps in the thurible of this Grand-Duke."

"How delicious! Ah, my extravagant child! we cannot afford such luxuries now. The perfume recalls so vividly the time when Bertie—"

A sob cut short the sentence. Beryl pinned the flowers at her mother's throat, kissed her cheek, and kneeling before her, crossed her arms on the invalid's lap, resting there the noble head, with its burnished crown of reddish bronze braids.

"Mother dear, humor my childish whim. In defiance of my wishes and judgment, and solely in obedience to your command, I am leaving you for the first time, on a bitterly painful and humiliating mission. To-night, let me be indeed your little girl once more. My heart brings me to your knees, to say my prayers as of yore, and now while I pray, lay your dear pretty hands on my head. It will seem like a parting benediction; a veritable Nunc dimittas."

CHAPTER II.

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"I do not want a carriage. If the distance is only a mile and a half, I can easily walk. After leaving town is there a straight road?"

"Straight as the crow flies, when you have passed the factory, and cemetery, and turned to the left. There is a little Branch running at the foot of the hill, and just across it, you will see the white palings, and the big gate with stone pillars, and two tremendous brass dogs on top, showing their teeth and ready to spring. There's no mistaking the place, because it is the only one left in the country that looks like the good old times before the war; and the Yankees would not have spared it, had it not been such comfortable bombproof headquarters for their officers. It's our show place now, and General Darrington keeps it up in better style, than any other estate I know."

"Thank you. I will find it."

Beryl walked away in the direction indicated, and the agent of the railway station, leaning against the door of the baggage room, looked with curious scrutiny after her.

"I should like to know who she is. No ordinary person, that is clear. Such a grand figure and walk, and such a steady look in her big solemn eyes, as if she saw straight through a person, clothes, flesh and all. Wonder what her business can be with the old general?"

From early childhood Beryl had listened so intently to her mother's glowing descriptions of the beauty and elegance of her old home "Elm Bluff," that she soon began to identify

the land-marks along the road, after passing the cemetery, where so many generations of Darringtons slept in one corner, enclosed by a lofty iron railing; exclusive in death as in life; jealously guarded and locked from contact with the surrounding dwellers in "God's Acre."

The October day had begun quite cool and crisp, with a hint of frost in its dewy sparkle, but as though vanquished Summer had suddenly faced about, and charged furiously to cover her retreat, the south wind came heavily laden with hot vapor from equatorial oceanic caldrons; and now the afternoon sun, glowing in a cloudless sky, shed a yellowish glare that burned and tingled like the breath of a furnace; while along the horizon, a dim dull haze seemed blotting out the boundary of earth and sky.

A portion of the primeval pine forest having been preserved, the trees had attained gigantic height, thrusting their plummy heads heavenward, as their lower limbs died; and year after year the mellow brown carpet of reddish straw deepened, forming a soft safe nidus for the seeds that sprang up and now gratefully embroidered it with masses of golden rod, starry white asters, and tall, feathery spikes of some velvety purple bloom, which looked royal by the side of a cluster of belated evening primroses.

Pausing on the small but pretty rustic bridge, Beryl leaned against the interlacing cedar boughs twisted into a balustrade, and looked down at the winding stream, where the clear water showed amber hues, flecked with glinting foam bubbles, as it lapped and gurgled, eddied and sang, over its bed of yellow gravel. Unacquainted with "piney-woods' branches," she was charmed by the novel golden

brown wavelets that frothed against the pillars of the bridge, and curled caressingly about the broad emerald fronds of luxuriant ferns, which hung Narcissus-like over their own graceful quivering images. Profound quiet brooded in the warm, hazy air, burdened with balsamic odors; but once a pine burr full of rich nutty mast crashed down through dead twigs, bruising the satin petals of a primrose; and ever and anon the oboe notes of that shy, deep throated hermit of ravines—the russet, speckled-breasted lark—thrilled through the woods, like antiphonal echoes in some vast, cool, columned cloister.

The perfect tranquillity of the scene soothed the travel-weary woman, as though nestling so close to the great heart of nature, had stilled the fierce throbbing, and banished the gloomy forebodings of her own; and she walked on, through the iron gate, where the bronze mastiffs glared warningly from their granite pedestal—on into the large undulating park, which stretched away to meet the line of primitive pines. There was no straight avenue, but a broad smooth carriage road curved gently up a hillside, and on both margins of the graveled way, ancient elm trees stood at regular intervals, throwing their boughs across, to unite in lifting the superb groined arches, whose fine tracery of sinuous lines were here and there concealed by clustering mistletoe—and gray lichen masses—and ornamented with bosses of velvet moss; while the venerable columnar trunks were now and then wreathed with poison-oak vines, where red trumpet flowers insolently blared defiance to the waxen pearls of encroaching mistletoe.

On the other side, the grounds were studded with native growth, as though protective forestry statutes had crossed the ocean with the colonists, and on this billowy sea of varied foliage Autumn had set her illuminated autograph, in the vivid scarlet of sumach and black gum, the delicate lemon of wild cherry—the deep ochre all sprinkled and splashed with intense crimson, of the giant oaks—the orange glow of ancestral hickory—and the golden glory of maples, on which the hectic fever of the dying year kindled gleams of fiery red;—over all, a gorgeous blazonry of riotous color, toned down by the silver gray shadows of mossy tree-trunks, and the rich, dark, restful green of polished magnolias.

Half a dozen fine Cotswold ewes browsed on the grass, and the small bell worn by a staid dowager tinkled musically, as she threw up her head and watched suspiciously the figure moving under the elm arches. Beneath the far reaching branches of a patriarchal cedar, a small herd of Jersey calves had grouped themselves, as if posing for Landseer or Rosa Bonheur; and one pretty fawn-colored weanling ran across the sward to meet the stranger, bleating a welcome and looking up, with unmistakable curiosity in its velvety, long-lashed eyes.

As the avenue gradually climbed the ascent, the outlines of the house became visible; a stately, typical southern mansion, like hundreds, which formerly opened hospitably their broad mahogany doors, and which, alas! are becoming traditional to this generation—obsolete as the brave chivalric, warm-hearted, open-handed, noble-souled, refined southern gentlemen who built and owned them. No Mansard

roof here, no pseudo "Queen Anne" hybrid, with lowering, top-heavy projections like scowling eyebrows over squinting eyes; neither mongrel Renaissance, nor feeble, sickly, imitation Elizabethan facades, and Tudor towers; none of the queer, composite, freakish impertinences of architectural style, which now-a-day do duty as the adventurous vanguard, the aesthetic vedettes "making straight the way," for the coming cohorts of Culture.

The house at "Elm Bluff" was built of brick, overcast with stucco painted in imitation of gray granite, and its foundation was only four feet high, resting upon a broad terrace of brickwork; the latter bounded by a graceful wooden balustrade, with pedestals for vases, on either side of the two stone steps leading down from the terrace to the carriage drive. The central halls, in both stories, divided the space equally into four rooms on each side, and along the wide front, ran a lofty piazza supporting the roof, with white smooth round pillars; while the upper broad square windows, cedar-framed, and deeply embrasured, looked down on the floor of the piazza, where so many generations of Darringtons had trundled hoops in childhood—and promenaded as lovers in the silvery moonlight, listening to the ring doves cooing above them, from the columbary of the stucco capitals. This spacious colonnade extended around the northern and eastern side of the house, but the western end had formerly been enclosed as a conservatory—which having been abolished, was finally succeeded by a comparatively modern iron veranda, with steps leading down to the terrace. In front of the building, between the elm avenue and the flower-bordered terrace, stood a row of

very old poplar trees, tall as their forefathers in Lombardy, and to an iron staple driven into one of these, a handsome black horse was now fastened.

Standing with one foot on the terrace step, close to the marble vases where heliotropes swung their dainty lilac chalices against her shoulder, and the scarlet geraniums stared unabashed, Beryl's gaze wandered from the lovely park and ancient trees, to the unbroken facade of the gray old house; and as, in painful contrast she recalled the bare bleak garret room, where a beloved invalid held want and death at bay, a sudden mist clouded her vision, and almost audibly she murmured: "My poor mother! Now, I can realize the bitterness of your suffering; now I understand the intensity of your yearning to come back; the terrible homesickness, which only Heaven can cure."

What is presentiment? The swaying of the veil of futurity, under the straining hands of our guardian angels? Is it the faint shadow, the solemn rustle of their hovering wings, as like mother birds they spread protecting plumes between blind fledglings, and descending ruin? Will theosophy ever explain and augment prescience?

"It may be—

The thoughts that visit us, we know not whence,
Sudden as inspiration, are the whispers
Of disembodied spirits, speaking to us
As friends, who wait outside a prison wall,
Through the barred windows speak to those within."

With difficulty Beryl resisted an inexplicable impulse to turn and flee; but the drawn sword of duty pointed ahead.

Striking her hands together, as if thereby crushing her reluctance to enter, she waited a moment, with closed eyes, while her lips moved in silent prayer; then ascending the terrace, she crossed the stone pavement, walked up the steps and slowly advanced to the threshold. The dark mahogany door was so glossy, that she dimly saw her own image on its polished panels, as she lifted and let fall the heavy silver knocker, in the middle of an oval silver plate, around the edges of which were raised the square letters of the name "Darrington." The clanging sound startled a peacock, strutting among the verbena beds, and his shrill scream was answered by the deep hoarse bark of some invisible dog; then the heavy door swung open, and a gray-headed negro man, who wore a white linen apron over his black clothes, and held a waiter in one hand, stood before her.

"I wish to see Mr. Darrington."

"I reckon you mean Gin'l Darrington, don't you? Mr. Darrington, Marse Prince Darrington, is in Yurop."

"I mean Mr. Luke Darrington, the owner of this place."

"Jess so; Gin'l Luke Darrington. Well, you can't see him."

"Why not? I must see him, and I shall stay here until I do."

"'Cause he is busy with his lie-yer, fixin' of some papers; and when he tells me not to let nobody else in I'de ruther set down in a yaller jacket's nest than to turn the door knob, after he done shut it. Better leave your name and call ag'in."

"No, I will wait until he is at leisure. I presume my sitting on the steps here will not be a violation of your orders."

"To be shore not. But them steps are harder than the stool of repentance, and you had better walk in the drawing-room, and rest yourself. There's pictures, and lots and piles of things there, you can pass away the time looking at."

He waved his waiter toward a long, dim apartment, on the left side of the hall.

"Thank you, I prefer to sit here."

She seated herself on the top of the stone steps, and taking off her straw hat, fanned her heated brow, where the rich waving hair clung in damp masses.

"What name, miss, must I give, when the lie-yer finishes his bizness?"

"Say that a stranger wishes to see him about an important matter."

"Its mighty uncertain how long he will tarry; for lie-yers live by talking; turning of words upside down, and wrong side outards, and reading words backards, and whitewashing black things, and smutting of white ones. Marse Lennox Dunbar (he is our lie-yer now, since his pa took paralsis) he is a powerful wrastler with justice. They do say down yonder, at the court house, that when he gets done with a witness, and turns him aloose, the poor creetur is so flustrated in his mind, that he don't know his own name, on when he was born, or where he was born, or whether he was ever born at all."

Curiosity to discover the nature of the stranger's errand had stimulated the old man's garrulity, but receiving no reply, he finally retreated, leaving the front door open. By the aid of a disfiguring scar on his furrowed cheek, Beryl recognized him as the brave, faithful, family coachman,

Abednego, (abbreviated to "Bedney")—who had once saved his mother's life at the risk of his own. Mrs. Brentano had often related to her children, an episode in her childhood, when having gone to play with her dolls in the loft of the stable, she fell asleep on the hay; and two hours later, Bedney remembering that he had heard her singing there to her dolls, rushed into the burning building, groped through the stifling smoke of the loft, and seizing the sleeping child, threw her out upon a pile of straw. When he attempted to jump after her, a falling rafter struck him to the earth, and left an honorable scar in attestation of his heroism.

Had she yielded to the promptings of her heart, the stranger would gladly have shaken hands with him, and thanked him, in the name of those early years, when her mother's childish feet made music on the wide mahogany railed stairs, that wound from the lower hall to the one above; but the fear of being denied an audience, deterred her from disclosing her name.

Educated in the belief that the utterance of the abhorred name of Brentano, within the precincts of "Elm Bluff," would produce an effect very similar to the ringing of some Tamil Pariah's bell, before the door of a Brahman temple, Beryl wisely kept silent; and soon forgot her forebodings, in the contemplation of the supreme loveliness of the prospect before her.

The elevation was sufficient to command an extended view of the surrounding country, and of the river, which crossed by the railroad bridge north of the town, curved sharply to the east, whence she could trace its course as it gradually wound southward, and disappeared behind the

house; where at the foot of a steep bluff, a pretty boat and bath house nestled under ancient willow trees. At her feet the foliage of the park stretched like some brilliant carpet, before whose gorgeous tints, ustads of Karman would have stood in despair; and beyond the sea-green, undulating line of pine forest she saw the steeple of a church, with its gilt vane burning in the sunshine, and the red brick dome of the ante bellum court house.

Time seemed to have fallen asleep on that hot, still afternoon, and Beryl was roused from her reverie by the sound of hearty laughter in the apartment opposite the drawing-room—followed by the tones of a man's voice.

"Thank you, General. That is my destination this afternoon, and I shall certainly expect you to dance at my wedding."

Quick, firm steps rang on the oil-cloth-covered floor of the hall, and Beryl rose and turned toward the door.

With a cigar in one hand, hat and riding-whip in the other, the attorney stepped out on the colonnade, and pausing involuntarily, at sight of the stranger, they looked at each other. A man, perhaps, more, certainly not less than thirty years old, of powerful and impressive physique; very tall, athletic, sinewy, without an ounce of superfluous flesh to encumber his movements, in the professional palaestra; with a large finely modeled head, whose crisp black hair closely cut, was (contrary to the prevailing fashion) parted neither in the middle, nor yet on the side, but brushed straight back from the square forehead, thereby enhancing the massiveness of its appearance.

Something in this swart, beardless face, with its brilliant inquisitorial dark blue eyes, handsome secretive mouth veiled by no mustache—and boldly assertive chin deeply cleft in the centre—affected Beryl very unpleasantly, as a perplexing disagreeable memory; an uncanny resemblance hovering just beyond the grasp of identification. A feeling of unaccountable repulsion made her shiver, and she breathed more freely, when he hewed slightly, and walked on toward his horse. Upon the attorney her extraordinary appearance produced a profound impression, and in his brief scrutiny, no detail of her face, figure, or apparel escaped his keen probing gaze.

Glancing back as he untied his bridle rein, his unspoken comment was: "Superb woman; I wonder what brings her here? Evidently a stranger—with a purpose."

He sprang into the saddle, stooped his head to avoid the yellow poplar branches, and disappeared under the elm arches.

"Gin'l Darrington's compliments; and if your bizness is pressin' you will have to see him in his bedchamber, as he feels poorly to-day, and the Doctor won't let him out. Follow me. You see, ole Marster remembers the war by the game leg he got at Sharpshurg, and sometimes it lays him up."

The old servant led Beryl through a long room, fitted up as a library and armory, and pausing before an open door, waved her into the adjoining apartment. One swift glance showed her the heavy canopied bedstead in one corner, the arch-shaped glass door leading out upon the iron veranda; and at an oblong table in the middle of the floor, the figure of a man, who rose, taller and taller, until he seemed a

giant, drawn to his full height, and resting for support on the hand that was rested upon the table. Intensity of emotion arrested her breath, as she gazed at the silvered head, piercing black eyes, and spare wasted frame of the handsome man, who had always reigned as a brutal ogre in her imagination. The fire in his somewhat sunken eyes, seemed to bid defiance to the whiteness of the abundant hair, and of the heavy mustache which drooped over his lips; and every feature in his patrician face revealed not only a long line of blue-blooded ancestors, but the proud haughtiness which had been considered always as distinctively characteristic of the Darringtons as their finely cut lips, thin nostrils, small feet and unusual height.

Unprepared for the apparition that confronted him, Luke Darrington bowed low, surveyed her intently, then pointed to a chair opposite his own.

"Walk in, Madam; or perhaps it may be Miss? Will you take a seat, and excuse the feebleness that forces me to receive visits in my bed-room?"

As he reseated himself, Beryl advanced and stood beside him, but for a moment she found it impossible to utter the words, rehearsed so frequently during her journey; and while she hesitated, he curiously inspected her face and form.

Her plain, but perfectly fitting bunting dress, was of the color, popularly dominated "navy-blue," and the linen collar and cuffs were scarcely whiter than the round throat and wrists they encircled. The burnished auburn hair clinging in soft waves to her brow, was twisted into a heavy coil, which the long walk had shaken down till it rested almost on her

neck; and though her heart beat furiously, the pale calm face might have been marble, save for the scarlet lines of her beautiful mouth, and the steady glow of the dilated pupils in her great gray eyes.

"Pray be seated; and tell me to whom I am indebted for the pleasure of this visit?"

"I am merely the bearer of a letter which will explain itself, and my presence, in your house."

Mechanically he took the preferred letter, and with his eyes still lingering in admiration upon the classic outlines of her face and form, leaned back comfortably against the velvet lining of his armchair.

"Are you some exiled goddess travelling incognito? If we lived in the 'piping days of Pan' I should flatter myself that 'Ox-eyed Juno' had honored me with a call, as a reward for my care of her favorite bird."

Receiving no reply he glanced at the envelope in his hand, and as he read the address—"To my dear father, Gen'l Luke Darrington"—the smile on his face changed to a dark scowl and he tossed the letter to the floor, as if it were a red-hot coal.

"Only one living being has the right to call me father—my son, Prince Darrington. I have repeatedly refused to hold any communication with the person who wrote that letter."

Beryl stooped to pick it up, and with a caressing touch, as though it were sentient, held it against her heart.

"Your daughter is dying; and this is her last appeal."

"I have no daughter. Twenty-three years ago my daughter buried herself in hopeless disgrace, and for her there can be no resurrection here. If she dreams that I am in my dotage,