AUGUSTA J. EVANS

MACARIA

Augusta J. Evans

Macaria

EAN 8596547317531

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

RUSSELL AUBREY

The town-clock was on the last stroke of twelve, the solitary candle measured but two inches from its socket, and as the summer wind rushed through the half-closed shutters, the melted tallow dripped slowly into the brightly-burnished brazen candlestick. The flickering light fell upon the pages of a ledger, and flashed fitfully in the face of the accountant, as he bent over his work. Sixteen years growth had given him unusual height and remarkable breadth of chest, and it was difficult to realize that the stature of manhood had been attained by a mere boy in years. A grey suit (evidently home-made), of rather coarse texture, bespoke poverty; and, owing to the oppressive heat of the atmosphere, the coat was thrown partially off. He wore no vest, and the loosely-tied black ribbon suffered the snowy white collar to fall away from the throat and expose its well-turned outline. The head was large, but faultlessly proportioned, and the thick black hair, cut short and clinging to the temples, added to its massiveness. The lofty forehead, white and smooth, the somewhat heavy brows matching the hue of the hair, the straight, finely-formed nose with its delicate but clearly defined nostril, the full firm lips unshaded by moustache, combined to render the face one of uncommon beauty. Yet, as he sat absorbed by his figures, there was nothing prepossessing or winning in his appearance, for though you could not carp at the moulding

of his features, you involuntarily shrank from the prematurely grave, nay, austere expression which seemed habitual to them. He looked just what he was, youthful in years, but old in trials and labours, and to one who analysed his countenance, the conviction was inevitable that his will was gigantic, his ambition unbounded, his intellect wonderfully acute and powerful.

"Russell, do you know it is midnight?"

He frowned, and answered without looking up—

"Yes."

"How much longer will you sit up?"

"Till I finish my work."

The speaker stood on the threshold, leaning against the door facing, and, after waiting a few moments, softly crossed the room and put her hand on the back of his chair. She was two years his junior, and though evidently the victim of recent and severe illness, even in her feebleness she was singularly like him. Her presence seemed to annoy him, for he turned round and said hastily: "Electra, go to bed. I told you good-night three hours ago."

She stood still, but silent.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing."

He wrote on for some ten minutes longer, then closed the ledger and put it aside. The candle had burned low; he took a fresh one from the drawer of the table, and, after lighting it, drew a Latin dictionary near to him, opened a worn copy of Horace, and began to study. Quiet as his own shadow stood the fragile girl behind his chair, but as she watched him a heavy sigh escaped her.

"If I thought I should be weak and sickly all my life I would rather die at once, and burden you and auntie no longer."

"Electra, who told you that you burdened me?"

"Oh, Russell! don't I know how hard you have to work; and how difficult it is for you to get even bread and clothes? Don't I see how auntie labours day after day, and month after month? You are good and kind, but does that prevent my feeling the truth, that you are working for me too? If I could only help you in some way." She knelt down by his chair and leaned her head on his knee, holding his hands between both hers.

"Electra, you do help me; all day long when I am at the store your face haunts, strengthens me; I feel that I am striving to give you comforts, and when at night you meet me at the gate, I am repaid for all I have done. You must put this idea out of your head, little one; it is altogether a mistake. Do you hear what I say? Get up, and go to sleep like a good child, or you will have another wretched headache to-morrow, and can't bring me my lunch."

He lifted her from the floor, and kissed her hastily. She raised her arms as if to wind them about his neck, but his grave face gave her no encouragement, and turning away she retired to her room, with hot tears rolling over her cheeks. Russell had scarcely read half a dozen lines after his cousin's departure when a soft hand swept back the locks of hair on his forehead, and wiped away the heavy drops that moistened them.

"My son, you promised me you would not sit up late to-night."

"Well, mother, I have almost finished. Remember the nights are very short now, and twelve o'clock comes early."

"The better reason that you should not be up so late. My son, I am afraid you will ruin your health by this unremitting application."

"Why—look at me. I am as strong as an athlete of old." He shook his limbs and smiled, proud of his great physical strength.

"True, Russell; but, robust as you are, you cannot stand such toil without detriment. Put up your books."

"Not yet; I have more laid out, and you know I invariably finish all I set apart to do. But, mother, your hand is hot; you are not well." He raised the thin hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"A mere headache, nothing more. Mr. Clark was here to-day; he is very impatient about the rent. I told him we were doing all we could, and thought that by September we should be able to pay the whole." He knew she watched him, and answered with a forced smile. "Yes, he came to the store this morning. I told him we had been very unfortunate this year, that sickness had forced us to incur more expense than usual. However, I drew fifty dollars, and paid him all I could. True, I anticipated my dues, but Mr. Watson gave me permission. So for the present you need not worry about rent."

"What is the amount of that grocery bill you would not let me see last week?"

"My dear mother, do not trouble yourself with these little matters; the grocery bill will very soon be paid. I have arranged with Mr. Hill to keep his books at night, and

therefore, you may be easy. Trust all to me, mother; only take care of your dear self, and I ask no more."

"Oh, Russell! my son, my dear son!"

She had drawn a chair near him, and now laid her head on his shoulder, while tears dropped on his hand. He had not seen her so unnerved for years, and as he looked down on her grief-stained, yet resigned face, his countenance underwent a marvellous change; and, folding his arms about her, he kissed her pale, thin cheek repeatedly.

"Mother, it is not like you to repine in this way; you who have suffered and endured so much must not despond when, after a long, starless night, the day begins to dawn."

"I fear 'it dawns in clouds, and heralds only storms.' For myself I care not, but for you, Russell—my pride, my only hope, my brave boy? it is for you that I suffer. I have been thinking to-night that this is a doomed place for you, and that if we could only save money enough to go to California, you might take the position you merit; for there none would know of the blight which fell upon you; none could look on your brow and dream it seemed sullied. Here you have such bitter prejudice to combat; such gross injustice heaped upon you."

He lifted his mother's head from his bosom, and rose, with a haughty, defiant smile on his lip.

"Not so; I will stay here, and live down their hate. Mark me, mother, I will live it down, so surely as I am Russell Aubrey, the despised son of a ——! Go to California! not I! not I! In this state will I work and conquer; here, right here, I will plant my feet upon the necks of those that now strive to grind me to the dust. I swore it over my father's coffin!"

"Hush, Russell, you must subdue your fierce temper; you must! you must! Remember it was this ungovernable rage which brought disgrace upon your young, innocent head. Oh! it grieves me, my son, to see how bitter you have grown. Once you were gentle and forgiving; now scorn and defiance rule you."

"I am not fierce, I am not in a rage. If I should meet the judge and jury who doomed my father to the gallows, I think I would serve them if they needed aid. But I am proud; I inherited my nature; I writhe, yes, mother, writhe under the treatment I constantly receive."

"We have trouble enough, my son, without dwelling upon what is past and irremediable. So long as you seem cheerful I am content. I know that God will not lay more on me than I can bear; 'As my day so shall my strength be.' Thy will be done, oh! my God."

There was a brief pause, and Russell Aubrey passed his hand over his eyes, and dashed off a tear. His mother watched him, and said cautiously—

"Have you noticed that my eyes are rapidly growing worse?"

"Yes, mother, I have been anxious for some weeks."

"You know it all then?"

"Yes, mother."

"I shall not murmur; I have become resigned at last; though for many weeks I have wrestled for strength, for patience. It was so exceedingly bitter to know that the time drew near when I should see you no more; to feel that I should stretch out my hands to you, and lean on you, and yet look no longer on the dear face of my child, my boy, my

all. But my prayers were heard; the sting has passed away, and I am resigned. I am glad that we have spoken of it; now my mind is calmer, and I can sleep. Good night, my son."

She pressed the customary good night kiss on his lips, and left him. He closed the dictionary, leaned his elbow on the table, and rested his head on his hand. His piercing black eyes were fixed gloomily on the floor, and now and then his broad chest heaved as dark and painful thoughts crowded up.

Mrs. Aubrey was the only daughter of wealthy and ambitious parents, who refused to sanction her marriage with the object of her choice; and threatened to disinherit her if she persisted in her obstinate course. Mr. Aubrey was poor, but honest, highly cultivated and, in every sense of that much abused word, a gentleman. His poverty was not to be forgiven, however, and when the daughter left her father's roof, and wedded the man whom her parents detested, she was banished for ever from a home of affluence, and found that she had indeed forfeited her fortune. For this she was prepared, and bore it bravely; but ere long severer trials came upon her. Unfortunately, her husband's temper was fierce and ungovernable; and pecuniary embarrassments rarely have the effect of sweetening such. He removed to an inland town, and embarked in mercantile pursuits; but misfortune followed him, and reverses came thick and fast. One miserable day, when from early morning everything had gone wrong, an importunate creditor, of wealth and great influence in the community, chafed at Mr. Aubrey's tardiness in repaying some trifling sum, proceeded to taunt and insult him most

unwisely. Stung to madness, the wretched man resented the insults; a struggle ensued, and at its close Mr. Aubrey stood over the corpse of the creditor. There was no mode of escape, and the arm of the law consigned him to prison. During the tedious weeks that elapsed before the trial his devoted wife strove to cheer and encourage him. Russell was about eleven years of age, and, boy though he was, realized most fully the horrors of his parent's situation. The days of his trial came at last; but the accused had surrendered himself to the demon Rage, had taken the life of a fellow creature; what could legal skill accomplish? The affair produced great and continued excitement; the murdered man had been exceedingly popular, and the sympathies of the citizens were enlisted in behalf of his family. Although clearly a case of manslaughter only, to the astonishment of the counsel on both sides, the cry of "blood for blood," went out from that crowded court-room, and in defiance of precedent, Mr. Aubrey was unjustly sentenced to be hanged. When the verdict was known, Russell placed his insensible mother on a couch from which it seemed probable she would never rise. But there is an astonishing amount of endurance in even a feeble woman's frame, and after a time she went about her house once more, doing her duty to her child and learning to "suffer and grow strong." Fate had ordained, however, that Russell's father should not die upon the gallows; and soon after the verdict was pronounced, when all Mrs. Aubrey's efforts to procure a pardon had proved unavailing, the proud and desperate man, in the solitude of his cell, with no eye but Jehovah's to witness the awful deed, took his own life with the aid of a

lancet. Such was the legacy of shame which Russell inherited; was it any marvel that at sixteen that boy had lived ages of sorrow? Mrs. Aubrey found her husband's financial affairs so involved that she relinquished the hope of retaining the little she possessed, and retired to a small cottage on the outskirts of the town, where she endeavoured to support herself and the two dependent on her by taking in sewing. Electra Grey was the orphan child of Mr. Aubrey's only sister, who, dying in poverty, bequeathed the infant to her brother. He had loved her as well as his own Russell, and his wife, who cradled her in her arms and taught her to walk by clinging to her finger, would almost as soon have parted with her son as the little Electra. For five years the widow had toiled by midnight lamps to feed these two; now oppressed nature rebelled, the long over-taxed eyes refused to perform their office; filmy cataracts stole over them, veiling their sadness and their unshed tears—blindness was creeping on. At his father's death Russell was forced to quit school, and with some difficulty he succeeded in obtaining a situation in a large dry-goods store, where his labours were onerous in the extreme, and his wages a mere pittance. Though Russell's employer, Mr. Watson, shrank from committing a gross wrong, and prided himself on his scrupulous honesty, his narrow mind and penurious habits strangled every generous impulse, and, without being absolutely cruel or unprincipled, he contrived to gall the boy's proud spirit and render his position one of almost purgatorial severity. His eldest son was just Russell's age, had been sent to various schools from his infancy, was indolent, self-indulgent, and

thoroughly dissipated. Having been a second time expelled from school for most disgraceful misdemeanours, he lounged away his time about the store, or passed it still more disreputably with reckless companions.

The daily contrast presented by Cecil and Russell irritated the father, and hence his settled dislike of the latter. The faithful discharge of duty on the part of the clerk afforded no plausible occasion for invective; he felt that he was narrowly watched, and resolved to give no ground for fault-finding; yet during the long summer days, when the intense heat prevented customers from thronging the store, and there was nothing to be done, when Russell, knowing that the books were written up and the counters free from goods, took his Latin grammar and improved every leisure half-hour, he was not ignorant of the fact that an angry scowl darkened his employer's visage, and understood why he was constantly interrupted to perform most unnecessary labours. What the day denied him he reclaimed from night, and succeeded in acquiring a tolerable knowledge of Greek, besides reading several Latin books. Finding that his small salary was inadequate, now that his mother's failing sight prevented her from accomplishing the usual amount of sewing, he solicited and obtained permission to keep an additional set of books for the grocer who furnished his family with provisions, though by this arrangement few hours remained for necessary sleep. The protracted illness and death of an aged and faithful servant, together with Electra's tedious sickness, bringing the extra expense of medical aid, had prevented the prompt payment of rent due for the three-roomed cottage, and Russell was compelled to

ask for a portion of his salary in advance. His mother little dreamed of the struggle which took place in his heart ere he could force himself to make the request, and he carefully concealed from her the fact that at the moment of receiving the money, he laid in Mr. Watson's hands, by way of pawn, the only article of any value which he possessed—the watch his father had always worn, and which the coroner took from the vest pocket of the dead, dabbled with blood. The gold chain had been sold long before, and the son wore it attached to a simple black ribbon. His employer received the watch, locked it in the iron safe, and Russell fastened a small weight to the ribbon, and kept it around his neck that his mother might not suspect the truth. It chanced that Cecil stood near at the time; he saw the watch deposited in the safe, whistled a tune, fingered his own gold repeater, and walked away. Such was Russell Aubrey's history; such his situation at the beginning of his seventeenth year.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

IRENE'S FRIENDSHIP

"Irene, your father will be displeased if he sees you in that plight."

"Pray, what is wrong about me now? You seem to glory in finding fault. What is the matter with my 'plight' as you call it?"

"You know very well your father can't bear to see you carrying your own satchel and basket to school. He ordered Martha to take them every morning and evening, but she says you will not let her carry them. It is just sheer obstinacy in you."

"There it is again! because I don't choose to be petted like a baby, or made a wax doll of, it is set down to obstinacy, as if I had the temper of a heathen. See here, Aunt Margaret, I am tired of having Martha tramping eternally at my heels as though I were a two-year-old child. There is no reason in her walking after me when I am strong enough to carry my own books, and I don't intend she shall do it any longer."

Irene Huntingdon stood on the marble steps of her palatial home, and talked with the maiden aunt who governed her father's household. The girl was about fourteen, tall for her age, straight, finely-formed, slender. The broad straw hat shaded but by no means concealed her features, and as she looked up at her aunt the sunshine fell upon a face of extraordinary beauty, such as is rarely seen,

save in the idealized heads of the old masters. Her eyes were strangely, marvellously beautiful; they were larger than usual, and of that rare shade of purplish blue which borders the white velvet petals of a clematis. When the eyes were uplifted, as on this occasion, long, curling lashes of the bronze hue of her hair rested against her brow. Save the scarlet lines which marked her lips, her face was of that clear colourlessness which can be likened only to the purest ivory. Though there was an utter absence of the rosy hue of health, the transparency of the complexion seemed characteristic of her type, and precluded all thought of disease. Miss Margaret muttered something inaudible in reply to her last remark, and Irene walked on to school. Her father's residence was about a mile from the town, but the winding road rendered the walk somewhat longer; and on one side of this road stood the small house occupied by Mrs. Aubrey. As Irene approached it she saw Electra Grey coming from the opposite direction, and at the cottage gate they met. Both paused: Irene held out her hand cordially—

"Good morning. I have not seen you for a fortnight. I thought you were coming to school again as soon as you were strong enough?"

"No; I am not going back to school."

"Why?"

"Because auntie can't afford to send me any longer. You know her eyes are growing worse every day, and she is not able to take in sewing as she used to do. I am sorry; but it can't be helped."

"How do you know it can't be helped? Russell told me he thought she had cataracts on her eyes, and they can be

removed."

"Perhaps so, if we had the means of consulting that celebrated physician in New Orleans. Money removes a great many things, Irie, but unfortunately we haven't it."

"The trip would not cost much; suppose you speak to Russell about it."

"Much or little it will require more than we can possibly spare. Everything is so high, we can barely live as it is. But I must go in; my aunt is waiting for me."

They shook hands and Irene walked on. Soon the brick walls of the academy rose grim and uninviting, and taking her place at the desk she applied herself to her books. When school was dismissed in the afternoon, instead of returning home as usual, she walked down the principal street, entered Mr. Watson's store, and put her books on the counter. It happened that the proprietor stood near the front door, and he came forward instantly to wait upon her.

"Ah, Miss Irene! happy to see you. What shall I have the pleasure of showing you?"

"Russell Aubrey, if you please."

The merchant stared, and she added—

"I want some kid gauntlets, but Russell can get them for me."

The young clerk stood at the desk in the rear of the store, with his back toward the counter; and Mr Watson called out —

"Here, Aubrey, some kid gauntlets for this young lady."

He laid down his pen, and taking a box of gloves from the shelves, placed it on the counter before her. He had not

noticed her particularly, and when she pushed back her hat and looked up at him he started slightly.

"Good evening, Miss Huntingdon. What number do you wish?"

Perhaps it was from the heat of the day, or from stooping over his desk, or perhaps it was from something else, but his cheek was flushed, and gradually it grew pale again.

"Russell, I want to speak to you about Electra. She ought to be at school, you know."

"Yes."

"But she says your mother can't afford the expense."

"Just now she cannot; next year things will be better."

"What is the tuition for her?"

"Five dollars a month."

"Is that all?"

He selected a delicate fawn-coloured pair of gloves and laid them before her, while a faint smile passed over his face.

"Russell, has anything happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"What is troubling you so?"

"Nothing more than usual. Do those gloves suit you?"

"Yes, they will fit me, I believe." She looked at him very intently.

He met her gaze steadily, and for an instant his face brightened; then she said abruptly—

"Your mother's eyes are worse."

"Yes, much worse."

"Have you consulted Dr. Arnold about them?"

"He says he can do nothing for her."

"How much would it cost to take her to New Orleans and have that celebrated oculist examine them?"

"More than we can afford just now; at least two hundred dollars."

"Oh, Russell! that is not much. Would not Mr. Watson lend you that little?"

"I shall not ask him."

"Not even to restore your mother's sight?"

"Not to buy my own life. Besides, the experiment is a doubtful one."

"Still it is worth making."

"Yes, under different circumstances it certainly would be."

"Have you talked to Mr. Campbell about it?"

"No, because it is useless to discuss the matter."

"It would be dangerous to go to New Orleans now, I suppose?"

"October or November would be better."

Again she looked at him very earnestly, then stretched out her little hand.

"Good-bye, Russell. I wish I could do something to help you, to make you less sorrowful."

He held the slight waxen fingers, and his mouth trembled as he answered—

"Thank you, Miss Huntingdon. I am not sorrowful, but my path in life is not quite so flowery as yours."

"I wish you would not call me 'Miss Huntingdon' in that stiff, far-off way, as if we were not friends. Or maybe it is a hint that you desire me to address you as Mr. Aubrey. It sounds strange, unnatural, to say anything but Russell."

She gathered up her books, took the gloves, and went slowly homeward, and Russell returned to his desk with a light in his eyes which, for the remainder of the day, nothing could quench. As Irene ascended the long hill on which Mr. Huntingdon's residence stood, she saw her father's buggy at the door, and as she approached the steps, he came out, drawing on his gloves.

"You are late, Irene. What kept you?"

"I have been shopping a little. Are you going to ride? Take me with you."

"Going to dine at Mr. Carter's."

"Why, the sun is almost down now. What time will you come home? I want to ask you something."

"Not till long after you are asleep."

The night passed very slowly; Irene looked at the clock again and again. Finally the house became quiet, and at last the crush of wheels on the gravel-walk announced her father's return. He came into the library for a cigar, and, without noticing her, drew his chair to the open window. She approached and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Irene! what is the matter, child?"

"Nothing sir; only I want to ask you something."

"Well, Queen, what is it?"

He drew her tenderly to his knee, and passed his hand over her floating hair.

Leonard Huntingdon was forty years old; tall, spare, with an erect and martial carriage. He had been trained at West Point, and perhaps early education contributed somewhat to the air of unbending haughtiness which many found repulsive. His black hair was slightly sprinkled with grey,

and his features were still decidedly handsome, though the expression of mouth and eyes was, ordinarily, by no means winning. Irene was his only child; her mother had died during her infancy, and on this beautiful idol he lavished all the tenderness of which his nature was capable. His tastes were cultivated, his house was elegant and complete, and furnished magnificently; every luxury that money could yield him he possessed, yet there were times when he seemed moody and cynical, and no one could surmise the cause of his gloom. The girl looked up at him fearing no denial.

"Father, I wish, please, you would give me two hundred dollars."

"What would you do with it, Queen?"

"I do not want it for myself; I should like to have that much to enable a poor woman to recover her sight. She has cataracts on her eyes, and there is a physician in New Orleans who can relieve her. Father, won't you give me the money?"

He took the cigar from his lips, shook off the ashes, and asked indifferently—

"What is the woman's name? Has she no husband to take care of her?"

"Mrs. Aubrey; she——"

"What!"

The cigar fell from his fingers, he put her from his knee, and rose instantly. His swarthy cheek glowed, and she wondered at the expression of his eyes, so different from anything she had ever seen there before.

"Who gave you permission to visit that house?"

"No permission was necessary. I go there because I love her and Electra, and because I like Russell. Why shouldn't I go there, sir? Is poverty disgrace?"

"Irene, mark me. You are to visit that house no more in future; keep away from the whole family. I will have no such association. Never let me hear their names again. Go to bed."

"Give me one good reason, and I will obey you."

"Reason! My will, my command, is sufficient reason. What do you mean by catechising me in this way? Implicit obedience is your duty."

The calm, holy eyes looked wonderingly into his; and as he marked the startled expression of the girl's pure face his own eyes drooped.

"Father, has Mrs. Aubrey ever injured you?"

No answer.

"If she has not, you are very unjust to her; if she has, remember she is a woman, bowed down with many sorrows, and it is unmanly to hoard up old differences. Father, please give me that money."

"I will bury my last dollar in the Red Sea first! Now are you answered?"

She put her hands over her eyes, as if to shut out some painful vision; and he saw the slight form shudder. In perfect silence she took her books and went up to her room. Mr. Huntingdon reseated himself as the door closed behind her, and the lamplight showed a sinister smile writhing over his dark features. He sat there, staring out into the starry night, and seeing by the shimmer of the setting moon only the graceful form and lovely face of Amy Aubrey, as she had

appeared to him in other days. Could he forget the hour when she wrenched her cold fingers from his clasp, and, in defiance of her father's wishes, vowed she would never be his wife? No; revenge was sweet, very sweet; his heart had swelled with exultation when the verdict of death upon the gallows was pronounced upon the husband of her choice; and now, her poverty, her humiliation, her blindness gave him deep, unutterable joy. The history of the past was a sealed volume to his daughter, but she was now for the first time conscious that her father regarded the widow and her son with unconquerable hatred; and with strange, foreboding dread she looked into the future, knowing that forgiveness was no part of his nature; that insult or injury was never forgotten.

CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

THE MISSING WATCH

Whether the general rule of implicit obedience to parental injunction admitted of no exceptions, was a problem which Irene readily solved; and on Saturday, as soon as her father and cousin had started to the plantation (twenty-five miles distant), she put on her hat, and walked to town. Wholly absorbed in philanthropic schemes, she hurried along the sidewalk, ran up a flight of steps, and knocked at a door, on which was written in large gilt letters "Dr. Arnold."

"Ah, Beauty! come in. Sit down, and tell me what brought you to town so early."

He was probably a man of fifty; gruff in appearance, and unmistakably a bachelor. His thick hair was grizzled, so was the heavy beard; and the shaggy grey eyebrows slowly unbent, as he took his visitor's little hands and looked kindly down into her grave face. From her infancy he had petted and fondled her and she stood as little in awe of him as of Paragon.

"Doctor, are you busy this morning?"

"I am never too busy to attend to you, little one. What is it?"

"Of course you know that Mrs. Aubrey is almost blind."

"Of course I do, having been her physician."

"Those cataracts can be removed, however."

"Perhaps they can, and perhaps they can't."

"But the probabilities are that a good oculist can relieve her."

"I rather think so."

"Two hundred dollars would defray all the expenses of a trip to New Orleans for this purpose, but she is too poor to afford it."

"Decidedly too poor."

His grey eyes twinkled promisingly, but he would not anticipate her.

"Dr. Arnold, don't you think you could spare that small sum without much inconvenience?"

"Really! is that what you trudged into town for?"

"Yes. I have not the necessary amount at my disposal just now, and I came to ask you to lend it to me."

"Do you want the money now?"

"Yes, if you please; but before you give it to me I ought to tell you that I want the matter kept secret. No one is to know anything about it—not even my father."

She looked so unembarrassed that for a moment he felt puzzled.

"I knew Mrs. Aubrey before her marriage." He bent forward to watch the effect of his words, but if she really knew or suspected aught of the past there was not the slightest intimation of it. Putting back her hair, she looked up and answered—

"That should increase your willingness to aid her in her misfortunes."

"Hold out your hand; fifty, one hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred. There, will that do?"

"Thank you! thank you. You will not need it soon, I hope?"

"Not until you are ready to pay me."

"Dr. Arnold, you have given me a great deal of pleasure—more than I can express. I——"

"Don't try to express it, Queen. You have given me infinitely more, I assure you."

Her splendid eyes were lifted toward him, and with some sudden impulse she touched her lips to the hand he had placed on her shoulder. Something like a tremor crossed the doctor's habitually stern mouth as he looked at the marvellous beauty of the girl's countenance, and he kissed her slender fingers as reverently as though he touched something consecrated.

"Irene, shall I take you home in my buggy?"

"No, thank you, I would rather walk. Oh! Doctor, I am so much obliged to you."

In answer to Irene's knock, Electra opened the cottage door, and ushered her into the small room which served as both kitchen and dining-room. Everything was scrupulously neat, not a spot on the bare polished floor, not a speck to dim the purity of the snowy dimity curtains, and on the table in the centre stood a vase filled with fresh fragrant flowers. In a low chair before the open window sat the widow knitting a blue and white nubia. She glanced round as Irene entered.

"Who is it, Electra?"

"Miss Irene, aunt."

"Sit down, Miss Irene; how are you to-day?"

"Mrs. Aubrey, I am sorry to hear your eyes are no better."

"Thank you for your kind sympathy. My sight grows more dim every day."

"You shan't suffer much longer; these veils shall be taken off. Here is the money to enable you to go to New Orleans and consult that physician. As soon as the weather turns cooler you must start."

"Miss Irene, I cannot tax your generosity so heavily; I have no claim on your goodness. Indeed I——"

"Mrs. Aubrey, don't you think it is your duty to recover your sight if possible?"

"Yes, if I could command the means."

"You have the means; you must employ them. There, I will not take back the money; it is yours."

"Don't refuse it, auntie, you will wound Irie," pleaded Electra.

There was silence for a few seconds; then Mrs. Aubrey took the hands from her face and said,—"Irene, I will accept your generous offer. If my sight is restored, I can repay you some day; if not, I am not too proud to be under this great obligation to you. Oh, Irene! I can't tell you how much I thank you; my heart is too full for words." She threw her arm round the girl's waist and strained her to her bosom, and the hot tears fell fast on the waves of golden hair. A moment after, Irene threw a tiny envelope into Electra's lap, and without another word glided out of the room. The orphan broke the seal, and as she opened a sheet of note-paper a ten-dollar bill slipped out.

"Electra, come to school Monday. The enclosed will pay your tuition for two months longer. Please don't hesitate to accept it if you really love

"Your friend IRENE."

Thinking of the group she had just left, Irene approached the gate and saw that Russell stood holding it open for her to pass. Looking up she stopped, for the expression of his face frightened and pained her.

"Russell, what is the matter? oh! tell me."

"I have been injured and insulted. Just now I doubt all people and all things, even the justice and mercy of God."

"Russell, 'shall not the righteous Judge of all the earth do right?'"

"Shall the rich and the unprincipled eternally trample upon the poor and the unfortunate?"

"Who has injured you?"

"A meek-looking man who passes for a Christian, who turns pale at the sound of a violin, who exhorts to missionary labours, and talks often about widows and orphans. Such a man, knowing the circumstances that surround me, my poverty, my mother's affliction, on bare and most unwarrantable suspicion turns me out of my situation as clerk, and endeavours to brand my name with infamy. To-day I stand disgraced in the eyes of the community, thanks to the vile slanders of that pillar of the church, Jacob Watson. I could bear it myself, but my mother! my noble, patient, suffering mother! I must go in, and add a yet heavier burden to those already crushing out her life. Pleasant tidings, these I bring her; that her son is disgraced, branded as a rogue!"

There was no moisture in the keen eye, no tremor in the metallic ring of his voice, no relaxation of the curled lip.

"Can't you prove your innocence? Was it money?"

"No, it was a watch, which I gave up as security for drawing a portion of my salary in advance. It was locked up in the iron safe; this morning it was missing, and they accuse me of having stolen it."

He took off his hat as if it oppressed him, and tossed back his hair.

"What will you do, Russell?"

"I don't know yet."

"Oh! if I could only help you."

She clasped her hands over her heart, and for the first time since her infancy tears rushed down her cheeks. It was painful to see that quiet girl so moved, and Russell hastily took the folded hands in his, and bent his face close to hers.

"Irene, the only comfort I have is that you are my friend. Don't let them influence you against me. No matter what you may hear, believe in me. Oh! Irene, Irene! believe in me always!"

He held her hands in a clasp so tight that it pained her, then suddenly dropped them and left her.

Mrs. Aubrey recognized the step and looked round in surprise.

"Electra, I certainly hear Russell coming."

He drew near and touched her cheek with his lips, saying tenderly—

"How is my mother?"

"Russell, what brings you home so early?"

"That is rather a cold welcome, mother, but I am not astonished. Can you bear to hear something unpleasant? Here, put your hands in mine; now listen to me. You know I drew fifty dollars of my salary in advance, to pay Clark. At