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The Step Daughter's Triumph, OR Annie Rathburn's Trials.

CONCLUDED.
MR. KIRKWOOD sat down with an increase of respect for the young girl, and looked at her with a slight degree of interest. He had a good opportunity to contemplate her. She had immediately resumed her previous occupation which he had interrupted, that of reading aloud from a child's book to the invalid boy. Her manner was perfectly self-possessed and lady-like—neither look nor tone betraying the least diffidence or even consciousness of having a listener.

How pale, and cold, and inanimate she seemed; but as he observed her closely, he began to suspect that what he had mistaken for weak submission was rather excess of pride. He saw too, with surprise, the extreme beauty of her form and features; he admired the finely shaped head, half bent over the book, with its dark abundant hair, and her voice, low, rich, and sweet. He wondered if her eyes were as beautiful as the rest of her face; but she gave him no opportunity to decide, for she neither looked at nor spoke to him till Edith appeared, when to his courteous bow, which Edith saw (with a disdainful curl of the lip, that he should have wasted upon Annie), she returned a slight inclination of the head.

Edith was a brilliant performer upon the piano, and seemed never to weary of playing and singing for Mrs. Lothrop, who was enthusiastically fond of music.

A few mornings after this, when Edith had finished playing, and Mrs. Lothrop had expressed in her peculiar way her thanks and gratification, the latter suddenly turned to Annie and said:

"Do you not play also?"

Before Annie could reply, her step-mother answered for her.

"Annie commenced taking lessons when a child, but we found she had not a correct ear; and as her father had a horror of girls who drum on the piano without producing music, her lessons were discontinued. Edith, on the contrary, early showed a perfect passion for music."

Mr. Kirkwood eyed the young girl intently and curiously while Mrs. Rathburn was speaking, but neither cheek flushed, nor eye flashed, nor lip curled a denial of the statement.

What a mystery she was becoming to him! This young girl with her reserve, her coldness, her command over tongue and feature!

He had been ear and eye-witness to a circumstance the day previous, which would have enabled him to enlighten Mrs. Rathburn upon this very subject, had he been so disposed.

He had made an engagement in the morning to make some visits with the ladies, but in consequence of the reception of some letters, which required immediate answers, he was prevented from fulfilling it. After assisting the ladies into the carriage, he repaired to a small room opening by a glass door from the parlor, for the purpose of answering his correspondence. He had been there but a few minutes, when Annie entered the parlor, wheeling in little Willie. She looked out of the window, then carefully closed the door into the hall. With a feeling of annoyance, he saw her open the piano and sit down to it; for he was in no mood to be disturbed, by the discordant sounds he expected would succeed, and there was no egress except through the parlor.

He was therefore, little prepared for the rich strains of harmony that broke upon his ear. The touch, the taste, the execution were perfect! There was no bungling, no harshness nor discord—all was smooth, easy, harmonious.

At first she played from memory, then some of Edith's most difficult pieces, and lastly ran over some new music he had himself the day before presented to Edith, which she had declared "so difficult she feared she never should be able to play to suit him," with a correctness and rapidity which astonished him, knowing that she could not have seen it previously.

During this time, she had once or twice risen, and looked out of the window as if she thought she heard the carriage returning; but finding herself mistaken, resumed her seat.

Her little auditor, for whose pleasure she was evidently playing, after every piece renewed his entreaties for once more. He now urged for a song on Eva's harp. Annie hesitated; but as he continued to plead, after another glance from the window, she went to the corner where the instrument stood, uncovered it, sat down, and after running her fingers over the strings commenced a simple German song. If her unknown auditor was astonished before, his astonishment was not lessened now. The young girl's voice naturally rich, sweet, and full, had evidently been highly cultivated; and she sang with taste and feeling, playing with artistic skill, while the pure accent of the German words evinced an extensive knowledge of that language.

Willie could not prevail upon his sister to sing again, much to Mr. Kirkwood's disappointment; and after she had covered the harp, both left the room, leaving Mr. Kirkwood filled with admiration and wonderment.

He did not know of the one bright spot in Annie's life—the three years, gleaming up like a flash of sunlight amid the darkness that preceded and followed, spent with her father's sister in a distant city, where the young girl had found all the love, and care, and appreciation denied her at home. Her aunt surprised at her ignorance of all accomplishments, on her own responsibility afforded her every advantage for improvement. Her talent for music was discovered, and the best masters obtained, and in which study her improvement was remarkable. But death called away Annie's one friend, and she returned home, sorrowing deeply for her whom she had so many reasons to mourn.

That Annie felt no disposition to display the accomplishments in which she could not but be conscious she far excelled Edith, and which, therefore, would but increase her annoyances and unhappiness, may be inferred.

It was only in the quiet of her own room that she pursued her studies, while her practice of music was necessarily irregular, being confined to those periods when the family were absent.

Mr. Kirkwood saw Annie the next evening under more advantageous circumstances than he had yet seen her. It was at a large party. She was dressed with exquisite taste, and her dark hair was worn in broad braids, arranged with the most artistic grace. He thought her, in her calm, proud beauty, far the most elegant girl present. He was not alone in his admiration. Although she declined dancing, she received marked attention from several of the most prominent gentlemen present.

Mrs. Rathburn saw, with chagrin and disappointment, that while her brilliant Edith numbered in her large crowd of admirers the vain, the shallow, the trifling, the brainless fashionist, those who surrounded the disliked Annie, if less in number, were men of mark, whose notice any girl would be proud of obtaining.

The few attentions Mr. Kirkwood rendered the first of the evening were so coldly received by the young girl that he did not continue them. Piqued and offended, he did not approach her again, but devoted himself as much as he was able to Edith. It might be this is what Annie wished and intended, for she knew that jealous eyes were watching him, and felt no willingness for his sake to undergo fresh annoyances.

Meanwhile, the days of Mrs. Lothrop's visit were passing. Mrs. Rathburn was perplexed beyond measure, that she could discover nothing of the lady's intentions.

Nothing further had been said of either of the young ladies accompanying her home; therefore the chances of either to be the future heiress could not be conjectured.

With due edification and tact, she had consoled with Mrs. Lothrop on her disappointment in losing her destined heir, and hinted that perhaps she found Mr. Kirkwood worthy of supplying his place. She had endeavored also to sound her concerning her opinion of Edith and Eva, but perverse Mrs. Lothrop would not be sounded. She listened—if not assenting, certainly not dissenting—to the fond mother's asser-

tions respecting the sweetness and affectionateness of Edith's disposition to superiority of Eva's intellect over that of other girls of her age; but, whether she preferred sweetness of disposition to superiority of intellect, baffled all Mrs. Rathburn's ingenuity to find out. She confessed to herself that Mrs. Lothrop was truly a peculiar woman—more so than she had expected—an enigma that could not be made out.

Her uncertainty was not less regarding Mr. Kirkwood's sentiments and intentions toward Edith. That he admired her was evident. He rode, walked and sung with her, and was ever ready to attend to her, yet there was not quite the *empressment* of manner she could have wished—she sometimes imagined even less than there had been at first. She feared, too, he had made an impression on her daughter's heart. She had noticed an anxiety to please him in her dress and actions; that she blushed on seeing him at any time suddenly; and, adept as she was in art, showed ill-concealed pique if he admired any other lady than herself.

The mother's highest ambition would be gratified could she see her daughter united to him. His fortune, position, person, manners, public and private character, were far beyond her most sanguine expectations of what Edith's husband would possess. All that art or tact could do should be done to attain the desired end.

Mrs. Rathburn was gratified at the interest Mrs. Lothrop began to take in Willie. She often entered the nursery quite familiarly; and even Mr. Kirkwood occasionally went in—sometimes staying long enough to read or relate a story to the invalid boy; at others, just stopping to offer some book, toy or fruit.

Poor Annie was not particularly pleased at finding her place of refuge thus invaded, and their coming was usually the signal for her departure.

One day she entered the nursery in haste, and carrying a plate of sweetmeats for Willie. The moment that she crossed the threshold, the change in her aspect was striking. All coldness vanished. Her whole face was changed into perfect, living beauty, by the expression of solicitude and tenderness it wore. Bending over Willie, she kissed him fondly, and said:

"How is my darling now? Is the pain all gone? I did not mean to leave him so long; but Edith's dress could not be completed for the party to-night unless I assisted; and Mamma's head-dress had to be altered. But, see! I have brought something nice, and after you eat it, I will tell you a beautiful—"

She paused abruptly, perceiving, for the first time, Mrs. Lothrop, seated near the door through which she had entered. In an instant Annie was her usual self again. She saluted the lady politely, but coldly, and then spoke again to Willie; but the tender-hearted boy was grieved and frightened at the tone, so different from what it was a moment before, and looking up tearfully into her face, asked:

"Am I naughty, sister Annie?"

"No, Willie," she replied, coldly, at the same gently, but decidedly, putting away Lilly, who was trying to climb into her lap.

It was not without some reason that Annie relapsed into silence and coldness in Mrs. Lothrop's presence.

Annie was not of a jealous disposition—she expected so little, poor child, and she was so accustomed to see her sisters preferred before herself in every way at home—but the difference in the treatment of herself and her gay, beautiful sisters, by Mrs. Lothrop was too marked for her not to perceive and feel. She was not unused to neglect, but this seemed to verge upon dislike; and from her father's friend, it was harder to bear.

Mrs. Lothrop could not be said to show affection for Edith and Eva, but she distinguished them by much notice, and sought to draw out their ideas and opinions upon every possible subject. But Annie she seldom noticed in any way. It seemed like a dream to the young girl—the kind tones of Mrs. Lothrop's voice, the morning she had first seen her; but then she knew her not—had never seen her more brilliant and attractive sisters—had never heard of the unloved and unlovely Annie.

And the young girl encased herself more strongly in her armor of indifference. But her greatest misfortune was coming. It arrived.

Willie awoke one morning apparently better and brighter than usual; and before night he slept in death!

The grief of the family was great. Annie alone was calm and tearless during all that dreadful day. Once only her lip quivered: when the dear eyes, darkening to the

light of earth, vainly sought to behold her, and the faint voice gasped with difficulty:

"Where's Annie? I want Annie!"

She bent over him saying something unheard by others, but which brought an angelic smile to the countenance of the dying child. She wiped the death dews from his fair forehead, and held the little hand till the life-beat ceased; then, still calm, she straightened the limbs, closed the blue eyes which had been wont to meet hers so lovingly, and folded the pale hands over the stilled heart.

Even in her great sorrow—for she had loved her boy—Mrs. Rathburn forgot not to reproach Annie for her utter want of feeling—that she had not one tear for the darling child who had loved her so dearly. And Annie heard her with an immovable countenance.

It was after the household had retired that the young girl sought, alone, the chamber of death; and then and there, the long pent-up agony burst forth—oh, what an agony of regret—for the lost one, as the recollection of his loveliness, his hundred endearing ways, his childish prattle, came over her!

With her present sorrow mingled the memory of the past—all bitterness, save this one ray of light, now extinguished; and looming up, with too well defined distinctness, was the future, with its darkness gloom and desolation.

It was her hour of utter abandon. Hot gushing tears, such as she had forgotten she could shed, seemed to have no power in exhausting the force of her sorrow. She was not startled—she was too wretched to be startled at anything—when a hand was laid on her head, and a voice said:

"Child Annie, where is thy umbrella? Hast thou not yet found it? If not, find it now and hide thyself under it. There is no refuge like to that it will yield thee."

The door closed gently behind the person, but Annie was scarcely conscious of that, or the voice, or the touch; but the words sank deep in her heart. They came home to her with convincing power, seeming to comprehend all her need; and Annie her heart humbled and softened by her great sorrow—feeling, oh, how deeply, the need of an All-powerful Comforter and Helper, and also realizing her sinfulness and unworthiness—prayed with earnest sincerity for the mercy and pardon of a merciful Savior.

Annie found her refuge. Thenceforth, whatever of sorrows and trials should assail her, she would have a sure rest and protection.

Two weeks afterward the family were assembled in the parlor, when Mrs. Lothrop announced her intention of returning home the first of the ensuing week.

They all entreated for a longer visit, but finding their entreaties unavailing, expressed their regret; and then there was an embarrassing pause.

Mrs. Rathburn waited expectantly, too well assured that her darling Edith would be the favored one invited to accompany her home, to feel any anxiety.

Edith was no less certain than her mother of being the favorite of the lady, and was composing a graceful sentence of acceptance of the anticipated invitation. Eva also looked conscious, and toyed with her bracelets.

Annie, only, had no hopes, no plans. Since the night of Willie's death she had not exchanged more than two or three sentences with Mrs. Lothrop, and she alone uttered no regrets at the announced departure, or entreaties to remain longer.

Mrs. Lothrop continued:

"I believe you were so kind, Mrs. Rathburn, as to promise that one of these young ladies should accompany me home? Annie," turning to her, "will you do me the favor to accompany me? I will do everything in my power to render your visit pleasant. Can you be ready by Monday?"

The young girl was too much astonished and bewildered to reply.

Mrs. Rathburn, white with rage and disappointment, made an excuse for leaving the room. She was shortly followed by Edith and Eva. The former burst into tears of jealousy and mortification the moment she reached her mother's room, while Eva gave free vent in words to her indignation.

When alone with Annie, Mrs. Lothrop leaned over her and said, archly:

"Come with me, my child, and I will prove to you that my umbrella is large enough, and strong enough, and blue enough, to protect you, both now and always, if you will permit it; although," she continued, earnestly, "I trust you have found the Better One?" looking enquiring-

ly into the young girl's eyes, and reading aright the serene glance that told of a heart at peace with its Maker.

She resumed; "I cannot now fully explain to you the reasons for my strange conduct during the time I have known you; but when you shall understand them, I think you will forgive me for all the unhappiness I have directly or indirectly caused you. Suffice it to say, that I knew you instantly the first morning I saw you, from your strong resemblance to your father. I followed you a few steps, to introduce myself, when I accidentally overheard your words; and both the tone and the words revealed much to me—more than you thought—and my plan was instantly determined upon."

They continued a conversation, till it was interrupted by the arrival of Mr. Kirkwood, who had been absent for a few days.

Mrs. Lothrop met him in the library. After informing him of her near departure she said:

"I fear you will be disappointed, Eustace, when you learn that Annie, instead of Edith, is to accompany me home."

A glow of undisguised pleasure illumined the gentleman's face.

"I am glad of it," he replied, heartily.

Mrs. Lothrop was astonished, for she had believed him interested in Edith; and she looked at him inquiringly.

He replied to the glance frankly.

"It is true; I cannot deny it. Annie, with all her coldness and reserve, interests me far more deeply than Edith, with her beauty and brilliancy."

Mrs. Lothrop's face expressed her pleasure at this avowal.

He continued: "I must confess to you, however, my dear aunt, humiliating as is the fact, that this young girl is ice so far as regards myself. It is evident she dislikes me."

"Ice will thaw," replied Mrs. Lothrop, with a smile. "You will have an opportunity at Oakwood to endeavor to conquer this dislike."

Monday morning came, and the three departed. The carriage was watched from the windows till it disappeared from view by Mrs. Rathburn and her daughters, with feelings of inexpressible jealousy and bitterness. They said to themselves and each other, that they had been deceived and injured. They felt no gratitude for, or pleasure in, the elegant and valuable gifts Mrs. Lothrop had bestowed upon each of them.

In the new atmosphere of love and kindness in which she now lived, Annie gradually became a different being—although never the gay, laughter-loving girl she would have been, had sorrow never touched her.

She never returned home. She became as a daughter to Mrs. Lothrop, and only left her to become a near neighbor—the mistress of the beautiful mansion adjoining, and the happy, honored bride of Eustace Kirkwood.

The King and the Soldier.

Frederick the Great of Prussia had a great mania for enlisting gigantic soldiers into the Royal Guards, and paid an enormous bounty to his recruiting officers for getting them.—One day the recruiting sergeant chanced to spy a Hibernian who was at least seven feet high; he accosted him in English, and proposed that he should enlist. The idea of Military and large bounty so delighted Patrick, that he immediately consented. "But, unless you can speak German, the king will not give you so much."

"Oh, said the Irishman, "sure it's I that don't know a word of German."

"But," said the sergeant, "three words will be enough, and those you can learn in a short time. The King knows every man in the Guards. As soon as he sees you, he will ride up and ask you how old you are? you will say, 'twenty-seven;' next how long have you been in the service? you must reply, 'three weeks;' finally, if you are provided with clothes and rations? you answer, 'Both.'

Pat soon learned to pronounce his answers, but never dreamt of learning questions. In three weeks he appeared before the King in review. His majesty rode up to him. Paddy stepped forward with "present arms."

"How old are you?" said the king.

"Three weeks," said the Irishman.

"How long have you been in the service?" asked his Majesty.

"Twenty-seven years."

"Am I or you a fool?" roared the king.

"Both," replied Patrick, who was instantly taken to the guard room, but pardoned by the king after he understood the facts of the case.