

this way, now that, but all the time with a secret encouragement. But now, as suddenly as a flash lights up the sky and disappears, every shadow of a hope had left his heart.

Willis Boynton had been the inmate of Mr. Maynard's home since his tenth year, and he was now twenty-five. He was born in South Carolina, but his father dying, he was sent to Mr. Maynard, a relative, and one who had loved the dead man dearly. Though partly educated in the North, he did not lose the fiery nature that had been born in him. He had, however, for the sake of his child-love, crushed his wild impulses, and subdued his imperious nature.

He possessed a small fortune that enabled him to realize his ambition to be a successful lawyer, and when anxiety and the loss of hope made it incumbent on him, to travel. His father was a Col. Boynton, a man greatly esteemed for his wealth and social position, in South Carolina, and he was extremely proud of his lineage, though both father and mother were dead, and he had held no correspondence with the other members of the family. Mr. Maynard, for the sake of his friend, had always treated him as a son, and, immersed as he was in business, did not see the change that had gradually come over his household.

Willis Boynton did not meet Florence again until the next morning at the breakfast-table. Then she saw what one brief night of agony can accomplish.—The face of her lover was as white as death, and bore the stamp of immeasurable sorrow. But he had wrestled with his anguish and partly conquered it. His greeting was subdued and manly, but he never once, if he could help it, looked toward Florence. In vain she strove to read his countenance—he gave her no opportunity.

For several evenings he absented himself; and whenever he met Florence, his manner was cool, though kind. Yet he seemed strangely pre-occupied, and more than once Florence caught his glance resting upon her face with an expression she did not like; but, as he seemed to have given her up at last, she waited patiently.

Meantime the stranger, who was to have stayed but a few days, yet lingered. Sometimes Florence met him, and the meeting always made her happier. At length he ventured to call, and spent an evening at Mr. Maynard's. The old gentleman was delighted with his modesty and acquirements. Like the rector, he pronounced him at once the most agreeable man he had met, and looked at Florence searchingly as he said so.—She could not conceal the sparkle of her eye, or the quick blush that lightened up her whole face, and whatever her father might have thought, he kept it to himself.

For many evenings the stranger came, and at last, having taken board at the hotel, he seemed likely to settle for the winter. Now Florence had full opportunity to pity and sympathize with Willis Boynton. With the whole strength of her heart, its slumbering emotions at length fairly and thoroughly roused, she loved Gilbert Allington. It was strange, she acknowledged to herself—it was perhaps unmaidenly, but it was also unavoidable. She could not help it. If he had never spoken to her one word of affection, she would still have loved right on—if he had left her forever, his image would still have been forever uppermost in her heart of hearts.

One evening when Gilbert was present Willis came in. He looked haggard and unhappy, as he always did of late. He did not try to master his passion by noble resolve, or manly patience. The sentiment he cherished was fast changing to revenge. If he could not wed Florence, no one else should, if it laid in his power. Florence was singing as he entered. Unconsciously her joyous tones took on a sadness, the atmosphere seemed clouded—it would not ring as before with the sweet vibrations of her voice.

Willis cast a scowling glance that was not observed toward the twain. Gilbert bent like one privileged over the musician, carefully turned the pages, and seemed entirely absorbed in the voice of the singer and his too pleasant occupation. It was the place, the delightful duty that had been his, Willis thought, bitterly, and in his deep-set eyes gleamed fires of vengeful disappointment.—Under his arm he held a book, which he placed carelessly upon the centre-table. It was unique in binding, very different from the many richly covered volumes that lay scattered round, a pale, mottled cloth, much worn and somewhat defaced. When the two turned from the piano, Willis had seated himself. His features assumed a smile of cordiality, they little knew what smouldering fires it hid.

For sometime the conversation was quiet and common-place. Florence watched anxiously, sure from his manner that he was uneasy and excited. At length the topics discussed began to cover a wider range. Willis spoke of

travel. Almost imperceptible they were led to talk of Australia. As soon, however, as that theme was touched the face of Gilbert underwent an entire change. Willis' eyes covered him continually—he noticed the evident shrinking, the uneasy movement, and a smile of triumph lurked around his lips. All this was read by Florence.

"You have traveled much, I suppose?" said Willis, quietly.

"For three years," returned the other, speaking as with an effort.

"Have you ever been in Australia?" Willis' tones, look and attitude, were a study. He sat leaning forward a little, his lips parted, his eyes fastened upon Gilbert, and his fingers working uneasily.

Gilbert Allington started; one instant and his blanched lip was quivering, his cheek devoid of all color, his eyes unsteady in their glance, and the whole expression that of a man exceedingly terrified. It was, however, only for a moment. Shivering once, he came out of the strange, trance-like manner, caught at his self-possession as they say drowning men catch at straws, and held it fast. With the utmost calmness, even while the astonished glance of Florence was fastened upon him, he answered the insinuating question.

"I have been in Australia; a glorious country it is, too."

"Did you reside there long?" queried Willis, trembling.

"Have you any particular reason for wishing to know?" asked the stranger, his voice changing to a sternness that was almost awful.

"I have," returned Willis.

"Then perhaps you will have the kindness to waive the subject for to-night, and meet me at some other place for the transaction of this important business."

Willis sank back in his chair, breathless. This answer had daunted him, had blunted the edge of his cool, revengeful audacity. He turned his eyes fiercely upon the stranger, as he said:

"I will meet you to-morrow," and rising stormily, he left the room.

"This man seems to conduct himself strangely," said Gilbert, with a smile, turning to Florence.

She merely answered:

"I don't understand it."

"I do," was the quick reply. "He is evidently trying to pick a quarrel with me, for some insane purpose."

"You will not—meet him in anger, Mr. Allington!"

"Who, I? I have no wish to meet him at all, Miss Florence. I think I understand the secret of his animosity. We must overlook much that seems out of place in those who fancy themselves injured. Yet Heaven knows I would not injure any man! I have suffered too deeply myself."

"You must remember that he is Southern-born, and of a warmer temper, by nature, than we of a colder clime," she said, faintly, trying to excuse his abruptness, though in truth there was no reason why she should, save that love made her pity him, although he was not its object. Besides, she felt the tenderness of the glances that were bestowed upon her, and this appeal to her womanly sympathies made her anxious to soften the errors of one who had been very kind to her from her earliest recollections.

For some time nothing more was said. At last Gilbert arose, hastily, almost nervously. He stood by the table, quite close to where she was seated. He gazed down upon her with one of his rare smiles, and seemed about to speak. The strange book that Willis had brought in lay directly under the light of the chandelier. Carelessly he lifted it in his hands, and as carelessly opened it—another moment the book was on the floor, he stooping with a white face to pick it up again.

"Unpardonable carelessness," he said, restoring its disordered pages, and placing it in its old position.

Florence could not forbear seeing that again some storm of passion or regret was sweeping over his soul, for his hand shook as he put it back, and his chest heaved. The smile did not return that night, and left alone, Florence, halting between love and a haunting fear, which like a presentiment saddened her, reflected bitterly upon the events of the evening. Something akin to hate sprang up in her bosom toward Boynton, who seemed determined to let no opportunity escape him in which he might thwart or distress her. Thinking it over, she, too, lifted the book, and listlessly opened it. What made her heart throb heavily, the blood surge across her cheek and forehead, and her sight grow dim? It was a list of Australian convicts for years back. What was the meaning of that ominous question which Willis had asked, the ominous book which he had brought—that dreadful unquiet man she loved?

Eagerly she perused it, looking with a sickening dread at the long array of G's and A's, and at last drawing a breath of relief when she saw that the one

name that had power to touch her heart-strings was not there. With a sigh of weariness she placed the book down and tried to throw off the gloomy forebodings that oppressed her, but they would not go away. Darker and more threatening they closed around her soul, till she wished in her anguish that she had never met this man, whose lightest smile was so inestimable precious to her. That night she slept but little, and when she did, her sleep was filled with distressing visions.

It was well that she could not see the other victim of the Southerner's malice. He sat in his room, without motion.—The clock struck out all the hours, until it struck the one that proclaimed midnight. Then he lifted his face. In the dim light it was ghastly.

"And I was to ask her to-night—and this fiend has come between me and happiness," he whispered hoarsely.—"I thought I knew his face, and I tried in vain to remember where I had seen him. Oh, it is cruel, cruel!"

He arose, changed his thick coat for a dressing-gown, drew on a pair of list slippers, and flung himself moodily in the chair again.

"I see," he murmured, "I am in this man's power, and God help me if he has no mercy—and God help him, too."

Slowly the hours passed by, but he did not seek his couch. Toward morning, he paced the floor, back and forth; then, as daylight began to steal into the room he drew toward him a box of papers (they seemed to be letters) and began to examine them, thrusting some aside, and placing others in a small heap. The sun shining in, still found him thus occupied.

Scarcely tasting his breakfast, he placed the packet in his pocket, as the day deepened, and going out wended his way to the house of the rector. There he was closeted for two hours.

When he came out, the rector came with him, his face scarcely cheerful, but very friendly. As the two parted, the former placed his hand upon Gilbert's shoulder, saying, in a low tone:

"Trust in God. I think it will all come out right."

"I hope so," said the young man, drearily.

When he returned to the hotel, he was somewhat surprised to receive Willis Boynton's card. That gentleman was in the parlor. He met him with cool civility.

"I can hardly fail to understand the object of your coming," he said. "Will you walk up into my room?"

"Certainly."

Willis looked like a man prepared to do a deed of villainy.

They entered the pleasant private parlor together.

"Now, sir?" said Gilbert, in calm, clear tones. "I am not afraid of you."

"It was not my purpose, I assure you, to create fear; on the contrary, I wish to save one who is dear to me from unnecessary mortification—from what, believe me, in one so sensitive, would cause death, perhaps."

"Go on, sir. What are your charges?"

"I met you in Australia, three years ago."

"Yes."

"Do you remember me?"

"I do now. Well?"

"You were there a convict."

"Go on," said Gilbert calmly.

"Good Heaven! could I say more?"

"Yes, much more, Mr. Boynton. Go on."

"You were convicted of forgery when a very young man—a clerk in a banking house in Manchester, England. You see, I know all about it."

"Is that all?"

"No, it is not enough. What has that to do with your present visit?"

"This, that I will not see Florence Maynard sacrificed."

"What is she to you?"

"Your coolness is audacious. She is my—my—sister—that is, I regard her in that light."

"You love her."

"Sir!" cried Willis, turning red.

"I say, you love her."

"Very well; and what if I do?"

"You are a rejected lover, and wish to wreak your vengeance thus upon her and upon me."

"You are impertinent."

"I am right."

"Great Heaven! do you think I would see any woman I respected wedded to a convict?"

Gilbert grew pale. He arose, walked a few steps, then came near Willis with a resolute face.

"I wish you to answer me one question," he said.

"What is it?"

"Did you ever hear me spoken of by any one?"

"I—Of course I did. Your course was extraordinary."

"How extraordinary?"

"You were considered a bookworm;

and you were, too, a sort of preacher and a teacher."

"Yes."

"That was all."

"What was that all that you heard of me?"

"And his piercing eyes seemed to read the very secrets of Willis Boynton's cowardly soul."

"Of course."

"Do you dare say that with deliberation, Mr. Boynton?"

"What do you mean?"

"This: that it was told you by everybody—and you remember it too—that I was an innocent man. Not one of the colonists, not one—even the most hardened among those felons, many of them transported for life—but believed in my entire innocence. You know I was always pointed out; that my story was always told; that I had a bitter enemy, against whom I was powerless in England. Willis Boynton, look at me! In your inmost soul, you do not believe that I am guilty of the crime charged against me."

"I know that you were transported," said Willis, a red light gleaming in his eyes.

"And you know, such was the leaning toward mercy in England, though I could get no proof, that my punishment was almost commuted; that ten of the fourteen years were cut off. Yes, you know—you know all this. Now why do you persecute me?"

"Because you have not yet been proven innocent."

"But I shall be, so sure as there is a God in heaven. I am biding my time, that will one day come."

Boynton laughed insultingly.

"In the meantime," he said, sneeringly, "with this cloud upon your reputation, you would take that innocent and confiding girl to the altar, and make her the wife of a convict."

"No!" thundered Gilbert. "You interpret my motives too readily by your own sinister thoughts. I should have done no such thing. Whatever I am, I am not a coward. Suffice it that I should have been honorable."

"Honorable!" he sneered; "honorable, indeed!"

Gilbert controlled himself. He had very nearly laid hands upon him; but insanely, wickedly as Willis was acting, he remembered that he loved Florence, and it saved him.

"Yes," he said calmly, "I love her too well to cloud her life even by a suspicion. I believe she loves me, and would be willing to wait the issue of the evidence pending in my behalf."

The eyes of Willis Boynton blazed again; all the evil passions of his nature were roused. He too believed that Florence loved this man, who in weeks had won what he had toiled for years with a patience and assiduity and self-denial that had been admirable in a loftier nature.

"I swear Florence Maynard shall not be your wife!" he cried, fiercely. "She shall not bend her pure head to the caresses of a felon. I will brand you, sir. You are a law-breaker: you have worn the chain—the badge of penal servitude and outrageous crime. That is enough to make your name a by-word!"

Gilbert Allington shivered from head to foot. His eyes were wild, his hands clenched involuntarily. He came toward Willis, and even he was dismayed.

"Don't lay your hands on me!" he said, hoarsely. "I won't submit to it."

Gilbert regarded him for a moment.—His face changed, his hands fell, his eye lost its fire.

"I never struck a man yet," he said, in a strange, earnest whisper. "I never will while God gives me reason—much less you, for whom I feel a sovereign contempt. You are unworthy to be touched by me. Go spit your foul venom, if you will! go ruin me. There's a God above, I believe in him, I serve him. You are powerless before him, and you cannot harm me ultimately. Your curses will fall upon your own head. You too perhaps will some time feel that lofty pride bent low; you too may shed the bitter tears of regret, and still be innocent. I do not hope this. I only say, as you would hope for mercy, have mercy."

"I do not need your advice, nor your good wishes," said Willis, hoarsely.—"Go your own way; I shall go mine.—If you do not leave the village, on your head be the consequences. I have warned you."

And thus they parted.

It was nearing twilight. All day poor Florence had been haunted by uneasy thoughts. Now, seeing a well-known form coming up the street, she seated herself, almost faint with apprehension.

Gilbert was very grave when he entered, but there was something so beautiful illuminating his face. Was it hope? was it joy?

"Florence," he said, "can we be alone a few moments?"

"Certainly." She was reassured by his manner.

"Florence, I have a story to tell you. A certain boy, an English boy of six-

teen, incurred the undying hate of a man, because years before, his mother had refused him her hand in marriage. He laid a plan which worked the boy's ruin—at least it seemed so. The boy was transported for the crime of forgery, when he was as innocent as you are.—The plan succeeded but too well. The heart of a gentle English woman was broken; she died the first year her son was away. The boy was recommended to mercy because there was strong sympathy in his favor. His punishment was only for a short term of years. In the colony he had many friends, among them one old, childless man, who had been there twenty-five years. The man died, leaving a large fortune to him.—Thus, you see, God in part frustrated the plans of his enemy. That boy sits before you a man, who has been unjustly dealt by."

Florence started, uttered a low cry, and covered her face with her hands.

"To-day I received a visit from your friend Willis Boynton. I will not tell you how he treated me—what bitter, cruel words he used. He swore I should never marry you, for I told him, as I have longed to tell you, that I love you." Florence did not shrink from him as he took her hand. "After he had gone, there came a strange guest to me, and sat down by my side. It was Despair."

Florence shivered a little.

"She did not stay long, however, for presently Faith crept in, and in her presence I grew a man again. I brought some old letters to show you that were sent to me from England, but in the usual mail to-day" (and now his face grew triumphant) "there came a most important letter. Florence, my enemy is dead; he had confessed all. I am clear not only in the sight of Heaven, but that of my country."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried Florence, springing to her feet, her whole face beaming.

"It's a forgery!" cried a hollow voice. Gilbert sprang to his feet; Florence uttered a cry of terror.

"So you have been listening?" said Gilbert, in tones of contempt. "Do you think I would be so insane as to contemplate even a deed like that, which I could by no possible means prove? No; I would rather cut off this right hand."

"I tell you I will brand you," cried Willis, like one frantic. "You have been a convict; never forget that."

When Mr. Maynard returned, he was made acquainted with the full particulars. He called Willis into his study, and reasoned with him. He might as well have talked to a maniac. The man raved forward and back, and was so bitter in his hostility to Gilbert that his guardian was fearful some harm might be done.

"Tell me, will you let your child marry an Australian convict?" cried Willis, furiously.

"I shall say nothing about it. I have not yet made up my mind; but if my child loved the poorest man on earth, and he was honest, she should marry him. This Allington has been wronged, but I do not see that that is straight now. Such cases excite sympathy, not prejudice. I am sorry you cannot afford to be generous."

"I will tell every man, woman, and child in this town what brand he bears upon him!" said Willis, resolutely, defiantly.

Mr. Maynard was silent. He saw that this rash thing would be done. There was but one way to avoid it.

"Willis," he said, "listen to me. I have your life's secret also in my hands. If you harm my child, you are at my mercy."

The man glared at him.

"I would have spared you if I had seen any mercy in you; but you must be punished. Willis Boynton, your mother was a slave. I have your free papers, made out when you were six years old, up-stairs. Now shall I be silent? or will you run the risk of my resentment?"

For one moment the room swam round; the next, Boynton fell to the ground heavily. Weeks of dangerous illness made another man of him. He rose from his bed humbled and chastened and at Gilbert's wedding he gave Florence a brother's kiss.

**Charity for the Fallen.**

Never say anything damaging to the good name of a woman, it matters not how poor she may be or what her place in society. They have a hard enough time at best, and God help the man who would give them a kick down the hill. We are all too free with their names—we talk too much about them on our street corner clubs and in public places to be heard of men. We do very wrong. The least little hint that there is something wrong, that "she ain't all right," whether spoken in jest or in earnest, is taken up, and like the rolling stone gathers moss as it goes from corner to corner, and at last comes home to the persecuted creature with crushing weight. She has done nothing but keep quiet while her idle persecutors have pursued her, and now she is kicked from door to door and has fallen so low that none will do her reverence. Give a dog a bad name and you had as well kill him; talk about a good woman in street corner clubs and across bar-room counters, and you had as well set her down at once as a social wreck.