

"Crescent Beach"

By Miss Catharine M. Sedgwick [1847]

"Not upon us or ours the solemn angel
Hath evil wrought,
The funeral anthem is a glad evangel--
The good die not." Whittier

In the summer of 183-, I passed a month at Crescent Beach. I find, on recurring to my note-book of that period, some passages that may now be published without offensive personality.

It was an unusually hot season, and the proximity of a delicious sea-shore to our great cities were never more enjoyed. Every day our citizens poured down from their streaming streets to bathe their wilted bodies and furrowed faces in the cool waves. There was a charming society that summer gathered at Crescent Beach many an "immortal flower" among "human weeds." There were beauties still pre-eminent, beauties returned unspoiled from the flatteries of foreign courts to fill the honored place of American matrons--their past a pleasant dream, their present a golden reality. There were the mothers and wives of statesmen holding the highest positions in the country, women whose intelligence, simplicity and kindly affability set in a bright aspect our democratic institutions. There were very pretty young women, content with the role of good mothers, surrounded by lovely children, bright wreaths of living flowers, chatting away the day good-humoredly over their worsted work and crochet needles. There were ___and ___who charmed away ennui with amateur music and heart-piercing ballads. There were, too, pretty young girls free from affection and coquetry, and intelligent young men, (Heaven be praised) exempt from conceit or coxcombry. There was the lawyer in his vacation -- who can ever forget him! as he passed up and down the room, giving courteous, gentle word to old and young, and gladdening the evening social circle with wit and grace, in those silvery tones that have often made the "wonder mute" in our courts and halls of legislation.

And there too was ___ as bright and enjoying as he had been thirty years before, his merry laugh ringing on our ears and through our hearts like festal bells. God grant him more lustres, for to that soul of honor, that happy spirit which they will come crowned with "the respect that waits on age." There too was ___bearing life's burdens firmly and gracefully, while the freshness, sincerity and charm of youth were still upon her. Already she had bound up her golden sheaves of filial virtue, and, amidst the *déclassments* of a watering-place, was sowing seeds in young and loving hearts for future reapings.

There, too, were young mothers in retired rooms, keeping patient vigils over sick children, and sisters passing the live-long day in woodland paths and quiet walks along the sea-shore with their invalid brothers, having early waked from the "dream that life was beauty," and found (without its casting a shadow over them) that "life is duty."

There was chaff with the wheat. But, to all, the uses of this place seemed to be good. Dissipation and display were, by common consent, avoided. The beach walks in the glorious twilights, and the ocean, solemn as the presence of a divinity, had an elevating power over the lowest, the least susceptible.

I must proceed to relate a few circumstances that may not tend to prove this position, but rather to indicate that the inner rules the outer world.

The first day after my arrival, on going, in the evening, into the drawing-room, "Who is that excessively pretty woman?" I inquired of an elderly gentleman.

"Which? all these young women are excessively pretty in my eyes!"

"She with a golden hue over her skin as if a sunbeam had lingered there."

"Oh, that dark complexioned lively little French woman "Madame Joubert."

"No, no, the one with the cap which the Graces seemed to have dropped on her head."

"That little jewel? have you been here twelve hours without finding her out? That is Mrs. Louise Ryson, the subject of the curiosity, observation (*inalveillance*) and gossip of all the very good-natured ladies at Crescent Beach."

"Mrs. Ryson," I responded in a tone of some astonishment.

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"Yes, Mrs. Ryson, married a second time, and the mother of that peerless child I saw you talking with as I came from the breakfast-room."

"Is it possible? The child must be seven years old."

"She is at least that, and wiser than her years. She has convinced me that Dickens "little Nell" is not an ideal, and that angel-spirits are sometimes invested with mortal mould, and sent to wander here for a little while on some heavenly mission. I expect on some bright morning to see Juliet unfold her wings and mount upward."

I looked at my friend, who was not addicted to romantic moods or sentimental notions. I saw he was earnest. "It was written on her forehead," he continued, "as the Turkish fatalist would say. It is not only royal physiognomies, like Napoleon's and Charles I's, that have a doom inscribed on them by nature; I have marked it on persons of obscure condition, and seen it realized. Sit down here by me

and look attentively at that child. Is there not something over that most lovely face like a shadow on an opening flower?"

He drew me to the window, and we sat down by it. The lady had just entered the drawing-room and sunk on the sofa. She seemed looking for some expected person; when the child, who evidently was not that person, appeared at a farther door, looked round, and bounded towards her. "Dear mamma," she said, "may I stay by you?" "Yes, Juliet, til I go out -- I am going to drive." "Can't I go with you, mamma?" "No, Juliet, there's no room."

"There used always to be room, mamma." A gentleman at this moment looked in at the door. My friend touched my arm. Mrs. Ryson's face lighted. She half rose and sat down again as if afraid of attracting observation; the gentleman advanced towards her, they exchanged a few words in a low voice, he went up to the piazza, and she rose to go to her room. "Then I can't go with you, mamma," said the child in a saddened voice. "No, why do you tease me, Juliet! why can't you go and amuse yourself as the other children do; you are so odd."

"So I am," said the child, dejectedly following her mother; "for there is nobody to mate with me." The mother soon after came to the piazza in a very handsome hat and mantilla; was handed into the carriage by the gentleman who addressed her in the drawing-room, and drove off. In the meanwhile I had learned from my friend, who was an established loungee at Crescent Beach, all that he knew of Mrs. Ryson's history.

She had been bred at one of our fashionable boarding schools, and had learned there just as much as might be expected, to prepare her for the serious duties and stern requisitions of life. She married at seventeen a man she loved, at eighteen she was a mother and a widow, and at twenty-two she was again married to a respectable prosperous merchant, a man of sound head and sound heart. Louis Ryson was attracted by her beauty and grace; but when he assumed the responsibility of her happiness and the support and protection of her unportioned child and herself through life, he believed she had sense enough to perform well a woman's part, that is to say, that she would be a credible, affectionate and domestic wife. As Mrs. Ryson and her companion drove off, Robert Liston, the friend whom I have quoted above, a man of shrewdness and experience, said to me, "there is an intrinsic difficulty in the case of our young married women. I mean those who have been fashionably educated and associated, and who have not (a few have) mind enough to lay their own course. They have accomplishments and tastes that belong to the class born to the *dolce far niente* life, or if you will allow me an illustration familiar to the ruder days of my youth, they have the ruffle without the shirt. Your sex has by nature more sensitiveness and more refinement than ours. This is developed

by your education. You get glimpses into the world of art, you learn the canting about painting and sculpture, and the names at least of the operas, composers and singers. Now, too, as your gods are unknown gods to us -- for the most part cotton and corn dealers, or importers of dry good, or if we chance to belong to the learned professions, still operatives, --delving all day, with no time to give to the mere embellishments of life, -- so our young women are left to be amused by foreign men, who have, as I said, the ruffle without the shirt, or by those few idle men of fortune among us, who like Mrs. Ryson's admirer, Rupert Reed, have time to acquire certain foreign graces, and time and leisure to practice foreign follies and vices, one of the worst of them being to profit by the coquetries of pretty, weak and very assailable young women, like poor Mrs. Louis Ryson. Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the daily coaches. "There is the owner of the property we were speaking of," continued my friend Liston, pointing to one of the gentlemen alighting from the coach, a man of some eight and twenty, with a fair open countenance, but remarkably destitute of that nicety and *delicatesse* to which ladies give the indefinable name of an "air."

"Is that Mrs. Ryson's husband?" I asked.

Liston smiled at my tone and replied, "That is, and a good honest fellow too; a man respected in his counting-house, and in Wall-street, and kind and affectionate in his own household; but he has no gift at making tableaux of life. You see the sort of person he is." Little Juliet, who ever since her mother drove off had been standing listlessly by the railing, gazing in the direction her mother had gone, came forward at the arrival of the

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coaches, to receive her step-father. He kissed her and asked "where was her mother?" "She has gone to take a drive," replied the child, in the manner that indicated she would rather not have had that answer to give.

"I am glad of it, it is a charming afternoon, but why did she not take you with her, Juliet?"

"There was not room." It was evident to me that Juliet gave this answer because she had no art to give another. A painful blush overspread her face as she spoke. Ryson misinterpreted it. "Never mind, my dear," he said, "you shall have a drive to-morrow, and here is something for you in the mean time, and from a multitude of parcels, fresh fruit, fresh books, etc. with which he had loaded himself for his wife and her daughter, he took a huge one of candies. "Oh, papa, how kind you always are! Let me take some of your things to your room. Oh, here are mamma's worsteds!"

"Yes, I went back for them, I had forgotten them in my hurry. No, dear, I'll take them all in." He turned

as he was entering the door, and said, "Tell your mother, Juliet, when she comes, that I shall be in directly. I have promised a gentleman to play a game of billiards with him before tea." Again he turned back and said, "There is a parcel of burnt almonds inside yours, for your mother. Don't open that, Juliet, you know she particularly likes burnt almonds."

"There is something very kindly in his voice," said I to my friend, as Ryson passed in, "and an air of simplicity, frankness, and unconventionalism that particularly pleases me."

"And are you not rather struck with his being remarkably unexact, unjealous--the poor man never even asked with whom his wife had gone; he thinks no evil, and therefore fears none."

"And perhaps has none to fear," I replied, "the rust in our society is a good element."

"And therefore," said my friend, "should never be abused. Of all the birds of prey who hover over society and live by devouring the weak, the libertine is the most atrocious and most detestable. I have known Rupert Reed from his childhood. The rich inheritance that awaited him, instead of stimulating his parents to fit him for the great responsibility of using and dispensing, procured for him exemption from restraint. He had from nature a quick perception and strong will, but he grew up as ignorant as a clown, with the exception of some accomplishment in music. He had some taste for it, and it was the grace in request among the people he consorted with. At seventeen he came into possession of his immense fortune, and for three or four years he abandoned himself to a life of *pleasure*, so called. His constitution was then exhausted, and he "brought up," as they term it. He changed his field of action, he married a beautiful woman, and neglected her after six months; he became *haut-ton*, was exclusive in his habits; in the world, but not of it, he bestows his favors on those only who are distinguished for fashion, or beauty, or talent, or a certain caste. Now it is a brilliant actress, opera singer, or ballet-dancer; now a debutante in high life, and now the pretty wife of some confiding, working city merchant, whom accident has made the belle of a season at a watering-place. like poor Mrs. Ryson. He like *eclat*, and therefore he always marks as his prey such as are sparkling in sunshine."

"But I am astonished that decent women should permit the advances of a man whose libertinism is so notorious as Rupert Reed's!"

"My dear, innocent friend! I beg your pardon, and your sex's, but when was reputed libertinism a bar to a man's acceptance in society, provided he has a very large fortune, has an ultra and rather refined coxcombry, studies foreign conventional refinements, and bears a name (that potent supreme charm

in our democratic society!) that has belonged to a fashionable dynasty for two or three generations. Besides, there is, it must be acknowledged, some charm peculiar to the individual. I am inclined to think it has something to do with animal magnetism. There are certain men and certain women too, whose attractions are inexplicable. This very Rupert Reed broke the heart and overclouded the destiny of a gifted young creature as far above him as the stars are above us. The facts came to me mysteriously, and I cannot communicate them. God help her! I never see his bloodless cheek without thinking that the curse I heard her father utter is eating his life away!"

I hope my readers will not conclude that my friend and I are merely cold and curious observers, analyzing and depicting our fellow-creatures as coolly as a naturalist does a fish. It does not become me to speak of myself; but of him I must say he has far more humanity than curiosity, far more of sorrow and pity than anger for human folly, and that excepting in his confidential communications with me, he maintained an apparent ignorance of the gossip in active circulation at Crescent Beach, in relation to poor little Mrs. Ryson and the reptile into whose web she was falling. I would forewarn my readers, too, against the trouble of looking on the map for Crescent Beach. It is only a name we have given to one of the sea-shores to which our citizens go down in herds during the hot summer months to refresh soul and body. Why not call things by their right names! Simply because we wish to invest with a slight veil of fiction circumstances which, having transpired some few years since, are already forgotten.

As I parted from my friend, Mrs. Clinly joined me. Mrs. Clinly is a star of magnitude, though declining from the ascendant, she has been a beauty;

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was younger once--is now a grandmother -- and very young and very handsome for a grandmother. She still hovers round the precincts of the world she once shone upon, and by no very violent imagination might be supposed to be a spirit condemned to note and publish the follies in which she indulged, till they forsook her. She is called a very good-natured person, and so she is as far as an easy, careless deportment goes -- a readiness to introduce a fashionable stranger, to do an acceptable office for a prominent actor on this scene -- to impart a new fashion, or teach a new stitch. She has a quick recognition, and what seems a spontaneous smile for every passer-by, but when they have passed, listen, if you will, to her annotations -- her treasured budget of private anecdotes -- "They are pretty girls! but what a pity the men are shy of them!"

"Shy of them! I have observed no such thing!"

"Oh, they are, I assure you, on account of that old story about their mother; it is very wrong they should suffer for it, poor girls!"

"Lovely dress of Mrs. C's. My husband say, he had rather look at her dresses than pay for them. I suppose he could afford it as well as poor Mr. ----."

"Just observe" (behind her fan) "Mrs. Rollins and Mrs. Smith when they meet," --the parties pass us, -- "they did not even bow. Mrs. Smith has mentioned some little thing Mrs. Rollins said about Mrs. John Buller. How are you to-day, Mrs. Rollins?" she continued to that lady, who now approached us, and who I thought had, en passant, looked very much askance at Mrs. Smith.

"Its a lovely day; did you bathe, Mrs. Rollins?"

"No; I haven't been in my room all day. I detest living in public and going in herds that your people are so fond of!"

"*Your* people! dear Mrs. Rollins, are not my people your people?"

"Not in feeling. No, I assure you, I have lived too long abroad to identify myself with them. One gets one's tastes so changed, that one can never be at ease here, I think. They talk of spies abroad--Lord bless me!--it seems you are all spies here! there is no freedom. You must do as everybody else does, and say what everybody else says. If you express an opinion that differs from others, on character, religion, or what not, it is repeated and garbled! If this were done in society *comme il faut* in Europe, the repeater would be sacrificed. Depend on it, mesdames," she concluded, shrugging her shoulders, and darting a glance along the piazza, at the offending Mrs. Smith; "this tittle-tattle belongs to demi-civilization. I made some chance remark about that poor little Mrs. Ryson's flirtation with Rupert Reed. I am sure I think none the worse of her-- *il faut l'amuser*; but repeated, I am made to appear -- what, you may imagine;" and she writhed a mouth that had once been pretty, into an expression of bitter resentment. At this moment, little Juliet came on the piazza, her face lightened, holding in one hand a bunch of fresh pond lilies (the exquisite lotus). "O! Your Mamma has returned from her drive; has she, my dear?" said Mrs. Clinly, who, if she had been Mrs. Ryson's recording angel, or accusing spirit, could not have kept a more exact watch over her movements. "No," replied Juliet, the passing ray of sunshine vanishing from her face; "do you think anything can have happened to mama, Mrs. Clinly?"

"Oh, no, my dear," replied Mrs. Clinly, with a sly smile that expressed more than one should have thought in the presence of that innocent child. "Mr. Rupert Reed is a very safe driver for your mother -- in one sense," she added in a lowered voice, to Mrs. Rollins, who merely shrugged her shoulders, as if the insinuation were a very light matter. At his moment, Mrs. Duncan passed along, dispersing at the right hand and the left all the lilies she had not given to little Juliet. I have nothing special to tell of Mrs. Duncan, and yet I pause, as my memory goes back to that period as if a good angel were passing by me. I wish I had the power to describe her, and to make others feel, as I did then, the influence of

her character. Mrs. Duncan was somewhere on that stage of pilgrimage of life between thirty and forty, when most women, if not worse by the experience of life have lost the freshness of their interest in it. Not so with dear Mrs. Duncan; she was as frank, fresh, confiding, and affectionate as a girl of sixteen, just -- not from boarding school; no, there for the most part, there is a forcing process of world-experience, but -- from a happy home. Mrs. Duncan reversed that ingenious chemical analysis that extracts poison from every earthly substance, and contrived to distil good from everybody and everything. It seemed to me that her sunny face, by a mysterious and improved daguerreotype, marked on her heart every line of beauty and form of loveliness, and left the rest--refuse to her. On her heart -- Mrs. Clinly was stamped the kind, all-admiring person she would fain be; Mrs. Duncan was too unconventional to stand high with the aspirants to high fashion, of Crescent Beach. They spoke of her as a person laboring under some disqualification, as "poor Mrs. Duncan." Poor! She was one of those rich ones whose treasures are every hour accumulating where the moth of worldliness and the rust of selfishness do not corrupt. But as I

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was saying, Mrs. Duncan came floating towards us. She was a woman whose specific gravity would not have promised a floating motion, but no sylph moved lighter; it was buoyancy of a cheerful, unburdened spirit. She had a curly-headed boy in her arms, and two children running after her. She looked the type of loving charity. "You are such a favorite with the children, Mrs. Duncan," said Mrs. Clinly. "I believe you keep them all in sugar-plums."

"Any how, she has not given us sugar-plums to-day," said one of the children, bristling. "We should not love some people, if they gave us all the sugar-plums in the world; should we, Jem?" added the boy. The children at Crescent Beach were franker than their parents.

"There's your tea-bell; away with you, boys, said Mrs. Duncan, who perceived their words were not sugar-plums to Mrs. Clinly. "It's natural to me to love children," she added, kissing them and pushing them off; "their noise never troubles me; there is a great difference in people about that; some mind it."

"Oh, it is an intolerable nuisance!" exclaimed Mrs. Rollins. "There is no country, I believe, in the world, but this, where children are permitted en scene. But here, it is not men and women, but children, that are the actors on the world's theatre. The drawing-room is a menagerie, and these young animals (whelps I won't call them) are careering up and down, while the men and women are thrust to the wall."

This was an evil we all had suffered under at Crescent Beach, and I believe all of us, excepting dear Mrs. Duncan, were ready to take up arms against this sea of children. "I don't know how it is," she said, "in other countries. I have never been there. My husband means to go as soon as he can arrange, but he has so many orphans under his care. It is not everybody you know, that is willing to be a guardian; it is always to fall on Mr. Duncan. Not but that it's very pleasant; there are three girls who dine with us every Sunday, not at all connected either, who seem like our own children. But I hope the time will come when we can go. I may feel differently when I have seen as much of the world as Mrs. Rollins has. Now children don't disturb me, they are so happy here. It's their vacation you know, and they must have a little range."

"But, dear Mrs. Duncan, their mothers are so shockingly negligent of them," urged Mrs. Rollins.

"Are they?" replied Mrs. Duncan, with the accent of one does not accede, and will not contradict. "I have not observed that. There are no dangers for them here to run into, and they come here for their health and diversion, and they are so happy. It's healthy to be happy; don't you think so, Mrs. Rollins?"

"That may be," replied Mrs. Rollins, "but I have no notion that we are to be sacrificed to make these little brats happy, or that they are any the happier for it. I tell you, Mrs. Duncan, if you and your husband ever achieve that voyage to Europe, you will see the benefit of discipline and subordination." She walked off with the air of one who has uttered an undeniable truth.

"She is a very peculiar woman," said Mrs. Duncan, "but very agreeable--how much she has seen of the world!"

"Rather too much," said I.

"Yes, she is very ill-natured," said Mrs. Clinly.

"Of course she has her own views," said Mrs. Duncan, "but I must think she is a good woman. She sits alone in her own room a great deal, and I don't believe that any one who is not good likes to be alone."

Mrs. Clinly made no reply but walked to the end of the piazza, to explore (as I, perhaps unjustly, believed) the road by which Mrs. Ryson was to return. "Mrs. Clinly and Mrs. Rollins do not seem like one another," said Mrs. Duncan; "but I dare say they will in a few days, when they come to know one

another better. I am not much accustomed to these public resorts, but it appears to me that one of the uses of coming to them is to do away prejudices. Now there are people here of such different religions; and poor Mrs. Rollins,--some of the ladies think she has no religion at all, because somebody overheard her say, one day, that she believed Mr. Horatio Smith had gone to ---- (you know where), *if there were such a place*.-- Now, she reads her Bible every day, and of course she must believe there is the place she alluded to---

"They are coming!" exclaimed Mrs. Clinly, returning to us, and interrupting Mrs. Duncan's charitable speculations.

"Who is coming?" asked Mrs. Duncan.

"Mrs. Ryson and her ___"

Mrs. Duncan filled the hiatus according to her own honest impressions, and called out to Juliet, "Run, Juliet, love! there's your mamma and papa!

Juliet did not run, but remained drooping, like the beautiful lily she was picking to pieces. "Dear child, don't spoil that lily," said Mrs. Duncan, "you know I gave them to you for your mamma's hair."

"I put mamma's in water," replied Juliet, "and this I kept for myself," and raising her eyes, which I thought were filled with tears, though a dim smile flitted over her lips, "I think," she added, "it feels pretty much as I do."

"Why you dear little thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan, "are you not well? have you a head-

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ache? Perhaps you have eaten something that does not agree with you."

Juliet slid away from the kind lady, without replying, and joining her mother, who had alighted at the end of the piazza, and, her arm in Rupert Reed's, was walking across it to the entrance door. Juliet said something in a low voice to her as they passed me. I did not hear her, but I was struck by Mrs. Ryson's mounting color. I fancied Juliet had announced her father. Mrs. Ryson hastily withdrew her arm, and went to her own apartment.

At tea she appeared with her husband. They sat opposite to me. Mrs. Clinly on my right hand. "Our vis-À-vis does not look quite as animated and excited as we sometimes see her," she whispered; and

added, aloud, to her husband, "do you find Mrs. Ryson improving?"

"Not as I expected," replied Mr. Ryson, "I have been laughing at her for getting the blues at Crescent Beach. To me, this is such a delightful change from the city, that I am half intoxicated with spirits." And so it appeared, for he went on talking in a loud voice with the gentlemen around him, about the city-news, the arrival of the steamer, the rise of corn, etc., etc., while his pretty wife sat by him, languid and listless.

But a change had come over her, when two hours after I saw her in the drawing-room. She had added some pretty decorations to her dress, her color was heightened, and I saw that her husband felt a pleasurable and natural vanity, as, when leading her into the room, he heard her pointed out to some new comers as the prettiest woman in Crescent Beach. He walked up and down the room, his wife on one side, and Juliet on the other, a proud and happy man. "How do you like it here, my child," he said.

"Not half so well as at home, papa."

"You don't? You are the girl for my money! But why, in the name of reason, do you not like it, Juliet? it seems to me you children have it all your own way."

"I do not have it at all my own way," said Juliet. "Before we came to Crescent Beach I was always with mamma, and mamma loved me better than any one, and now___"

"Hush, Juliet," said her mother; "what nonsense are you talking. It was high time we should leave home, you were getting so selfish as to think I must be wholly devoted to you--body and soul."

"Oh, my dear Juliet, you must not be selfish; there is nothing so disagreeable as selfishness!" said the loving step-father. Soon after, in the shuffling up of the company, I found myself on the sofa with the Rysons. Robert Liston, who had been one of a circle of waltzers, took a chair beside me. "Young America!" he exclaimed, with a deep, inward laugh, peculiar to himself. "There is," he added, something either very naive, or frank, or daring, in some of our young ladies. I just heard Miss Lupton say to Ned Bristol, after whirling around with him in what we old-fashioned people should call a very close embrace, "Now, Mr. Bristol, why can't you waltz like Rupert Reed. You come too near me! and you put your arm too far round!" Waltzing may sanctify such remonstrances, but I fancy if Miss Lupton were to make these elegant remarks to a gentleman sitting by her, her father might feel bound to call him out. Oh, Lord! "what we are we know, but not what we shall be." I once thought the freedom of our young women guaranteed their purity."

"You think differently now?"

"I would not trust to freedom alone. Those must be well broken animals that require neither reins nor blinders. And reins, surely, are of no use where such a mother as Mrs. Lupton holds them."

"Anne, my love," she said, as Bristol left her daughter to seek another partner, "you are quite right, Bristol does not waltz comme il faut. Mr. Reed," she said, "I am half mind to ask you to waltz with Anne; entre nous, I infinitely prefer she should waltz only with married men; and you waltz so__so differently from people in general." Reed bowed to the compliment, and took out Miss Anne; and the chary mother has the pleasure of seeing her waltz with the most fashionable man in the room. I think little Juliet, who had nestled close to me, had, without understanding the purport of my friend's remarks, a sort of feeling of his meaning, or perhaps it was the instinct give to the weakest creatures, by which they detect the presence of an enemy; for, soon after, when Rupert Reed asked her mother to waltz, the child said, impulsively, "Oh, don't, mamma -- don't"

"Juliet!" said her mother, in a tone of deep displeasure, and then turning to her husband, she added, "Mr. Ryson does not dance, and he is so seldom here, that much as I love waltzing I shall not waltz to-night." There was a false tone in the voice -- poor lady! her path had become a devious one.

"Oh, Mary!" said the good-natured husband, "waltz with Mr. Reed, by all means, if you like it. Live and let live, Mr. Reed, that's my rule. I will go on the piazza, in the meantime, and smoke a cigar." He went, and escaped many a whisper that might have enlightened him, as his wife went the giddy round with a glowing cheek and downcast eye.

The next evening just before sunset, I saw little Juliet sitting pensive and alone on the piazza, as I was crossing it to go down to the beach for my usual evening walk. I asked her to come with

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me, and she expressed her acquiescence by taking my hand and kissing it with a grace and gentleness that marked all she did. "This is a beautiful vesper-service, Juliet," I said as we paced along over the compacted sands, from which the waves had just retreated. "Vesper-service! what does that mean?" she asked. I explained. She was silent for a few moments, while her fine hazel eye turned to the horizon, along with the black clouds lay like gigantic structures, castle and tower. The sky kindled around the sun, and he seemed to sink down into a field of fire that lit up these black masses, so that they shone like the temples of Peru, with their golden friezes, and incrustations of amethysts, rubies and sapphires. The heavens were tinged to the very zenith with gold, and red shading off to the

faintest rose color; and the ocean, as far as we could see it, reflected the ruddy light.

I felt the child's delicate little fingers pressing my hand more closely, she instinctively paused and gazed on the lines of surf, as the green arches rose, careering on, one after another, and threw off their bright crests. Juliet stood, as if entranced, and then turned her eyes to me, and would have spoken, but her habitual timidity overcame her impulse.

"What is it, Juliet," I asked, "you were going to say something to me?"

"Yes," she said, re-assured by my manner. "After you spoke of the vesper-service, I remembered my mother took me once to a vesper-service, and I was thinking how much better was the ocean than the organ; and it seems to me," she added, turning her eager gaze to the feathery clouds, "as if there were millions of angels standing there, where the sun went down, and I can hear -- almost, I mean -- soft, low music coming from them, like a response to those deep ocean sounds. I have had some such thoughts before, when I walked here alone, but your speaking of the vesper-service made me understand them better!"

I said nothing. I would not encourage the imaginations of this child of seven years -- I dared not repress them. I felt then -- I feel now -- that she may have held communion with the angel that stood before her Father's face. I never saw anything human so angelic! We had already walked beyond the usual limit of the strollers on the beach, we paused again and looked oceanward, as those are wont to do who feel its mysterious charm. Troops of the little beach-bird, were chasing their prey, as the last refluent wave left it on the sand, where there was scarcely water enough to wet their claws, and yet enough to reflect the brilliant dyes of the sky, so that it looked as if they were running over a pearly pavement, and as the crested wave met them they spread their wings and mounted over them -- "skill triumphing over might!" I thought. My little companion had another thought.

"My cousin died last spring," she said. "My cousin Sally Vore. I loved Sally dearly -- these birds make me think of her -- so she rose over all the waves that came against her." The child's voice trembled as she added, "I have nobody now, Sally is gone!"

"Nobody, my dear Juliet! your Mamma?"

"Oh yes, indeed, Mamma; but since we came here, Mamma--" her voice faltered, and she paused.

"Your Mamma is very much occupied here," I said, "and so is every one. You will soon go home and

then you will have your mamma all to yourself again; but it is time for us to turn, there is the evening star shing through that rosy haze--we are alone on the beach." We turned around, and found we were not alone. Retracing our steps for a few moments we met Mrs. Ryson and Rupert Reed. They were neither of them habitual pedestrians, and were both evidently in that sort of absorption which makes one unmindful of time or space. Juliet sprang towards her mother.

"Come home, mamma," she said, "do come home, it's late--come home with me." It was evident, that Mrs. Ryson felt a sudden revulsion in the tide of her feelings at the unexpected meeting with her child. She stood still for a half moment and looked around her like one that grasped the brink of a precipice, and then recovering herself she repulsed the little girl not ungently, and said, "Finish your walk with that lady, my dear; I shall finish up directly." Juliet returned to my side, but she walked on silently and languidly, and often looking back. After a short time, she drew a long breath as if relieved from a pressure, and said, "Mamma has turned about--I do not like that Mr. Rupert Reed; do you?"

I answered heartily, "No, I do not."

"And yet," she resumed, "I should like him if it were not he--you are laughing at me -- I mean if any one else did what he does I should like him. He has given mamma the loveliest case of perfumes, and a beautiful cross. I am sure it is he, for you know he is the only person mamma seems to know very well here; but perhaps I should not tell it -- I have no one to talk to here, and I told you before I thought; and I am afraid mamma would not like it, for she has packed the things quite away at the bottom of her trunk!"

"O!" thought I, "are these things thrown into the scale with protestations and flatteries to buy a woman!--a wife!--a mother! My country-women! you have been marked for your purity, your conjugal virtue, your maternal devotion; you have been held worthy guardians of a holier temple than that kept by the ancient vestals--the temple of married love and purity. Be careful that you enter it with a full sense of its high

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duties, its inappreciable happiness, and infinite rewards. Keep your faith unsullied by a disloyal wish or thought, it will be the brightest jewel of your immortal crown. Let your virtues be as a circle of fire around you, that the serpent, in the form of a libertine, dare not approach. If he come adorned with foreign graces, accomplishments and refinements, he is still the reptile whose touch defiles. Do not admit him to your houses, nor tolerate him in your society! Resist the flood of foreign princesses and

duchesses, who, when the glare of their position vanishes, are lower than the weak, tempted, and betrayed wretches of our streets, whom you would spurn from your thresholds."

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A few days passed on; Mr. Ryson had gone to the South on business, and consequently his frequent runs to Crescent Beach were suspended. Mrs. Ryson seemed to lose all sense of observation of her absorption with her lover--as I am sorry to say Rupert Reed was called, by some of the ladies at Crescent Beach--who, if Mrs. Ryson had been on the brink of the grave with a fever, would not have spoken lightly of it; and yet the abyss yawning before her--and oh, how to be closed!--was infinitely worse, more hopeless than the grave. It was impossible to see her without feeling an interest in her fate. She was not yet five and twenty. Her face did not indicate strength of character, but had the positive beauty of perfect symmetry and coloring, and added to this a certain sweetness, affectionateness of innocence still hung about her, giving charm to the whole, like the fading light of the sinking sun. Besides, she was the mother of Juliet--this should have exorcised an evil spirit!

It was about ten o'clock Sunday morning, when I was walking with Mrs. Duncan on the piazza. Mrs. Duncan is the person in the world of whom if I had a favor to ask (without any claim but my want) I should have asked for it. So, I presume, thought Mrs. Ryson, for she came from her room and said, "I am obliged, Mrs. Duncan, to go suddenly to town to see a relative who is ill. I may be detained a day or two. Will you be kind enough to take charge of Juliet?"

"Oh, certainly, I shall be delighted, my husband and I both think she is the sweetest child we ever saw. I think it quite an honor to be entrusted with her. If I had had such a daughter, I should have been but a worshipper of idols; I could think of nothing else."

Mrs. Ryson's eyes were suddenly raised for the first time. They fell again, and a deadly paleness overspread her face. Mrs. Duncan did not seem to observe it. She was most unsuspecting of mortals.

"How do you go to town," she asked; "there is no coach on Sunday."

"No, I am going in a private conveyance."

"Alone! that's not pleasant. Would you not like to have my husband go with you? He goes at any rate, to-morrow. I'll run and speak to him."

"No, no, don't, I am not going alone. Mr. Reed--is--has offered to drive me--he is going to town on his way home." Mrs. Ryson turned away with a hasty farewell, and Mrs. Duncan called after her. "Where is Juliet, I want to tell the dear child how glad I am to have her for a little while."

"She is bathing," replied Mrs. Ryson, "She is not quite well; I thought she wanted it, and I persuaded her, much against her will."

As she left us, "It's a pity, it's a pity she goes up with that man!" exclaimed Mrs. Duncan, in the voice of a sorrowing angel; "not that there is any real harm in it, but I fear some observations will be made. Everybody here is not charitable!" She touched my arm and pointed to the end of the piazza. There stood Rupert Reed's equipage, his liveried servant, and Reed himself biting his nails with impatience.

I know not what I should have replied to Mrs. Duncan. Just at that moment our attention was attracted by an unusual noise at the beach. It was the bathing hour, and there were some commotion there--shrill screams mingled with the booming of the waves. In a moment the Beach-wagon, (the vehicle was so called that conveyed the bathers to and fro,) came driving up at most unusual speed, followed by people half dressed, or in bathing dresses. Something had happened, some cause of general consternation. The alarm spread, the people who were gathering in the drawing-room prepared for church, poured on to the piazza. At this moment, veiled, and shrinking from observation, Mrs. Ryson came through the front entrance. The wagon had reached the steps, and amidst exclamations of horror, the dead, drowned body of little Juliet was lifted out of it. The crowd parted, the mother saw her child, uttered a piercing shriek, and fainted on the floor!

Every measure was taken to restore life, but in vain. No one could tell how the accident had happened. Several ladies had seen Juliet go in; some had held her by the hand. The surf was not particularly strong, and no one had apprehended danger. No one had missed her til the man-bather saw her rising quite unconscious to the surface. She had fulfilled her mission--she had saved her mother's honor, and passed to immortality.

"O not when the death-prayer is said,
The life of life departs;
The body in the grave is laid,
Its beauty in our hearts."