

“*The Bridal Ring*” by Miss Sedgwick [1833].

The following account, received from a friend, we have ventured to transcribe, and prepare for publication.

It is now nearly three years since I was told that two travellers, an elderly gentleman and his daughter, had stopped at the principal inn of the village, and were like to be detained there a long time, by the illness of the young lady, whom our physician had pronounced to be threatened with a ‘course of fever.’ This I knew to be an opinion which our professor, of what Napoleon has so happily called ‘the conjectural art,’ was apt oracularly to intimate of every case which he did not comprehend, and moreover that his nostrums and confinement in a close room in most cases verified his prediction.

My humanity was awakened by the forlorn condition of the strangers, and, I may as well confess the infirmity, my curiosity was excited by all that I heard of them. I was reminded of the story of La Roche. Who that has ever read that most beautiful, and in this age of story writing, still unequalled tale, could hear of a father and daughter, detained at an inn, without enquiring into their condition? I could not, and I repaired to the tavern, secretly hoping to find that some resemblance to ‘Mademoiselle,’ or to the saintly La Roche, in my travellers, who seemed to me to have lightened upon our uneventful village, to sustain my almost famished appetite for romance. I was announced to the father, and admitted to the little parlor he occupied. My first glimpse of captain St. Clair put my imagination to flight. A more striking contrast to the meek, devout La Roche, could scarcely have been found. The captain had the erect and elaborate deportment that is the usual result of military breeding; the consequential *etiquettical* politeness that is rather a tribute to self-respect, than a deference to the subject of it. He was on the verge of old age, but without any thing of the gentleness, humility, and spirituality that so well becomes the old, and is the crown of those who have ‘fought a good fight.’

He received me politely, being, as he has since told me, struck with what Johnson calls the air of a ‘born gentleman;’ the only quotation from a book I ever heard from the captain. I apologized for my intrusion, by boasting of my talents as a nurse, and expressing an earnest wish to be of service to his daughter. The worn, broken and neglected, as it now was, there was one chord that vibrated to the touch, and that chord I had fortunately struck.

His courtesy, as formal, external, and military as his epaulettes, gave place to an expression of real feeling, as he conducted me to his daughter’s apartment.

Dear Arabella! after the lapse of three years of daily and confidential intercourse, can I recall my first impressions of the youthful stranger, who, even amidst the unbecoming shrouding of a sick bed, seemed to me one of the most lovely and graceful creatures I had ever seen. A small bible was lying open on her pillow, and beside it a freshly plucked white rose, whose leaves were not more soft nor fair than her cheek. Her night cap was untied and pushed back, and discovered such a wealth of hair as I have never seen equalled in hue or quality, unless it be in Miss Hall’s exquisite picture of the Greek girl, Garaphelia. Every one acknowledged the tenderness and sweetness that characterized Arabella’s beauty; cavillers sometimes said she wanted spirit and variety, but to me, there was an immeasurable power in the purity and elevation of her countenance, and her eye had the calm, mysterious, wonderful expression which reveals the deathless spirit that informs this soul speaking organ. Captain St. Clair communicated my errand to his daughter. She gave me her hand, and expressed her gratitude with an

earnestness and simplicity that evinced her susceptibility to kindness. Her accent was slightly foreign. 'My daughter,' said captain St. Clair, 'unhappily, cannot quite rid herself of her French accent. She has lived for the most part in the south of France, in the family of a protestant clergyman, a relative of her mother. Poor Belle! she has always been delicate, and I was flattered into the hope that a favorable climate would strengthen her, but it has been of no use, she still bends like a reed to every blast.'

'My dear father is too anxious,' said Miss St. Clair, looking at me with a smile—'And can I help being anxious, madam,' replied the captain, 'when all the treasure I have on God's earth—yes all—is in that frail casket.'

'But you are too apprehensive papa—I had but a slight chill and fever, and papa must send for a physician, and then I must take medicine.'

'And of course be sick, Miss St. Clair—I well understand all those sequences, if indeed they be not consequences. But as the doctor has humanely suspended his drugs to day, we will try what nursing and the sensitive powers of nature will do.'

Arabella gratefully accepted my proposition—the circumstances of sickness banish ceremony—my superior age inspired Arabella with a childlike confidence; her father was delighted with my success, and before the day was over, we were on the footing of intimate friends—and before a week had passed, she and her father were inmates of my house. I had learned their history, and become thoroughly acquainted with their characters.

Captain St. Clair, when considerably past forty, had married a lovely young woman, the daughter of a Swiss officer in the English service—she had died a few months after the birth of Arabella. The regiment to which captain St. Clair was attached, was ordered to the East Indies, and Arabella was left with her mother's connections in the south of France. The captain, from a series of ill fortune, for such he esteemed his regiment being exempted from the desperate chances of war, wore away year after year, without promotion, and finally, when he had a reasonable expectation of a majority, he was superseded by a young officer. In his first disgust, he resigned his commission and returned to Europe; and being joined by his daughter in England, where his asperity had been increased by finding himself forgotten or slighted by the friends of his youth, he embarked for America, and withdrew from a country whose ingratitude, he thought, had severed the bonds of his allegiance. But, in spite of his resentment, the captain's long cherished national partialities often broke forth. An Ethiopian will change his color before an Englishman ceases to be English—before he changes the first article of faith in his national creed—that England is the wisest, happiest, best portion of the habitable globe. Captain St. Clair's strict adherence to this creed, atoned for his voluntary expatriation, though it manifested a discrepancy, (not very uncommon) between faith and practice. If he ever found a shadow of a fault in Arabella, he traced it to her French education, and whatever was wrong in America, was so because it was not English. I remember asking my new friends, before I knew them quite well enough to understand their biases, 'if they had ever seen any thing so beautiful as our autumnal foliage? No pen,' I added, in the fervor of my home bred admiration, 'no pen can describe it; no painter dare copy it.'

'No, madam, no, certainly not,' replied the captain, 'it is gaudy and unnatural—quite unlike any thing in England.'

I appealed to Arabella, if she did not think it magnificent. 'I am not fond of brilliant

colors', she answered, 'I am so used to the russet hue of our old trees at Clermont.' How different are the same sentiments from different persons. Arabella turned away to hide the tear that had risen at the remembrance of her French home, while captain St. Clair graciously proceeded to inform me of the particulars in which English scenery far excelled ours.

Captain St. Clair was in quest of a place to fix his residence, when accident detained him in our village. The American world was all before him, and the advantage of being near me, as he kindly said, induced him to purchase a place in my neighborhood, that just suited his taste and finances. Clermont cottage, as Arabella named her new residence in memory of her former home, was about a mile from the village, on the borders of a pretty sheet of water, that she called a lake, and I am not therefore bound to give it its vulgar appellation. There is *some* virtue in names, and the new nomenclature which Arabella adopted at Clermont, graced the other refinements introduced there. The *farm house* became a cottage—a name to conjure with, and call up a thousand images of rural beauty. The *front yard* that sloped to the lake, after having the ambitious fence that enclosed it removed, became a lawn. The *stoop*, with no other alteration than a latticing of sweet briars and honey suckles, was converted into a *piazza*—and the *pond*, an appellation that recalls to mind pickerel and geese, became a lake—a name consecrated by poetry—one of the water privileges of the muses.

My friend seemed to have a mysterious tie to the innocent and beautiful in nature. Never have I seen the birds so tame as they were on the lawn at Clermont cottage, and the flowers that grew under Arabella's culture were more graceful, had a sweeter odour, and a brighter tint—at least I thought so—than any other.

I have often wondered that Arabella's reserved manners and secluded life did not give offence to the good people of the village. She never left her home, except to see me, or a visit of charity. Her superior elegance was tempered by a soft diffidence, that seemed to fall over it like a veil, increasing its charm, while it dimmed its lustre. She was religious, and yet, if I may be allowed the word, her religion was the most *uncreeded* I ever knew. The bible she never criticized, but believed with implicit faith. In our age and land of theological discussion, she could not always be so fortunate as to escape hearing controversy, but she listened to it as a child listens, silent and deferential it may be—but uninterested and uncomprehending. If ever appealed to, she modestly replied that having bred protestant in the midst of catholics, she had been instructed to avoid theological discussion, and to be content with feeling and practicing religion; and in these departments of our faith all acknowledged her superiority, although some might have regretted that she had not been indoctrinated in the mysteries of theology. To confess the truth, Arabella was rather ignorant in all departments of science. The little pedants of our infant schools, who rattle off their definitions of spheroids, rhomboids, and equilateral triangles, far surpassed her in science. She had a respectable acquaintance with history, but of politics she knew no more than a fair Circassian, though she read the newspapers aloud to her father from beginning to end. She was familiar with the best poets of England, Italy, and France—this was the extent of her erudition. She had an exquisite taste in poetry, and her sweet voice seemed to give it its natural vehicle of music. It was perhaps this sublimated aliment that gave a romantic cast to her mind. She had no taste for romance reading. Few works of this description had enough of nature and elevation for so pure and unperverted a mind as hers.

I used often to speculate with womanly solicitude, on Arabella's future destiny. Her

father, according to the common course of nature, could not long survive; Arabella was so tender, so relying in her character, that the protection, and dependence of conjugal life seemed essential to her, but where in our 'working day world,' and in the obscurity in which she lived, was she to find a person suited to her. How vain in our forecast!

A popular law school, which soon became celebrated from the reputation of the eminent professor who presided over it, was established in the village, about a year after captain St. Clair's settlement among us. Pupils resorted hither from all parts of the United States. Among the rest came Wingfield Clayborne, a son of a former acquaintance of mine. Of course he was welcomed to all the hospitalities I could offer him. At my house he obtained the rare privilege of frequent intercourse with Arabella. I say, rare, for owing to captain St. Clair's aristocratic demeanor, and Arabella's reserve, and her unaffected and utter indifference to young men in their official character of beaux, the law students had no access to Clermont cottage. In vain were formal introductions, in vain poetic effusions to the lily, the snow drop and the snow berry, for by the name of these pure and cold emblems was she addressed. In vain, too, moonlight serenades—she remained as impassive as polar ice to the sunbeam. Tender and affectionate as my young friend was to me, as devoted as she was to her father, I sometimes doubted whether she possessed a due portion of that sensibility essential to the perfection of women. Alas! I was not long left to doubt.

Clayborne was at first sight struck with Arabella's beauty and grace. He admired the refinement, and even the reserve of her manners. He had himself been partly educated abroad. He admired the refinement, and even the reserve of her manners. He had himself been partly educated abroad. He disliked excessively what he called the *brusquerie* of our northern ladies: laughed at their all-knowingness, and detested their independence and rationality. I defended my countrywomen, and asked Arabella if she did not think there was more of false refinement, than true sentiment in Clayborne's fastidiousness. She replied that she had no skill at analyzing, but I saw by the deep suffusion on her cheek, that she understood Clayborne's opinions, as they were meant as tribute to her. It was plain whatever Clayborne did not admire, he did devotedly admire my friend, and that her heart was filled with new emotions which she indulged without question or fear.

Clayborne's tastes corresponded with hers, but I sometimes thought his were merely the offspring of a cultivated imagination. I feared, too, (but I was aware that I was somewhat jealous for my friend,) that Clayborne's love was tinged and adulterated by gratified vanity. That he had the pride of a virtuoso, in attaining a gem that was unattainable to others. But I did not often criticise severely; I could not, Clayborne knew too well how to propitiate the few he cared to lease. I can now look back upon a thousand little flatteries that I then called attentions.

The captain's heart too was soon completely won. He pronounced Clayborne the only accomplished man he had seen in America, which, 'no doubt,' he would add in one of his patriotic parentheses, 'is owing to his having seen society in England.' I believed him to be well principled, and I felt him to be excessively interesting, and regarding anxiously Arabella's solitary condition; and casting a prudent eye on the future prospects of this well born and talented young man, I was gratified by his intense devotion to my friend; and I observed with satisfaction, the sudden flushing of her cheek and faltering of her voice at his approaching footstep. She dwelt on the passages of poetry he selected, cherished every flower he gave her,

sung over his favorite songs, and betrayed by many other signs, infallible to a veteran eye, the existence of a sentiment of whose power over her she was not herself fully aware.

After a thousand indirect, but intelligible declarations, Clayborne made a formal avowal of his hopes; they were sanctioned by Arabella, and ratified by captain St. Clair.

Clayborne's father was dead. He had no one to consult but a doting mother who had never denied him any thing. He showed me her letter in reply to one communicating his engagement. She assented to his wishes, and sent a polite assurance of future kindness to Miss St. Clair, but the letter concluded with an expression of disappointment that seemed to have been too pungent to be repassed, that her son had neglected the article of fortune, so important to him, in his matrimonial arrangement. The letter displeased me, I was displeased too, with his showing it to me, and for the first time, seeing Arabella's lover in an unfavorable light, I fancied his ardor had abated since his certainty of possessing her affections. I began to analyse his character, to suspect that the element of his fastidiousness was pride, and that his demand of an intense devotion, an exclusive and all absorbing sentiment, proceeded, not as he fancied from sensibility, but from a purely human feeling, compounded of selfishness and vanity.

Not long after the engagement, a circumstance occurred that increased my concern, lest my pure and trustful friend, had lavished her heart on one unworthy of the treasure.

Captain St. Clair's banker in London failed, and his narrow income was reduced to less than a hundred pounds sterling per annum. This, with the place he occupied, would have been an ample fortune to a New England father and daughter, who should have understood thoroughly what wonderful science, the worth of a shilling, and should have had the maxims of poor Richard, inwrought in the fabric of their characters. But though my friend was capable of any mode or degree of self denial, the art of turning a penny was an inscrutable to her as the art of the alchemist; and how, without some such legerdemain, was a luxurious table, and wine, his staff of life, to be provided for her father?

Captain St. Clair was prostrated by his misfortune. Arabella communicated to me his despondency. 'If I could do any thing?' said she, half enquiringly.

'You can,' I replied, 'but how, my dear Arabella, with your feelings and your reserved manners, how can you meet the trials and mortifications of a sub-teacher in a boarding school, for instance?'

'Oh, do not think so meanly of me,' she said, 'if my feelings disqualify me for my duties, the sooner I get rid of them the better.'

'Then, my dear child, your troubles are at an end. Mrs. Butler, (Mrs. B. was the mistress of a successful school in the village,) has just parted with her teacher of music, your accomplishment in music will command the highest salary she can give.'

Arabella begged me to secure the place for her immediately, and said she would return home and make the plan acceptable to her father.

'But Clayborne,' said I, 'he must first be consulted.'

Arabella hesitated for a moment, and then replied. 'No; to consult him, would be to appeal to him. We will make our arrangements, and communicate them to him afterwards.'

The arrangement was quickly made. Mrs. Butler was liberal in her terms. The girls were enchanted with the expectation of having the lovely Miss St. Clair for their teacher, and the captain's pride, after a slight hesitation, deferred to his necessities.

But Clayborne's pride was invincible. He was at first indignant. He felt injured. He remonstrated with me, and entreated Arabella; the fatigues, vexations, and anxieties of a teacher seemed never to cross his mind but the degradation! 'Arabella St. Clair, a teacher in a yankee school!' he exclaimed, 'at the call and beck of half bred girls; daughters of tailors and shoemakers!' At first I laughed at his folly, and then treated it with the serious contempt it deserved. I even tried to solace his pride by reminding him of the illustrious persons that had been compelled by vicissitudes, to make their talents available in this way; I told him that throughout New England, even in our polished Metropolis, teachers were on the highest level; but he was unyielding, and so was my gentle friend. Her decision might be called pride too, but it was that ratified and rectifying principle that is sustained by conscience.

Her first and present duty was to her father. If, as Clayborne urged, she had consented to an immediate marriage, she must have left her father with a narrowed income to pine in solitude, and have encumbered Clayborne with a burden of expences, before he had finished the study of his profession. She did not waver for an instant, but entered on her new occupation with a vigor and grace that surprised even me, her fond friend.

One thing I noted; after this, Clayborne, though he had been a most passionate admirer of Arabella's music, never asked her to play or sing. I once inconsiderately remarked this to her, she made no reply, but I perceived that her eyes filled with tears.

Months passed on. Arabella's employment inevitably brought her into observation, and her beauty, grace and accomplishments were a constant theme. Clayborne's passion, or at least its manifestations, became more ardent, and as the time for his return to his native state, drew night, he was possessed with a lover's apprehensions and jealousies. He expressed a fear; it might have arisen from the conscious fallibility of his own affections, that he might be superseded. He entreated Arabella to permit their marriage to take place before his departure. He obtained her father's consent, this gave authority to his entreaties, but Arabella resisted them, and resisted the pleadings of her own heart. Her resolution was fixed, never to leave her father while his well being depended on her exertions. In his selfish importunity he betrayed a doubt of her constancy. She meekly replied, that her fidelity to her father, should be her warrant that she could not prove faithless to him.

This was the only approach to a boast I ever heard from her lips. How well did her subsequent conduct justify it!

The evening preceeding Clayborne's departure, the lovers passed on my piazza; I took care that they should not be molested by intruders. It was late when I heard his parting footsteps; I waited for Arabella, but she did not appear, and afraid that she would be exhausted by the indulgence of her feelings, I went to her. She stood where Clayborne had left her, leaning her head against one of the pillars of the piazza. Her hands were clasped and raised, and I perceived on her finger a diamond ring, which Clayborne had always worn, and which he had told me was given to him by his mother at the time of her second marriage. It had been his father's bridal gift, and he had received it on condition that it should never be transferred, till he placed it on the finger of his bride. After a few days, and when I thought Arabella could bear a little bantering, I reminded her of this. She said nothing, but I never shall forget the sudden contraction of her brow, nor the deep painful blush that suffused her pale cheek and alabaster neck.

Clayborne wrote by every post. His letters, which I have since seen, were as impassioned,

and almost as eloquent as Rousseau's; they all began, 'My beloved wife,' and finished with 'your devoted husband.'

After a while, they became more temperate, and contained such notices of his occupations and pleasures, as she could read to me. In less than six months the 'beloved wife' gave place to 'dear Arabella,' and the fever heat of the lover seemed to have subsided to the calm temperament of the friend. Arabella, till now, mindful of every present duty, devoted to the happiness of every one around her, became abstracted and almost melancholy; the faint but distinct rose like tinge on her cheek, faded to absolute and sickly paleness. She still gave lessons at the school, but with languor and effort.

One little month more passed away. She was sitting with me one day, when my servant brought her a letter. She read it, sat for a few moments as if she were petrified, then threw on her hat and shawl, and left me without a word of explanation. I did not for a long time know the contents of the letter. I have since seen it: what follows is an extract from it.

'After long and painful reflection on the subject, my dear Arabella, I have come to the decision that it would be ungenerous in me, not to offer to release you from an engagement, in the shackles of which you are wasting your beautiful youth. Gifted creature! you may create your own destiny! while I, a poor devil of a lawyer, must go my daily round for 'nought but provender.' There was much more in the letter, but all 'words, words' without any distinct, or certainly apparent, meaning.

I transcribe the following passage from his next letter. 'You are in the *Melpomene* vein, my dear Arabella, and since you have taken me so seriously, why seriously will be. I cannot see, I confess, why you should estimate promises made in a moment of excited, and extravagant feeling as indissolubly binding. I do not claim to be as deeply read in the code of sentiment as you are, but it seems to me to be a very plain dictate of common sense, the promises cannot be binding if the parties will mutually relinquish them. Why be tremulous over a fancied duty? I disdain to hold you bound by a by-gone promise, and henceforth release you from any obligation in any way contracted with me, and wish 'as if we had never met.'

After this Arabella received at distant intervals, and answered letters from Clayborne, but his were burned as soon as read, and I could only guess at their contents. Her father was ignorant and unsuspecting of any change in her affairs. He imputed the change in Arabella's appearance to Clayborne's protracted absence, and sometimes wondered that the young man no longer forwarded him the southern newspapers, which he had at first done punctually. When I remarked to him that Arabella's health seemed to be failing, he took the alarm, insisted that she should relinquish teaching, and acquiesced in my proposal that they should abandon the cottage and pass the winter with me. Arabella was still alive to every look and word of kindness, and she gratefully acceded to my wishes.

Not long after their removal to my house, I received a letter from Clayborne. He said he presumed I was aware that his engagement with Miss St. Clare was at an end, and he begged my influence to persuade her to relinquish and forward to him a diamond ring. 'Miss St. Clair, he says, 'will my dear madam pay deference to your opinion, and your good sense will at once perceive her weakness in retaining, from girlish sentiment, a ring which has no longer any significance to her, and is of incalculable moment to me, as the lady to whom I hope shortly to be united, for reasons which it is not necessary to communicate, insists on deferring our nuptials

till he receives it. I would be the last to impute any baseness of mind to Miss St. Clair; but how am I to explain her obstinate retention of the pledge of a retracted vow.'

All the passions of my woman's nature were roused. I could not comprehend why Arabella should permit such a request to be repeated, and I resolved if I had any influence with her, that no indulgence of memory or hope should delay the transmission of the ring to its most unworthy giver. It was a difficult task to approach the subject. Affectionate as Arabella was, and as trustful as a child on all other subjects, she had never even alluded to Clayborne since she first doubted his fidelity. I first spoke in hints. Arabella would not understand me. I then went directly and explicitly to the point. Bitterly have I since repented it! I read Clayborne's letter to her. I reproached her with throwing away her life, in cherishing a hopeless passion for a most unworthy object. I besought her by every motive of pride and delicacy—I adjured her, as she would preserve my esteem and her own self respect, to relinquish the worthless pledge of false and broken vows.

She heard me out with an expression of dignity and gentleness. When I afterwards recalled it, I knew she had pitied me while I reproached her. When I finished, she collected all the energies of her soul to reply, and she did so in a low but sustained voice.

'You too doubt me,' she said, 'but I will not blame you. Cannot you believe that I have sufficient reasons for retaining this ring. I cannot now communicate them. Your judgment might differ from mine, and I have no strength to oppose your arguments. Death alone can divorce me from this ring—it has long been in my eyes the signet of my death warrant. Clayborne will not have to wait long for it,' she added, holding up her emaciated hand, and showing me the small guard she was obliged to wear to retain the ring on her slender finger. 'When you send it to him, send it simply with a notice of my death.'

'You have reproached me with cherishing a hopeless passion for a worthless object. Indeed you have mistaken me. My love for Clayborne was extinguished, when I discovered that he whom I love was a creature of my imagination—a creature of noble qualities and high aims; of pure, tender and disinterested affections, one whom neither events nor place, life nor death could change—but to improve.'

'My dear friend, it was not continuing, but ceasing to love, that gave such a shock to my life. It was the sudden loss of that which was the sweet employment of my thoughts, the object of my efforts, the stimulant of my mind. In the first amazement of my grief I forgot that life was God's gift, to be preserved and cherished, not for the object I should select, but for those it should please him to assign me. For this, I deserve your reproach. I selfishly shrunk from my duties; I permitted the feelings that were given me for benevolent uses to consume my life. I meditate much and bitterly on all this. And I trust that He who looks with a pitiful eye on the sins of his children, has forgiven me. I feel my death to be rapidly approaching; I dread it only for my poor father.'

For the first time, Arabella shed tears, she paused for a few moments, and wept in my arms, silently and freely.

'I cannot,' she resumed, 'think of his loneliness and disappointment without anguish.'

I assured her that her father should want no kindness I could render. She replied, that she doubted not my kind disposition, 'but who,' she added, with characteristic truth and simplicity, 'who, but his child can bear with all the infirmities of my poor old father?'

She requested me never again to speak to her of Clayborne. 'I am not willing,' she said, 'to break the holy calm it has pleased God to grant me. Are you now satisfied with me, my dearest friend?'

I told her, 'that I was certain she acted from the purest and most exalted motives.' 'Simply, from a sense of duty,' she replied, and the conversation dropped there.

Afterwards, for many weeks, she constantly, though almost imperceptibly, declined. She made unceasing efforts to conceal the progress of her malady from her father. 'I long to be at rest,' she would say to me, 'but for his sake, I will do and suffer whatever may prolong my life.' And most patiently did she listen to medical advice, most cheerfully take every remedy prescribed. It had been her custom to play her father to sleep in the afternoon, and this she continued to do, even after she became so weak, that she secretly begged me to sit by her, and support her with my arm. Every day, till the very last week of her life, she sat or reclined on the sofa, till her father retired to bed, and then she was carried exhausted to her own apartment.

It was heart breaking to see one so generous in her affection, so true to her duties, the victim of a selfish and capricious passion. It is true, in spite of the poet of nature, and the millions that quote him, that many have died for love. Not of love, perhaps, for it is in its nature a sustaining and vivifying passion; but from the extinction of hope, of expectation, of purpose, of all that breathes a soul into life.

Clayborne, finding his letter to me ineffectual, addressed a similar one to captain St. Clair. The old man had, I believe, before this, gradually come to a right conclusion respecting the recreant love; but his pride and his feeling were too deeply wounded to allow him to speak on the subject. Never did I witness anything so fierce and frightful as his rage at Clayborne's letter. He swore that he would rather have cut off his daughter's hand and sent it, than to have waited for a second request for the ring. When the energy of his rage was spent, he wept like a child, and in this moment of weakness, I obtained a reluctant promise from him that he would not disturb Arabella with this grievous subject. He kept his promise, and when with her was apparently calm, but

'The deepest ice that ever froze,
Can only o'er the surface close;
The living stream lies quick below,
And flows—and cannot cease to flow.'

A few more weeks passed on, and I received a southern newspaper. One passage was encircled by a pen line. It was the advertisement of Clayborne's marriage with a Miss Wythe, a lady of whom I had heard as a beauty and a fortune. Of course, I burnt the paper without communicating its tidings. Arabella's life was gently wearing away; each day left her with abated strength, but her spirit seemed to receive peace and courage, from the fountain of strength and joy to which it was so rapidly approaching. Even her father caught a ray from the light of that world that was opening upon his child. He was calm and gentle, and would listen, with a look almost devotional, to her intreaties that would be resigned to the will of God. He would walk in her room and sit by her bed hour after hour, and forget and forego his walk, his cigars, and his wine, and all those daily recurring indulgencies that had seemed to constitute his sum of life. I was sitting one evening beside Arabella. She had passed a day of extreme weakness, hardly discovering any consciousness, excepting once or twice when I read a few passages from

the bible, and she looked up with a sweet smile of assent—the response of her spirit to the words of inspiration.

My servant, by mistake, admitted two of our neighbors, who, with some drops of benevolence, have a flood of curiosity that impels them to witness, wherever they can, the last conflict of humanity. Use has given them a sort of official right to intrude on deathbed scenes, and they go to them, *con amore*, like the wretched cummers in the ‘Bride of Lammermoor.’ When they entered, I was sitting beside Arabella, holding her hand in mine. Her beautiful hair lay in rich masses on the pillow. There was a slight contraction on her brow, and a quick and labored respiration; excepting these manifestations of the presence of the spirit, she was as serene as death itself. Mrs. Smith came to the bedside, and after standing there for a few moments, ‘she changes fast, I think ma’am,’ she said,— I answered by pointing to a seat at the farther end of the room. She turned to her companion and said ‘she still breathes, Patty, and that is all.’ They seated themselves on each side captain St. Clair; protracted anxiety seemed to have exhausted his sensibility. His eyes were half closed, and he was nearly unconscious of any external impressions. Yet it was curious to see the power of habit in his customary politeness. ‘It is a dying world, captain,’ said Mrs. Smith.

‘Yes, madam.’

‘And an uncommon dying season it has been,’ interposed Miss Patty—‘eleven deaths since Fast—no, I am wrong, widow Brown’s was the tenth, Miss Arabella’s will be the eleventh. It is a solemn time, captain.’

‘Yes, madam.’

‘It is a dark world, captain,’ resumed Mrs. Smith, ‘and we are blind creatures. If Miss Arabella is prepared, we ought not to mourn for her.’

‘Madam?’

Here I interposed; I observed a slight tremulousness about Arabella’s mouth, that indicated she was not unnoticing, as I had supposed, and I hesitated no longer to request the woman to leave the room.

But their dull sense did not feel the instruments of torture they were handling. ‘If you should need us during the night, captain,’ said Miss Patty, ‘don’t hesitate to send for us.’

‘Need you!—for what, in Heaven’s name?’ asked the captain, for the first time speaking naturally.

‘To lay out your daughter, sir.’

‘Good God!’ exclaimed the wretched father; the woman left the apartment

Arabella gently pressed my hand, opened her eyes, and fixed them intently on me. ‘Am I dying,’ she asked, ‘tell me truly, I did not think it was so near, but I am not frightened.’

‘I believe, my dear child,’ I replied, ‘that you have little more to endure.’

‘God’s will be done,’ she said, ‘I am ready; one thing yet remains to do, and then I am perfectly ready.’ Her father approached the bedside at the sound of her voice. ‘This ring,’ she continued, feebly raising her hand, ‘was put on my finger on your piazza, the night before Clayborne’s departure. He feared my constancy, and he prayed me to kneel with him, and with God for our witness to exchange the marriage vow. I promised in the awful presence we had invoked, to wear this ring till death should divorce us.’

Her father heard her thus far, and then a flood that had been so long accumulating and

fretting against its barriers, burst forth in imprecations and curses. Never shall I forget the deep heart rending groan, that Arabella, who had scarcely given an audible sigh to her own injuries and sufferings, now uttered; never can I describe the energy with which she raised her head from the pillow, and clasping her arms around her father's neck, drew his head down to her bosom, saying, 'Oh father, as you hope to be forgiven; as you are thankful to God for giving peace to your dying child, take back those horrid words and forgive him—father, forgive him.'

'I do—I do, my child.'

'Dear father!' she murmured, and pressed her lips to his burning cheek. A few moments after, I disengaged her clasped hands from her father's neck, while yet the sweet smile, which the parted spirit had left there, hovered on her lips.

-----'Death should come,
Gently to one of the gentle mould like thee.

Close thy sweet eyes calmly and without pain;
And we will trust in God, to see thee yet again.'