

Walter

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LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP. BY MISS C. M. SEDGWICK.

I was on a visit, not long since, to a friend of mine, who still in the unimpaired maturity of life, is surrounded by grown and growing children. Her summer residence is in the neighborhood of a thickly populated village, and being a most gracious lady, she is sometimes rather over visited by her social neighbors.

We were soon arranged for our morning's business, and a lovely household group than the mother and tried descriptions of mamma, fair, fat and forty, indicated health and produced by a wise simplicity of living, by the most beneficent disposition and the sweetest serenity of temper.

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than the space we have now assigned to other matter, so we leave her to be guessed at by a few glimpses of her heart through her words. She began to read to us, but she read rather dreamily. Her poetic eyes often wandered to the mist floating over the mountains, and finally coming upon Dr. Johnson's saying that he believed marriages would be full as happy as they are, if matches were made by the lord chancellor, she threw down the volume, saying, 'What a detestable old goose he is!'

'I dare say; Clara, you would like a husband of the chancellor's choosing, and would take him with 'thank you sir!' and 'if you like him, sir, I am sure I shall.'

'But utterly worthless as reason and judgment are in themselves, Anne,' said Mrs. Reyburn, with a grave smile, 'may they not be allowed to sanction an influence or even to decide an insufficient love?'

'The whole world! That is talking in very general terms; but suppose a case—If you had a lover whom you liked extremely, but did not love, according to your extravagant notion of love—'

'Do not interrupt me, Anne. Suppose that your father and I approved him; would you choose him from all the world for you; that your brothers were his warm friends; that the children loved—'

My friend influenced the formation of her children's characters rather by the atmosphere of affection and kindness with which she surrounded herself, than by any direct authority upon them. This is an admirable and sufficient agent, with gentle and pliant materials. Anne has one of those strong characters, that must do for itself the hard work of education; the training of feeling, the subduing of passion, the maturing of reason; must for itself fight the battle of life.

family, and an impaired fortune. Mrs. Ewing took a small house, and let her best two rooms to a single gentleman, who boarded with her, and paid liberally—Mr. John Sheafe. He was a singular man, this Mr. John Sheafe, but his singularities were graceful and pleasing. He was about thirty when he took possession of his rooms. Dear Mrs. Ewing! she used to say that he gave her no more trouble than a kitten, and yet he had his peculiarities. Through his rooms were scattered with some convenience, and in a place, he did not scruple to let in all the little Ewings—a perfect menagerie—of wild young things they were—and they might wrap themselves in the bedclothes, pull down the curtains, pile up the chairs, rattle down the shovel and tongs, anything but touch his pictures and books, and the little sinners, like their unhappy progenitors, were very apt to seize on the forbidden things, and then they were driven forth from their paradise, and the doors shut upon them.—Sheafe would try his best to look like a thunder storm, but the sun always shone through the clouds, and the little wretches were weather-wise enough to know that no storm could gather there, and though Sheafe had told them they never should enter his room again, and Mrs. Ewing with her sternest face (poor Mrs. Ewing! it was as difficult for her as for her lodger to counterfeit wrath,) assured them Mr. Sheafe was very angry indeed. Before twenty-four hours passed away, they had one by one stolen in, and they were as lawless and uproarious and as welcome as ever. Sheafe had one peculiarity that puzzled Mrs. Ewing to the day of her death. Though of a spirit so social that in every relation in life he felt and made felt what had been happily called fellow-feeling, he had an aversion to being included in social arrangements. He prized above everything else his individual independence, and when Mrs. Ewing would say, 'Mr. Sheafe, our friends so-and-so, are going to have a picnic on Staten Island, or are going to Long Island; or wherever the party of pleasure might be, and I have promised you will join us,—or we are going to have such a pleasant party this evening, all your friends—do come home,' he invariably replied, 'no—don't count on me, it is not probable. I can be there, or 'be here, and finally perhaps at the very moment they began to recover from their disappointment of his not being with them, he appeared among them, the very soul of all their pleasures.'

'Mamma,' interrupted Clara Reyburn, you said you were going to tell us a love story.' 'So I am my dear, and I am just introducing you to one of the parties.'

'That Mr. Sheafe, mamma? Why you said he was thirty years old?' 'Yes, Clara, and he was thirty-five before I came to the love part of my story.'

'Oh! horrid, mamma!' Mrs. Reyburn proceeded: 'Mr. Sheafe was not rich, but he had an easy fortune and few wants, and he continued to let it fall, like the quiet and pleasant dew of heaven, on the right and on the left. There was no burden in his favors. For five years he managed to make Mrs. Ewing live in a house rent free, of which he said he had taken a lease for a bad debt, that he had long ago given up as hopeless. He kept a servant, and secretly paid him double wages for doing Mrs. Ewing's work. He had always some poor friend in the shape of a French dancing or music teacher, that he wanted to give a little money to, and Mrs. Ewing would particularly oblige him, if she would allow the children to take lessons of them, as he did not like to take money without an equivalent. This was something like reversing the old adage of 'killing two birds with one stone.'

'You will easily perceive that such a man in the course of four or five years would involve himself with the concerns of a family as to become indispensable to their happiness. In this five years, Catharine, or Kate Ewing, as we used to call her, had passed from the awkward age of her fourteenth to her nineteenth year.'

'Oh, now the love story is coming,' cried Clara Reyburn. 'And reason versus love, said Anne. Her mother smiled and went on— 'Kate was a light hearted, happy tempered young creature. She had been from the beginning a prime favorite of Sheafe's, but for the last two or three years he had appeared rather more reserved towards her.—While she was a child he had been unlimited in his beneficence towards her. Her room was filled with his gifts, books and pictures. All her books—the prettiest rosewood bookcases—all were his gift. All her expensive masters had been employed by him. Now he ceased to be her open benefactor, some good earthly providence seemed still watching over her. If a new book worth buying appeared, she was the first to possess it, and never had the occasion for a bouquet, but a bouquet of the choicest flowers appeared at the door. Kate was not very far sighted in such matters. She did not see why, if Mr. Sheafe continued to give, he could not give

openly as he always had done. Her simple hearted mother was easily deluded. 'I know very well, Mr. Sheafe, she said, soon after these anonymous gifts began, 'where Kate's presents come from. I may thank the giver if she cannot.'

'Well, I assure you,' replied Mrs. Ewing, completely baffled, I have not the smallest notion who it is. I never once thought of any but you. To be sure I ought to have remembered that you in years past made no secret of your gifts.'

'Oh, not a scratch, mamma; don't say he wore a scratch!' 'Not quite a scratch, Anne, but a small, nicely fitted patch to hide the ravages of time. Plenty of black hair indeed! You will hardly find that on a man's head of thirty-five, from Maine to Georgia.'

'Mrs. Reyburn and I exchanged smiles, she proceeded—'Even the patch, Anne, did not conceal or deform the classic shape of his head, which, with its moral and intellectual development, would have charmed a phrenologist. I am sure large, dark eyes ever so expressed, as his beaming grey one did, the kindling and discharging of feeling. His lips, between humor, kindness, tenderness and sympathy, were always in a sort of grateful movement, and in short though he had none of your requisites of beauty, he was the most agreeable looking man I ever saw.'

'Not perhaps, what you would quite call falling in love,' resumed her mother, 'but the love he felt for her as a child, grew insensibly into a stronger sentiment, and one bright day he was betrayed into a disclosure, for which Kate was totally unprepared. She burst into tears, and frankly told him she had never thought of him as a lover, and never could; but that she loved him so dearly that she would rather have died than told him so. A total change came over him, in place of his perpetual good humor and sunny cheerfulness, an immovable gravity and occasional melancholy. Poor Mrs. Ewing could only divine what it meant. She first thought his affairs must be embarrassed, and then she fancied it was an incipient fever, and begged him to take advice. She told him all the house would be wretched if any evil overtook him, and called his observation to Kate, who, she said, had not smiled for a week. He made no reply to her, but the next morning she was astonished by the information that he was going abroad, and that his servant was packing up his furniture to be removed to a place of storage.'

'It was a wretched day at the Ewings.—Poor Mrs. Ewing walked up and down her room, wringing her hands and wondering (till Kate wished herself deaf that she might not hear) what could have happened to Mr. Sheafe. Kate went to her worsted work, but her eyes were so blinded with tears that she could not see it; she took up a book, but she could not tell whether she read backward or forward. She sat down to her piano and played so false that even Mr. Sheafe heard and noted it. Mrs. Ewing saw the carpenters bringing in empty boxes. 'Dear me, she said; it seems just as if a coffin was coming into the house. 'Oh, thought Kate, in the impatience of her first misery, 'I wish it were, and that I were carried away dead in it!'

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'Ma'am said the chambermaid, rushing in, 'you never saw such an awful change as there is in Mr. Sheafe's room: its day changed into night—it is as solitary as the tomb.' 'Is he gone, Jane?' said Kate starting up. 'Oh no, Miss—Lord, how pale you look—but dismal like a tomb, I mean. The wardrobe is empty—the books are all in boxes—the pictures every one of them, even that pretty likeness of Mr. Sheafe, that a body can never look at without feeling that he is going to speak something pleasant—that is in a box and it looked up at me something sorrowful, it did ma'am; and his dressing-gown there—always with the red cord and tassel hanging down by the bedpost, so lively and like Mr. Sheafe, that is packed up too.'

'Jane, do go away,' said Kate petulantly, 'you make my head ache.' 'Why, Miss Kate, said Jane; and as she shut the door after her she murmured to herself, 'her heart aches, more likely, and it is good enough for her, for I know she is at the bottom of it.'

'A few moments after, in flounced Sophy, the cook, and after turning her eyes from Mrs. Ewing to her daughter, 'it's true ma'am she said, 'I see it's true, I could not believe Jane. Well, how things do turn topsy-turvy in this world. I shall have to go too. I can't stand it. Who'll regulate the clock now? I shall never take no more satisfaction in roasting a goose. He always said I did it to a turn. The tears actually rolled over her round, black cheeks. She continued: 'with most everybody the seam will rise sometimes, but he's as clear as spring water. He knows what is what, Mr. Sheafe does. He says I'm the only one short of old England, that can cook a Christian beef-steak and be always had something funny to say. O, he's sugar and spice too!'

'A poor old widow, who served the house from her thread and needle basket opened the door gently at this moment, and I asked, 'Is it true, ma'am? Is Mr. Sheafe going? Yes!'

'The Lord have mercy on the poor.' 'Every voice brought forth a fresh shower of tears from Mrs. Ewing. While matters were at this point, the doors were opened a crack, and Mr. Sheafe said in a broken voice, 'I am going out for an hour, when the carpenter calls, Mrs. Ewing, be kind enough to tell him the boxes are ready to nail up.' 'Half an hour after, when the carpenters did call, Kate sprung up and said, 'I will speak to him, mamma.' An hour or two passed away, when Mr. Sheafe came in. He had a pass key to the street door, and as he opened it and shut very gently, no one was apprised of his entrance. Of all the men I ever knew, he had the greatest repugnance to success. He greeted dear Mrs. Ewing's ingenuous demonstrations, so he stole stealthily up the back stairs, and first entered his lodging room. The door communicating with his parlor was wide open, and through it he saw his books were replaced in his book case; he advanced a little farther—the pictures were rehanging in their places—a little farther still, and he saw Kate Ewing standing on a chair before his picture, which she had that moment replaced, and he heard her say. 'Dear, dear Mr. Sheafe—never never shall you leave this house if I can help it.' My friend paused. Smiles were on her lips, and tears in her eyes. It could no longer be concealed that she was the heroine of her own story. I looked round upon her children. Surprise and discovery were flashing from Anne Reyburn's bright eyes. 'The young girl's cried 'Go on mamma,' and 'What did Mr. Sheafe say?' and 'What could Miss Kate say. 'I do not remember, my dear children. It was one of those rich moments of life when much more is felt than said; but this I know very well, that from that time to this, I have never repented the repentance of that morning— My friend was interrupted by the entrance of her husband. He had been into the village and brought home a basket of fruit, which he threw among the children.—His face had that expression of beaming, paternal happiness, which came from the consciousness that his footsteps, once over his threshold, was the welcome sound ever heard there. I think there was a slight struggle in Anne Reyburn's bosom, as there will be when old ideas are giving place to new ones, but it was soon over. A joyous light flashed from her soul as her eye fell on her father,

and kissing her mother, she said in a subdued voice—'Nobody, but yourself, mamma, would have made believe that yours was not a love match in the beginning, as it is in the end. Well, well I have had many a cream of love, if I ever have such a reality as yours, I shall be quite content. The light just dawned on Clara. Why, Anne?' she exclaimed; 'goodness, mamma! Mr. Sheafe, indeed! Dear, dear Mr. Sheafe. If you had shamed him, mamma, I never would have believed it.'

A pretty family scene followed; a chorus of exclamations a few tears, many questions, some jokes on the discarded patch, and a ringing of laughing voices—but here the curtain falls.

Less than a hundred years ago an antiquary from Grand Cairo, brought a mummy with him presumed to be at least three thousand six hundred years old. Our savant, tired of the diligences in which he had been traveling from Marseilles, took a barge at Fontainebleau which landed him safe and sound at Port St. Bernard. Eager to see his family, he had his effects loaded on a litter, but left his precious mummy in the bottom of the boat. The custom-house officer on boarding it, discovered a box, of a strange shape and aspect. Suspecting it contained contraband goods, he had it opened. What a spectacle! A woman, swathed in linen bandages from head to foot! No doubt this was a wretched victim strangled by a jealous lover or grasping heir. The commissary of police was instantly sent for, and made his appearance, flanked by two surgeons as skillful as himself in archaeology. The crime was recognized, a report made of it, and the body transported to the Morgue, that the friends might come and identify it. It is presumed that none of them made their appearance. Our learned traveler, however in taking an inventory of his effects the next day, bethought himself of his greatest curiosity. He flew to the boat, when the learned commissary and three minions of the law seized him and took him before a magistrate: 'Ala! my fine fellow,' cried the Judge, 'we've got you!'

'Will your Honor favor me with the reason of this extraordinary proceeding?' 'It remains for you, sir, to explain the circumstances of the murder you have committed.' 'Murder?' 'That is the word sir.' 'The murder I have committed!' cried the savant aglast. 'Or at least the crime in which you were an accomplice.' 'Good heavens! your worship is dreaming.' 'Ah! I'm dreaming, am I? No, sir; you'll find me wide awake to your cost. The eye of justice never closes. Did not my vigilant officers discover the body of your victim strangled and shut up in a box? Here's the report of the discovery, duly sealed, signed and attested, sir.'

'Is that all?' said the antiquary, with a heavy laugh. 'Hardened ruffian! cried the Judge, do you indulge in levity with a shadow of a crime so black hanging over your head?—Now sir, look me in the face and answer the questions I shall put. By whom was that young girl put in the box in which she was discovered?' 'By myself, sir.' 'Mr. Clerk, please take down his confession,' said the magistrate. 'Who has swathed her with linen bandages from head to foot?'

'I did, your Honor.' 'Write down Mr. Clerk, that he admits this horrid crime.' 'The expression is rather strong, sir.' 'The deed is heinous. How old was this unfortunate girl?' 'About nineteen years.' 'Of what country?' 'Memphis, I think.' 'Fancy importing a girl such a distance, to murder her! When did her death take place?'





