

After the Storm

By Timothy Shay Arthur

1868

Chapter 10.

And they *were* reconciled. The clouds rolled back; the sun came out again with his radiant smiles and genial warmth. But was nothing broken? nothing lost? Did each flower in the *garden of love* lift its head as bravely as before? In every *storm of passion* — something is lost. Anger is a blind fury, who tramples ruthlessly on tenderest and holiest things. Alas for the *ruin* that waits upon her footsteps!

The day that followed this night of reconciliation had many hours of sober introversion of thought for both Hartley and his wife; hours in which memory reproduced language, conduct and sentiments that could not be dwelt upon without painful misgivings for the future. They understood each other too well to make light account of things said and done, even in anger.

In going over, as Irene did many times, the language used by her husband on the night before, concerning their relation as man and wife, and his prerogative, she felt the old spirit of *revolt* arising. She tried to let her thought fall into his rational presentation of the question involving who is to *rule*, and even said to herself that he was right; but her *pride* was strong, and kept lifting itself in her mind. She saw, most clearly, the hardest aspect of the case. It was, in her view, his *command* — and her *obedience*. And she knew that *submission* was, for her, impossible.

On the part of Hartley, the day's sober thought left his mind in no more hopeful condition than that of his wife. The pain suffered in consequence of her temporary flight from home, though lessened by her return, had not subsided. A portion of *confidence* in her was lost. He felt that he had no guarantee for the *future* — that at any moment, in the heat of passion, she might leave him again. He remembered, too distinctly, her words on the night before, when he tried to make her comprehend his view of the relation between man and wife — "That will not suit me, Hartley!" And he felt that she was in earnest; that she would resist every effort he might make to *lead* and *control* in certain things as a husband — just as she had done from the beginning.

In matrimonial quarrels, you cannot kiss and make up again, as children do, *forgetting* all the stormy past in the sunshiny present. And this was painfully clear to both Hartley and Irene, as she, alone in her chamber, and he, alone in his office — pondered, on that day of reconciliation, the *past* and the *future*. Yet each

resolved to be more forbearing and less exacting; to strive for concession, rather than exaction; to let love, uniting with reason — hold *pride* and *self-will* in close submission.

Their meeting, on Hartley's return home, at his usual late hour in the afternoon, was tender — but not full of the joyous warmth of feeling that often showed itself. Their hearts were not light enough for ecstasy. But they were kind in their attentions to each other, desirous of affectionate words and actions, yielding and considerate. And yet this mutual, almost formal, recognition of a recent state of painful antagonism, left on each mind a feeling of embarrassment, checked words and sentences before they came to utterance, and threw amid their pleasant talks, many intermittent pauses.

Often through the day had Hartley, as he dwelt on the unhappy relation existing between himself and his wife, made up his mind to renew the subject of their true relationship to each other, as briefly touched upon in their meeting of the night before — and as often changed his purpose, in fear of another breach. Yet to him it seemed of the first importance that this matter, as a basis of future peace — should be *settled* between them, and settled at once. If he held one view and she another, and both were sensitive, quick-tempered and tenacious of individual freedom — then fierce antagonism might occur at any moment. He had come home inclined to the affirmative side of the question, and many times during the evening it was on his lips to introduce the subject. But he was so sure that it would prove a theme of sharp discussion, that he had not the courage to risk the consequences.

There was peace again after this conflict — but it was not, by any means, a *hopeful* peace. It had no well-considered basis. The causes which had produced a struggle, were still in existence, and liable to become active, by provocation, at any moment. No *change* had taken place in the characters, dispositions, temperaments or general views of marriage, in either of the parties. Strife had ceased between them, only in consequence of the pain it involved. A deep conviction of this fact so sobered the mind of Hartley, and altered, in consequence, his manner toward Irene — that she felt its reserve and coldness as a *rebuke* that chilled the warmth of her tender impulses.

And this manner did not greatly change as the days and weeks moved onward. Memory kept too vividly in the mind of Hartley that one act, and the danger of its repetition on some sudden provocation. He could not feel safe and at ease with his *temple of peace* built close to a *slumbering volcano*, which was liable at any moment to blaze forth and bury it in lava and ashes.

Irene did not comprehend her husband's state of mind. She felt painfully, the change in his manner — but failed in reaching the true cause. Sometimes she attributed his coldness to resentment; sometimes to defect of love; and sometimes to a settled determination on his part to inflict *punishment*. Sometimes

she spent hours alone, weeping over these sad ruins of her peace, and sometimes, in a spirit of revolt, she laid down for herself a line of conduct intended to react against her husband. But something in his calm, kind, self-reliant manner, when she looked into his face, broke down her purpose. She was afraid of throwing herself against a *rock* which, while standing immovable — might bruise her tender limbs or extinguish life in the strong collision.

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