

After the Storm

The Shipwrecked Life

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

Chapter 19.

Often, during that morning, did the name of *Irene* come to their lips, for the thought of her was all the while present to both.

"You must win her heart back again, Rose," said Mr. Delancy. "I will lure her to Ivy Cliff often this summer, and keep her here as long as possible each time. You will then be much together." They had risen from the dinner-table, and were entering the library.

"Things rarely come out as we plan them," answered Rose. "But I love Irene truly, and will make my own place in her heart again, if she will give me the *key* of entrance."

"You must find the key, Rose."

Miss Carman smiled.

"I said if she would *give* it to me."

"She does not carry the key which opens the door for you," replied Mr. Delancy. "If you do not know where it lies, search for it in the secret places of your own mind, and it will be found, God helping you, Rose."

Mr. Delancy looked at her significantly.

"God helping me," she answered, with a reverent sinking of her voice, "I will find the key."

"Who is that?" said Mr. Delancy, in a tone of surprise, turning his face to the window.

Rose followed his eyes — but no one was visible.

"I saw, or thought I saw — a lady cross the portico this moment."

Both stood still, listening and expectant.

"It might have been my imagination," said Mr. Delancy, drawing a deep breath.

Rose stepped to one of the library windows, and throwing it up, looked out upon the portico.

"There is no one," she remarked, coming back into the room.

"Could I have been so mistaken?"

Mr. Delancy looked bewildered.

Seeing that the impression was so strong on his mind, Miss Carman went out into the hall, and glanced from there into the parlor and dining-room.

"No one came in, Mr. Delancy," she said, on returning to the library.

"A mere impression," remarked the old man, soberly. "Well, these impressions are often very singular. My face was partly turned to the window, so that I saw out — but not so distinctly as if both eyes had been in the range of vision. The form of a *woman* came to my sight as distinctly as if the presence had been real — the form of a woman going swiftly past the window."

"Did you recognize the form?"

It was some time before Mr. Delancy replied.

"Yes." He looked anxious.

"You thought of Irene?"

"I did."

"We have talked and thought of Irene so much today," said Rose, "that your thought of her has made you present to her mind, with more than usual distinctness. You saw her by an inward, not by an outward, vision. These things often happen. They startle us by their strangeness — but are as much dependent on laws of the mind — as bodily nearness is dependent on the laws of matter."

"Do you think so?" Mr. Delancy looked at his young companion curiously.

"Yes, I think so."

The old man shook his head. "Ingenious — but not satisfactory."

At this moment the library door was pushed gently open, and the form of a woman stood in the presence of Mr. Delancy and Rose. She was dressed in a dark silk — but had on neither bonnet nor shawl. Both startled; Mr. Delancy raised his hands and bent forward, gazing at her eagerly, his lips apart. The face of the woman was pale and haggard, yet as familiar as the face of an old friend; but in it was something so strange and unnatural, that for a moment or two it was not recognized.

"*Father!*" It was Irene. She advanced quietly and held out her hand.

"*My daughter!*" He caught the extended hand and kissed her — but she showed no emotion.

"Rose, dear, I am glad to see you." There was truth in the dead level tone with which "I am glad to see you" was spoken, and Rose, who perceived this, took her hand and kissed her. Both hands and lips were cold.

"What's the matter, Irene? Have you been sick?" asked Mr. Delancy, in a choking voice.

"No, father, I'm very well."

"No, child, you are not well. What ails you? Why are you here in so strange a way and looking so strangely?"

"Do I look strangely?" There was a feeble effort to awaken a smile, which only gave her face a ghastly expression.

"Is *Hartley* with you?"

"No." Her voice was fuller and more emphatic as she uttered this word. She tried to look steadily at her father — but her eyes moved aside from the range of his vision.

For a moment, there was a *troubled silence* with all. Rose had placed an arm around the waist of Irene and drawn her to the sofa, on which they were now sitting; Mr. Delancy stood before them. Gradually the cold, almost blank, expression of Irene's face changed, and the old look came back.

"My daughter," said Mr. Delancy.

"Father" — Irene interrupted him — "I know what you are going to say. My sudden, unannounced appearance, at this time, needs *explanation*. I am glad dear Rose is here — my old, true friend" — and she leaned against Miss Carman

— "I can trust her."

The arm of Rose tightened around the waist of Irene.

"Father" — the voice of Irene fell to a deep, solemn tone; there was no emphasis on one word more than on another; all was a dead level; yet the meaning was as full and the involved purpose as fixed as if her voice had run through the whole range of passionate intonation — "Father, I have come back to Ivy Cliff and to you, after having suffered *shipwreck* on the voyage of life. I went out rich, as I supposed, in heart-treasures; I come back poor. My gold was dross, and the sea has swallowed up even that miserable substitute for wealth. Hartley and I never truly loved each other, and the experiment of living together as husband and wife has proved a failure. We have not been happy; no, not from the beginning. We have not even been *tolerant* or *forbearing* toward each other. A *steady alienation* has been in progress day by day, week by week, and month by month, until no remedy is left but *separation*. That has been, at length, applied, and here I am! It is the third time that I have left him, and to both of us, the act is final. He will not seek me, and I shall not return."

There had come a slight flush to the countenance of Irene before she commenced speaking — but this retired again, and she looked *deathly pale*. No one answered her — only the arm of Rose tightened like a cord around the waist of her unhappy friend.

"Father," and now her voice *fluttered* a little, "for your sake I am most afflicted. I am strong enough to bear my fate — but you!"

There was a little sob — a strong suppression of feeling — and silence.

"*Oh, Irene! my child! my child!*" The old man covered his face with his hands, *sobbed*, and *shook* like a fluttering leaf. "I cannot bear this! It is too much for me!" and he staggered backward. Irene sprung forward and caught him in her arms. He would have fallen — but for this, to the floor. She stood clasping and kissing him wildly, until Rose came forward and led them both to the sofa.

Mr. Delancy did not rally from this shock. He leaned heavily against his daughter, and she felt a low tremor in his frame.

"Father!" She spoke tenderly, with her lips to his ear. "Dear father!"

But he did not reply.

"It is my life-discipline, father," she said; "I will be happier and better, no doubt, in the end for this severe trial. Dear father, do not let what is *inevitable* so break down your heart. You are my strong, brave, good father, and I shall need now more than ever — your sustaining arm. There was no help for this. It had to

come, sooner or later. It is *over* now. The first bitterness is past. Let us be thankful for that, and gather up our strength for the future. Dear father! Speak to me!"

Mr. Delancy tried to rally himself — but he was too much broken down by the shock. He said a few words, in which there was scarcely any connection of ideas, and then, getting up from the sofa, walked about the room, turning one of his hands within the other in a distressed way.

"Oh dear, dear, dear!" he murmured to himself, in a feeble manner. "I have dreaded this, and prayed that it might not be. Such wretchedness and disgrace! Such wretchedness and disgrace! Had they no patience with each other — no forbearance — no love, that it must come to this? Dear! dear! dear! Poor child!"

Irene, with her white, wretched face, sat looking at him for some time, as he moved about, a picture of helpless misery; then, going to him again, she drew an arm around his neck and tried to comfort him. But there was no comfort in her words. What could she say to reach with a healing power, the wound from which his very life-blood was pouring.

"Don't talk! don't talk!" he said, pushing Irene away, with slight impatience of manner. "I am heart-broken. Words are nothing!"

"Mr. Delancy," said Rose, now coming to his side, and laying a hand upon his arm, "you must not speak so to Irene. This is not like you."

There was a calmness of utterance and a firmness of manner which had their right effect.

"How have I spoken, Rose, dear? What have I said?" Mr. Delancy stopped and looked at Miss Carman in a rebuked, confused way, laying his hand upon his forehead at the same time.

"Not from yourself," answered Rose.

"Not from myself!" He repeated her words, as if his thoughts were still in a maze. "Ah, child, this is dreadful!" he added. "I am not myself! Poor Irene! Poor daughter! Poor father!"

And the old man lost himself again.

A look of *fear* now shadowed darkly the face of Irene, and she glanced anxiously from her father's countenance, to that of Rose. She did not read in the face of her young friend, much that gave assurance or comfort.

"Mr. Delancy," said Rose, with great earnestness of manner, "Irene is in great

trouble. She has come to a great *crisis* in her life. You are older and wiser than she is, and must counsel and sustain her. Be calm, dear sir — calm, clear-seeing, wise and considerate, as you have always been."

"Calm — clear-seeing — wise." Mr. Delancy repeated the words, as if endeavoring to grasp the *rein of thought* and get possession of himself again.

"Wise to counsel and strong to sustain," said Rose. "You must not fail us now."

"Thank you, my sweet young monitor," replied Mr. Delancy, partially recovering himself; "it was the weakness of a moment. Irene," and he looked toward his daughter, "leave me with my own thoughts for a little while. Take her, Rose, to her own room, and God give you power to speak words of consolation; I have none."

Rose drew her arm within that of Irene, and said, "Come." But Irene lingered, looking tenderly and anxiously at her father.

"Go, my love." Mr. Delancy waved his hand.

"*Father! dear father!*" She moved a step toward him, while Rose held her back.

"I cannot help myself, father. The die is cast. Oh bear up with me! I will be to you a better daughter than I have ever been. My life shall be devoted to your happiness. In that I will find a compensation. All is not lost — all is not ruined. My heart is as *pure* as when I left you three years ago. I come back *bleeding* from my life-battle it is true — but not in *mortal* peril — wounded — but not unto death — cast down — but not destroyed."

All the muscles of Mr. Delancy's face quivered with suppressed feeling as he stood looking at his daughter, who, as she uttered the words, "cast down — but not destroyed," flung herself in wild abandonment on his bosom!

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