

## After the Storm

### Struck Down

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

#### Chapter 22

Yes, Irene had expected this — expected it daily for now more than a year. Still it came upon her with a shock which sent a strange, wild shudder through all her being. *A divorce!* She was less prepared for it than she had ever been.

What was beyond? Ah! that touched a *chord* which gave a chill of pain. What was beyond? A new alliance, of course. Legal disabilities removed, Hartley would take upon himself new marriage vows. Could she say, "Yes, and amen" to this? No, alas! no! There was a feeling of intense, *irrepressible anguish* way down in her heart-regions, which lay far beyond consciousness. What did it mean? She asked herself the question with a fainting spirit. Had she not known herself? Were old states of tenderness, which she had believed crushed out and dead along ago — hidden away in secret places of her heart, and kept there safe from harm?

No wonder she sat pale and still, crumpling nervously that fatal document which had startled her with a new revelation of herself. There *was* love in her heart still — and she knew it not! For a long time she sat like one in a dream.

"God help me!" she said at length, looking around her in a wild, bewildered manner. "What does all this mean?"

There came at this moment a gentle tap at her door. She knew whose soft hand had given the sound.

"Irene," exclaimed Rose Carman, as she took the hand of her friend and looked into her changed countenance, "what ails you?"

Irene turned her face partly away to get control of its expression.

"Sit down, Rose," she said, as soon as she could trust herself to speak.

They sat down together — Rose, troubled and wondering. Irene then handed her

friend the *notice* which she had received. Miss Carman read it — but made no remark for some time.

"It has disturbed you," she said at length, seeing that Irene continued silent.

"Yes, more than I could have believed," answered Irene. Her voice had lost its familiar tones.

"You have *expected* this?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were *prepared* for it."

"And I am," replied Irene, speaking with more firmness of manner. "Expectation grows so nervous, sometimes, that when the event comes, it falls upon us with a painful shock. This is my case now. I would have felt it less severely if it had occurred six months ago."

"What will you do?" asked Rose.

"Do?"

"Yes."

"What *can* I do?"

"Resist the divorce, if you will."

"But I will not," answered Irene, firmly. "He signifies his wishes in the case, and those wishes must determine everything. I will remain passive."

"And let the divorce issue by *default* of answer?"

"Yes."

There was a faintness of tone which Rose could not help remarking.

"Yes," Irene added, "he desires this *complete separation*, and I can have nothing to say in opposition. I left him, and have remained ever since a stranger to his home and heart. We are *nothing* to each other, and yet are bound together by the strongest of *chains*. Why should he not wish to be released from these *chains*? And if he desires it, I have nothing to say. We are divorced in *fact* — why then retain the *form*?"

"There may be a question of the fact," said Rose.

"Yes; I understand you. We have discussed that point fully. Your view may be right — but I do not see it clearly. I will at least retain passive. The responsibility shall rest with him."

No life or color came back to the face of Irene. She looked as cold as marble; not cold without feeling — but with intense feeling recorded as in a piece of sculpture.

There were deeds of *kindness* and *mercy* set down in the purposes of our young friend — and it was to go forth and perform them that Rose had called for Irene this morning. But only one *Sister of Charity* went to the field that day, and only one for many days afterward.

Irene could not recover from the shock of this legal notice. It found her less prepared than she had been at anytime during the last two years of separation. Her life at Ivy Cliff had not been favorable to a *self-approving judgment* of herself, when the past came up, as it often came, strive as she would to cover it as with a veil. She had grown in this *night of suffering*, less *self-willed* and blindly impulsive. Some *scales* had dropped from her eyes, and she saw clearer. Yet no *repentance* for that one act of her life, which involved a series of consequences beyond the reach of conjecture — had found a place in her heart. There was no looking back from this — no sober questioning as to the right or necessity which had been involved. There had been *one great mistake* — so she decided the case — and that was her *marriage*.

From this fatal error — all subsequent evil was born.

Months of waiting and expectation followed, and then came a decree of the official divorce.

"It is well," was the simple response of Irene when notice of the fact reached her.

Not even to Rose Carman, did she reveal a thought that took shape in her mind, nor betray a single emotion that trembled in her heart. If there had been less appearance of *indifference* — less *avoidance* of the subject — her friends would have felt more comfortable as to her state of mind. The unnatural repose of her exterior — was to them significant of a *strife within* which she wished to conceal from all eyes.

About this time her true, loving friend, Miss Carman, married. Irene did not stand as one of the bridesmaids at the ceremony. Rose gently hinted her wishes in the case — but Irene shrunk from the position, and her feeling was respected. The husband of Rose was a merchant, residing in New York, named Mr. Everet. After a short bridal tour, she went to her new home in the city. Mr. Everet was five or six years her senior, and a man worthy to be her life-companion. No *sudden*

attachment had grown up between them. For years, they had been in the habit of meeting, and in this time the character of each had been clearly read by the other. When Mr. Everet asked the maiden's hand — it was yielded without a sign of hesitation.

The removal of Rose from the neighborhood of Ivy Cliff greatly disturbed the even-going tenor of Irene's life. It withdrew also a *prop* on which she had leaned often in times of weakness — which would recur very heavily.

"How can I live without you?" she said in tears, as she sat alone with the new-made bride on the eve of her departure; "you have been everything to me, *Rose* — strength in weakness; *light*, when all around was cold and dark; a *guide* when I had lost my way. God bless and make you happy, darling! And he will. Hearts like yours create happiness wherever they go."

"My new home will only be a few hours' distant," replied Rose; "I shall see you there often."

Irene sighed. She had been to the city only a few times since that sad day of separation from her husband. Could she return again and enter one of its bright social circles? Her heart said no. But *love* drew her too strongly. In less than a month after Rose became the mistress of a stately mansion, Irene was her guest. This was just *six years* from the time when she set up her home there — a loving and happy young wife. Alas! that hearth was desolate, "its bright fire quenched and gone."

It was best for Irene thus to get back again into a wider social sphere — to make some new friends, and those of a class that such a woman as Rose would naturally draw around her. Three years of suffering, and the effort to lead a life of self-denial and active interest in others, had wrought in Irene a great change. The old, flashing ardor of manner was gone. If she grew animated in conversation, as she often did from temperament — her face would light up beautifully — but it did not show the *radiance* of old times. Thought, more than feeling, gave its living play to her countenance. All who met her were attracted; as her history was known, observation naturally took the form of close scrutiny. People wished to find the angular and repellant sides of her character, in order to see how far she might be to blame. But they were not able to discover them. On the subjects of woman's rights, domestic tyranny, sexual equality and all kindred themes — she was guarded in speech. She never introduced them herself, and said but little when they formed the staple of conversation.

Even if, in three years of intimate, almost daily, association with Rose, she had not learned to think in some new directions on these bewildering questions, certain *womanly instincts* must have set a seal upon her lips. Not for all the world would she, to a stranger — no, nor to any new friend — utter a sentiment that could in the least degree give color to the thought that she wished to throw even

the faintest shadow of *blame* on Hartley. Not that she was ready to take blame to herself, or give the impression that fault rested by her door. No. The subject was *sacred* to herself, and she asked no sympathy — and granted no confidences. There were those who sought to draw her out, who watched her face and words with keen intentness when certain themes were discussed. But they were unable to reach the *recesses* of her heart. There was a secret chamber there, into which no one could enter but herself.

Since the separation of Irene from her husband — Mr. Delancy had shown signs of rapid failure. His heart was bound up in his daughter, who, with all her captious self-will and impulsiveness, loved him with a tenderness and fervor that never knew change or eclipse. To see her make *shipwreck* of life's dearest hopes — to know that her name was spoken by hundreds in *reprobation* — to look daily on her quiet, aging, suffering face — was more than his fond heart could bear. It broke him down. This fact, more perhaps, than her own sad experiences, tended to sober the mind of Irene, and leave it almost passive under the right influences of her wise young friend, Rose.

After the removal of Rose from the neighborhood of Ivy Cliff, the health of Mr. Delancy failed still more rapidly, and in a few months the brief visits of Irene to her friend in New York had to be intermitted. She could no longer venture to leave her father, even under the care of their faithful Margaret. A sad winter for Irene succeeded. Mr. Delancy drooped about until after Christmas, in a weary, listless way, taking little interest in anything, and bearing life, as a *burden* it would be pleasant to lay down. Early in January he had to retire and go to bed; and now the truth of his condition startled the mind of Irene and filled her with alarm. By slow, insidious encroachments, that dangerous enemy, *typhoid fever*, had gained a lodgment in the very citadel of life, and boldly revealed itself, defying the physician's arts. For weeks the dim light of mortal existence burned with a low, wavering flame, that any sudden *breath of air* might extinguish; then it grew steady again, increased, and sent a few brighter rays into the darkness which had gathered around Ivy Cliff.

Spring found Mr. Delancy strong enough to sit, propped up with pillows, by the window of his chamber, and look out upon the newly-mantled trees, the green fields, and the bright river flashing in the sunshine. The heart of Irene took courage again. The *cloud* which had lain upon it all winter like a funereal pall dissolved — and went floating away in dim expanses.

Alas, that all this sweet promise was but a mockery of hope! A sudden cold, how it was caught, is almost impossible to tell — for Irene guarded her father as tenderly as if he were a new-born infant — disturbed life's delicate equipoise, and the *scale* turned fatally the wrong way.

Poor Irene! She had only *staggered* under former blows — this one *struck her down*. Had life anything to offer now? "*Nothing! nothing!*" she said in her heart,

and prayed that she might die and be at rest with her father.

Months of *stupor* followed this great sorrow; then her heart began to beat again with some interest in life. There was one friend, almost her only friend — for she now repelled nearly everyone who approached her — who never failed in hopeful, comforting, stimulating words and offices, who visited her frequently in her *recluse* life at Ivy Cliff, and sought with untiring assiduity to win her once more away from its dead seclusion. And she was at last successful. In the winter after Mr. Delancy's death, Irene, after much earnest persuasion, consented to pass a few weeks in the city with Rose. This gained, Rose was certain of all the rest.

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