

## After the Storm

### Born for Each Other

By Timothy Shay Arthur

1868

#### Chapter 25.

"I saw *Hartley* yesterday," said Rose. She was sitting with Irene in her own house in New York.

"Did you?" Irene spoke evenly and quietly — but did not turn her face toward Rose.

"Yes. I saw him at my husband's store. My husband has engaged him to conduct an important *suit*, in which many thousands of dollars are at stake."

"How does he look?" inquired Irene, without showing any feelings but still keeping her face turned from Mrs Everet.

"*Well*, I would say, though rather too much *frosted* for a man of his years."

"*Gray*, do you mean?" Irene manifested some surprise.

"Yes; his hair and beard are quite sprinkled with *time's white snow-flakes*."

"He is only forty," remarked Irene.

"I would say fifty, judging from his appearance."

"Only forty." And a faint sigh breathed on the lips of Irene. She did not look around at her friend but sat very still, with her face turned partly away. Rose looked at her closely, to read, if possible, what was passing in her mind. But the countenance of Irene was too much hidden. Her attitude, however, indicated intentness of thought, though not disturbing thought.

"Rose," she said at length, "I grow less at peace with myself as the years move onward."

"You speak from some passing state of mind," suggested Rose.

"No; from a gradually forming permanent state. Ten years ago, I looked back upon the past in a stern, self-sustaining, martyr-spirit. Five years ago all things wore a different aspect. I began to have misgivings; I could not so clearly make out my case. New thoughts on the subject — and not very welcome ones — began to intrude. I was *self-convicted* of wrong; yes, Rose, of a great and an irreparable wrong! I shut my eyes; I tried to look in other directions; but the truth, once seen, could not pass from the range of mental vision.

I have never told you that I saw Hartley five years ago. The effect of that meeting was such that I could not speak of it, even to you. We met on one of the river steamboats — met and looked into each other's eyes for just a moment. It may only be an imagination of mine — but I have thought sometimes that — but for this seemingly accidental meeting — he would have married again."

"Why do you think so?" asked Rose.

Irene did not answer for some moments. She hardly dared venture to put what she had seen in words. It was something that she felt more like *hiding* even from her own consciousness, if that were possible. But, having ventured so far, she could not well hold back. So she replied, keeping her voice into as dead a level as it was possible to assume:

"He was sitting in earnest conversation with a young lady, and from the expression of her face, which I could see, the subject on which he was speaking was evidently one in which more than her thought was interested. I felt at the time that he was on the verge of a new life-experiment — was about venturing upon a *sea* on which he had once made *shipwreck*. Suddenly he turned half around and looked at me, before I had time to withdraw my eyes — looked at me with a strange, surprised, startled look. In another moment a form came between us; when it passed, I was lost from his gaze in the crowd of passengers. I have puzzled myself a great many times over that fact of his turning his eyes, as if from some hidden impulse, just to the spot where I was sitting. There are *no accidents* — as I have often heard you say — in the common acceptance of the term; therefore this was no accident."

"It was a divine providence," said Rose.

"And to what end?" asked Irene.

Rose shook her head.

"I will not even presume to conjecture."

Irene sighed, and then sat lost in thought. Recovering herself, she said:

"Since that time I have been growing less and less satisfied with that brief, troubled portion of my life which closed so disastrously. I forgot how much the happiness of another was involved. A blind, willful girl, struggling in imaginary chains — I thought only of myself, and madly tore apart the ties which death only should have sundered. For five years, Rose, I have carried in my heart the expression which looked out upon me from the eyes of Hartley at that brief meeting. Its meaning was not then, nor is it now, clear. I have never set myself to the work of interpretation, and believe the task would be fruitless. But whenever it is recalled, I am affected with a tender sadness. And so his head is already frosted, Rose?"

"Yes."

"Though in years he has reached only manhood's ripened state. How I have *marred* his life! Better, far better, would it have been for him — if I had been the *bride of Death* on my wedding-day!"

A shadow of pain darkened her face.

"No," replied Rose; "it is better for both you and him that you were not the *bride of Death*. There are deeper things hidden in the events of life than our reason can fathom. We die when it is best for ourselves and best for others that we should die — never before. And the fact that we live is in itself conclusive that we are yet needed in the world by all who can be affected by our mortal existence."

"*Gray hair at forty!*" This seemed to haunt the mind of Irene.

"It may be constitutional," suggested Rose; "some heads begin to whiten at thirty."

"Possibly."

But the tone expressed no conviction.

"How was his face?" asked Irene.

"Grave and thoughtful. At least so it appeared to me."

"At forty!" It was all Irene said.

Rose might have suggested that a man of his legal position would naturally be grave and thoughtful — but she did not.

"It struck me," said Rose, "as a true, pure, manly face. It was intellectual and refined; delicate, yet firm about the mouth and expansive in the upper portions. The hair curled softly away from his white temples and forehead."

"Worthy of a better fate!" sighed Irene. "And it is *I* who have *marred* his whole life! How blind is selfish pride! Ah, my friend, the years do not bring peace to my soul. There have been times when to know that he had sought refuge from a lonely life in marriage, would have been a relief to me. Were this the case, the thought of his isolation, of his imperfect life, would not be forever rebuking me. But now, while no less severely rebuked by this thought, I feel glad that he has not ventured upon an act no clear sanction for which is found in the Divine Word. He could not, I feel, have remained so true and pure a man as I trust he is this day. God help him to hold on, faithful to his highest intuitions, even unto the end."

Rose looked at Irene wonderingly as she spoke. She had never before thus unveiled her thoughts.

"He struck me," was her reply, "as a man who had passed through years of *discipline* and gained the mastery of himself."

"I trust that it may be so," Irene answered, rather as if speaking to herself than to another.

"As I grow older," she added, after a long pause, now looking with calm eyes upon her friend, "and *life-experiences* correct my judgment and chasten my feelings — I see all things in a new aspect. I understand my own heart better — its needs, capacities and yearnings; and *self-knowledge* is the key by which we unlock the mystery of other souls. So a deeper self-acquaintance enables me to look deeper into the hearts of all around me. I erred in marrying Hartley. We were both too hasty, self-willed and tenacious of *rights* and *opinions* to come together in a union so sacred and so intimate. But, after I had become his wife, after I had taken upon myself such holy vows, it was my duty to stand fast. I could not abandon my place and be innocent before God and man. And I am not innocent, Rose."

The face of Irene was strongly agitated for some moments; but she recovered herself and went on:

"I am speaking of things that have hitherto been secrets of my own heart. I could not bring them out even for you to look at, my dearest, truest, best of friends. Now it seems as if I could not bear the weight of my heavy thoughts alone; as if, in admitting you beyond the veil, I might find strength to suffer, if not ease from pain. There is no such thing as living our lives over again and correcting their great errors. The past is an irrevocable fact. Ah, if *conscience* would sleep, if struggles for a better life would make atonement for wrong — then, as our years progress, we might lapse into tranquil states. But gradually clearing vision, increases the magnitude of a fault like mine — for its fatal consequences are seen in broader light.

I think it is well for my peace of mind that I have not been in the way of hearing about him or of seeing him. Since we parted, it has been as if a dark curtain had fallen between us; and, so far as I am concerned, that curtain has been lifted up but once or twice, and then only for a moment of time. So all my thoughts of him are joined to the past. Away back in that sweet time when the heart of girlhood first thrills with the passion of love are some memories that haunt my soul like dreams from paradise. He was, in my eyes, the impersonation of all that was lovely and excellent; his presence made my sense of happiness complete; his voice touched my ears as the blending of all rich harmonies. But there fell upon him a *shadow*; there came hard discords in the music which had entranced my soul; the fine gold was dimmed. Then came that period of mad strife, of blind antagonism, in which we hurt each other by rough contact. Finally, we were driven far asunder, and, instead of revolving together around a common center — each has moved in a separate orbit. For years that dark period of pain, has held the former period of brightness in eclipse; but of late gleams from that *better time* have made their way down to the present. Gradually the shadows are giving away. The *first* state is coming to be felt more and more as the *true* state — as that in best agreement with what we are in relation to each other. It was the *evil* in us, which met in such fatal antagonism — not the good; it was something that we must put off if we would rise from natural and selfish life — into spiritual and heavenly life. It was our *selfishness* and *pride* which drove us asunder.

Thus it is, dear Rose, that my thoughts have been wandering about in the *maze of life* which entangles me. In my isolation, I have time enough for mental self-examination — for self-exploration, if you will. And so I have lifted the *veil* for you; uncovered my *inner* life; taken you into the *sanctuary* over whose threshold no foot but my own had ever passed."

There was too much in all this for Rose to venture upon any reply that involved suggestion or advice. It was from a desire to look deeper into the heart of her friend, that she had spoken of her meeting with Hartley. The *glance* she obtained revealed far more than her imagination had ever reached.

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