

After the Storm

Love Never Dies

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

Chapter 26.

The brief meeting with Rose had stirred the *memory of old times* in the heart of *Hartley*. With a vividness unknown for years, Ivy Cliff and the sweetness of many life-passages there came back to him, and set heart-pulses that he had thought stilled forever, beating in tumultuous waves. When the business of the day was over, he sat down in the silence of his chamber and turned his eyes inward. He pushed aside intervening year after year, until the long-ago past was, to his consciousness, almost as real as the living present. What he saw, moved him deeply. He grew restless, then showed disturbance of manner. There was an effort to turn away from the haunting fascination of this long-buried — but now exhumed period; but the dust and dross were removed, and it lifted, like another Pompeii, its desolate walls and silent chambers in the clear noon-rays of the present.

After a long but fruitless effort to bury the past again, to let the years close over it as the waves close over a treasure-laden ship — *Hartley* gave himself up to its thronging memories and let them bear him where they would.

In this state of mind, he unlocked one of the drawers in a secretary and took therefrom a small box or casket. Placing this on a table, he sat down and looked at it for some minutes, as if in doubt whether it were best for him to go further in this direction. Whether satisfied or not, he presently laid his fingers upon the lid of the casket and slowly opened it. It contained only a *morocco case*. He touched this as if it were something precious and sacred. For some moments after it was removed, he sat holding it in his hand and looking at the dark, blank surface, as a long-expected letter is sometimes held before the seal is broken and the contents devoured with impatient eagerness. At last his finger pressed the spring on which it had been resting, and he looked upon a young, sweet face, whose eyes gazed back into his with a living tenderness. In a little while his hand so trembled, and his eyes grew so dim, that the face was veiled from his sight. Closing the miniature — but still retaining it in his hand, he leaned back in his chair and remained motionless, with shut eyes, for a long time; then he looked at the fair young face again, pondering over every feature and expression, until sad

memories came in and veiled it again with tears.

"Folly! weakness!" he said at last, pushing the picture from him and making a feeble effort to get back his manly self-possession. "The past is gone forever. The page on which its sad history is written, was closed long ago, and the book is sealed. Why unclasp the volume and search for that dark record again?"

Yet, even as he said this, his hand reached out for the miniature, and his eyes were on it before the closing words had parted from his lips.

"Poor Irene!" he murmured, as he gazed on her pictured face. "You had a pure, tender, loving heart . . ." then, suddenly shutting the miniature, with a sharp click of the spring, he tossed it from him upon the table and said,

"This is folly! folly! folly!" and, leaning back in his chair, he shut his eyes and sat for a long time with his brows sternly knitted together and his lips tightly compressed. Rising, at length, he restored the picture to its casket, and the casket to its place in the drawer. A servant came to the door at this moment, bringing the compliments of a lady friend, who asked him, if not engaged, to favor her with his company on that evening, as she had a visitor, just arrived, to whom she wished to introduce him. He liked the lady, who was the wife of a legal friend, very well; but he was not always so well pleased with her lady friends, of whom she had a large circle. The fact was, she considered him too fine a man to go through life companionless, and did not hesitate to use every artifice in her power to draw him into an entangling alliance. He saw this, and was often more amused than annoyed by her finesse.

It was on his lips to send word that he was engaged — but a regard for truth would not let him make this excuse; so, after a little hesitation and debate, he answered that he would present himself during the evening. The lady's visitor was a widow of about thirty years of age — rich, educated, accomplished and personally attractive. She was from Boston, and connected with one of the most distinguished families in Massachusetts, whose line of ancestry ran back among the nobles of England. In conversation this lady showed herself to be rarely gifted, and there was a *charm* about her manners that was irresistible. Hartley, who had been steadily during the past five years growing less and less attracted by the fine women he met in society, found himself unusually interested in Mrs. Wager.

"I knew you would like her," said his lady friend, as Hartley was about retiring at eleven o'clock.

"You take your conclusion for granted," he answered, smiling. "Did I say that I liked her?"

"We ladies have eyes," was the laughing rejoinder. "Of course you like her. She's

going to spend three or four days with me. You'll drop in tomorrow evening. Now don't pretend that you have an engagement. Come; I want you to know her better. I think her charming."

Hartley did not promise positively — but said that he might look in during the evening.

For a new acquaintance, Mrs. Wager had attracted him strongly; and his thoughtful friend was not disappointed in her expectation of seeing him at her house on the following night. Mrs. Wager, to whom the lady she was visiting had spoken of Hartley in terms of almost extravagant eulogy, was exceedingly well pleased with him, and much gratified at meeting him again. A second interview gave both an opportunity for closer observation, and when they parted it was with pleasant thoughts of each other lingering in their minds. During the time that Mrs. Wager remained in New York, which was prolonged for a week beyond the period originally fixed, Hartley saw her almost every day, and became her voluntary escort in visiting points of local interest. The more he saw of her — the more he was charmed with her character. She seemed in his eyes, to be the most attractive woman he had ever met. Still, there was something about her that did not wholly satisfy him, though what it was did not come into perception.

Five years had passed since any serious thought of marriage had troubled the mind of Hartley. After his meeting with Irene, he had felt that another union in this world was not for him — that he had no right to exchange vows of eternal fidelity with any other woman. She had remained unwedded, and would so remain, he felt, to the end of her life. The legal contract between them was dissolved; but, since his brief talk with the stranger on the boat, he had not felt so clear as to the *higher divine law* obligations which were upon them. And so he had settled it in his mind, to bear life's burdens alone.

But Mrs. Wager had crossed his way, and filled, in many respects, his *ideal* of a woman. There was a *charm* about her that won him against all resistance.

"Don't let this opportunity pass," said his interested lady friend, as the day of Mrs. Wager's departure drew near. "She is a woman in a thousand, and will make one of the best of wives. Think, too, of her social position, her wealth and her large cultivation. An opportunity like this is never presented more than once in a lifetime."

"You speak," replied Hartley, "as if I had only to say the word and this *fair prize* would drop into my arms."

"She will have to be wooed if she is won. Were this not the case, she would not be worth having," said the lady. "But my word for it, if you turn *wooer* — the winning will not be hard. If I have not erred in my observation, you are about mutually interested. There now, my cautious sir, if you do not get handsomely

provided for, it will be no fault of mine."

In two days from this time, Mrs. Wager was to return to Boston.

"You must take her to see those new paintings at the rooms of the Society Library tomorrow. I heard her express a desire to examine them before returning to Boston. Connoisseurs are in ecstasies over three or four of the pictures, and, as Mrs. Wager is something of an enthusiast in matters of art, your favor in this will give her no light pleasure."

"I shall be most happy to attend her," replied Hartley. "Give her my compliments, and say that, if agreeable to herself, I will call for her at twelve tomorrow."

"No verbal compliments and messages," replied the lady; "that isn't just the way."

"How then? Must I call upon her and deliver my message? That might not be convenient to me, nor agreeable to her."

"Oh!" ejaculated the lady, with affected impatience, "you men are so stupid at times! You know how to write!"

"Ah! yes, I comprehend you now."

"Very well. Send your compliments and your message in a note; and let it be daintily worded; not in heavy phrases, like a legal document."

"A very princess in feminine diplomacy!" said Hartley to himself, as he turned from the lady and took his way homeward. "So I must pen a note."

Now this proved a more difficult matter than he had at first thought. He sat down to the task immediately on returning to his room. On a small sheet of tinted note-paper he wrote a few words — but they did not please him, and the page was thrown into the fire. He tried again — but with no better success — again and again; but still, as he looked at the brief sentences, they seemed to express too much — or too little. Unable to pen the note to his satisfaction, he pushed, at last, his writing materials aside, saying,

"My head will be clearer and cooler in the morning."

It was drawing on to midnight, and Hartley had not yet retired. His thoughts were too busy for sleep. Many things were crowding into his mind — questions, doubts, misgivings — scenes from the *past* and imaginations of the *future*. And amid them all came in now and then, just for a moment, as he had seen it five years before — the pale, still face of Irene.

Wearied in the conflict, *tired nature* at last gave way, and Hartley fell asleep in his

chair.

Two hours of deep slumber tranquilized his spirit. He awoke from this, put off his clothing and laid his head on his pillow. It was late in the morning when he arose. He had no difficulty now in penning a note to Mrs. Wager. It was the work of a moment, and satisfactory to him in the first effort.

At twelve he called with a carriage for the lady, whom he found all ready to accompany him, and in the best possible state of mind. Her smile, as he presented himself, was absolutely fascinating; and her voice seemed like a freshly-tuned instrument, every tone was so rich in musical vibration, and all the tones came chorded to his ear.

There were not many visitors at the exhibition rooms — a score, perhaps — but they were art-lovers, gazing in enrapt attention or talking in hushed whispers. They moved about noiselessly here and there, seeming scarcely conscious that others were present. Gradually the number increased, until within an hour after they entered, it was more than doubled. Still, the presence of art subdued all into silence or subdued utterances.

Hartley was charmed with his companion's appreciative admiration of many pictures. She was familiar with art-terms and special points of interest, and pointed out beauties and harmonies that to him were dead letters without an interpreter. They came, at last, to a small but wonderfully effective picture, which contained a single figure, that of a man sitting by a table in a room which presented the appearance of a library. He held a letter in his hand — a old letter; the artist had made this plain — but was not reading. He had been reading; but the words, proving conjurors, had summoned the *dead past* before him, and he was now looking far away, with sad, dreamy eyes, into the *long ago*. A *casket* stood open. The letter had evidently been taken from this repository. There was a picture; a bracelet of auburn hair; a ring and a chain of gold lying on the table. Hartley turned to the catalogue and read,

"With the buried past."

And below this title the brief sentiment —

"Love never dies!"

A deep, involuntary *sigh* came through his lips and stirred the pulseless air around him. Then, like an echo, there came to his ears an answering *sigh* — and, turning, he looked into the face of *Irene!* She had entered the rooms a little while before, and in passing from picture to picture had reached this one a few moments after Hartley. She had not observed him, and was just beginning to feel its meaning, when the *sigh* that attested its power over him — reached her ears and awakened an answering sigh. For several moments their eyes were fixed in

a gaze which neither had power to withdraw. The face of Irene had grown thinner, paler and more shadowy than it was when he looked upon it five years before. But her eyes were darker in contrast with her colorless face, and had a deeper tone of feeling.

They did not speak nor pass a sign of recognition. But the instant their eyes withdrew from each other — Irene turned from the picture and left the room.

When Hartley looked back into the face of his companion, its charm was gone. Beside that of the fading countenance, so still and nun-like, upon which he had gazed a moment before — it looked coarse and worldly. When she spoke, her tones no longer came in chords of music to his ears — but jarred upon his feelings. He grew silent, cold, abstracted. The lady noted the change, and tried to rally him; but her efforts were vain. He moved by her side like an automaton, and listened to her comments on the pictures they paused to examine, in such evident absent-mindedness, that she became annoyed, and proposed returning home. Hartley made no objection, and they left the quiet picture-gallery for the turbulence of Broadway. The ride home was a silent one, and they separated in mutual embarrassment, Hartley going back to his rooms instead of to his office, and sitting down in loneliness there, with a shuddering sense of thankfulness at his heart for the *danger* he had just escaped.

"What a *blind spell* was on me!" he said, as he gazed away down into his soul — far, far deeper than any tone or look from Mrs. Wager had penetrated — and saw needs, states and yearnings there, which must be filled — or there could be no completeness of life. And now the still, pale face of Irene stood out distinctly; and her deep, yearning eyes looked into his with a fixed intentness that stirred his heart to its profoundest depths.

Hartley was absent from his office all that day. But on the next morning he was at his post, and it would have taken a close observer to have detected any change in his usually quiet face. But there was a change in the man — a great change. He had gone down deeper into his heart than he had ever gone before, and understood himself better. There was little danger of his ever being tempted again in this direction.

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