

After the Storm

Effects of the Storm

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

Chapter 27.

It was more than a week before Hartley called again upon the lady friend who had shown so strong a desire to procure him a wife. He expected her to introduce the name of Mrs. Wager, and came prepared to talk in a way that would forever close the subject of marriage between them. The lady expressed surprise at not having seen him for so long a time, and then introduced the subject nearest her thought.

"What was the matter with you and Mrs. Wager?" she asked, her face growing serious.

Hartley shook his head, and said, "Nothing," with not a shadow of concern in his voice.

"Nothing? Think again. I could hardly have been deceived."

"Why do you ask? Did the lady charge anything ungallant against me?"

Hartley was unmoved.

"Oh no, no! She scarcely mentioned your name after her return from viewing the pictures. But she was not in so bright a humor as when she went out, and was dull up to the hour of her departure for Boston. I'm afraid you offended her in some way — unconsciously on your part, of course."

"No, I think not," said Hartley. "She would be sensitive in the extreme, if offended by any word or act of mine."

"Well, letting that all pass, Hartley, what do you think of Mrs. Wager?"

"That she is an attractive and highly accomplished woman."

"And the one who reaches your ideal of a wife?"

"No, ma'am," was the unhesitating answer, and made in so emphatic a tone that there was no mistaking his sincerity. There was a change in his countenance and manner. He looked unusually serious.

The lady tried to rally him — but he had come in too sober a state of mind for pleasant trifling on *this* subject, of all others.

"My kind, good friend," he said, "I owe you many thanks for the interest you have taken in me, and for your efforts to get me a companion. But I do not intend to marry."

"So you have said . . ."

"Pardon me for interrupting you." Hartley checked the light speech that was on her tongue. "I am going to say to you some things that have never passed my lips before. You will understand me; this I know, or I would not let a sentence come into utterance. And I know more, that you will not make light of what to me is *sacred*."

The lady was sobered in a moment.

"To make light of what to you is sacred, would be impossible," she replied.

"I believe it, and therefore I am going to speak of things that are to me the saddest of my life, and yet are coming to involve the holiest sentiments. I have more than one reason for desiring now to let another look below the quiet surface; and I will lift the veil for your eyes alone. You know that I was married nearly twenty years ago, and that my wife separated herself from me in less than three years after our union; and you also know that the separation was made permanent by a divorce. This is all that you or any other one knows, so far as I have made communication on the subject; and I have reason to believe that she who was my wife, has been as reserved in the matter as myself.

"The simple facts in the case are these: We were both young and undisciplined, both quick-tempered, self-willed, and very much inclined to have things our own way. She was an only child, and so was I. Each had been spoiled by long self-indulgence. So, when we came together in marriage, the action of our lives, instead of taking a common pulsation — was inharmonious. For a few years we strove together blindly in our chains, and then foolishly broke asunder. I think we were about equally in fault; but if there was a preponderance of blame, it rested on my side — for, as a man, I should have kept a cooler head and shown greater forbearance. But the time for *blame* has long since passed. It is with the stern, irrevocable facts that we are dealing now.

"So bitter had been our experience, and so painful the shock of separation, that I

think a great many years must have passed before *repentance* came into either heart — before a feeling of *regret* that we had not held fast to our marriage vows was born. How it was with me you may infer from the fact that, after the lapse of two years, I deliberately asked for and obtained a divorce on the ground of desertion. But doubt as to the propriety of this step stirred uneasily in my mind for the first time when I held the decree in my hand; and I have never felt wholly satisfied with myself since. There should be something deeper than *incompatibility of temper* to warrant a divorce. The parties should *correct* what is wrong in themselves — and thus come into harmony. There is no excuse for pride, passion and self-will. The law of God does not make these justifiable causes of divorce, and neither should the law of man. A purer woman than my wife, never lived; and she had elements of character that promised a rare development. I was proud of her. Ah, if I had been wiser and more patient! If I had endeavored to *lead*, instead of assuming the manly prerogative! But I was young, and blind, and willful!

"Fifteen years have passed since the day we parted, and each has remained single. If we had not separated, we might now be living in a true heart-union; for I believe, strange as it may sound to you, that we were *made* for each other — that, when the false and evil of our lives are put off, the elements of harmony will appear. We have made for ourselves, a dreary wilderness — when, if we had overcome the evil of our hearts, our paths would have been through green and fragrant places. I am a better man, I think, for the discipline through which I have passed, and she is a better woman."

Hartley paused.

"She? Have you seen her?" the lady asked.

"Twice since we parted, and then only for a moment. Suddenly each time we met, and looked into each other's eyes for a single instant; then, as if a curtain had dropped suddenly between us — we were separated. But the impression of her face remained as vivid and permanent as a picture. She lives, for most of her time, secluded at Ivy Cliff, her home on the Hudson; and her life is passed there, I hear, in doing Christian charity. And, if good deeds, from right ends, write their history on the human face, then her countenance bears the record of tenderest charities. It was pale when I last saw it — pale — but *spiritual* — I can use no other word; and I felt a sudden panic at the thought that she was growing into a life so *pure* and *heavenly* — that I must stand afar off as unworthy. It had sometimes come into my thought that we were approaching each other — as both put off, more and more, the evil which had driven us apart and held us so long asunder. But this illusion our last brief meeting dispelled. She has passed me on the road of self-discipline and self-denial, and is journeying far ahead. And now I can but follow through life at a distance.

"So much, and no more, my friend. I drop the veil over my heart. You will

understand me better hereafter. I shall not marry. That legal divorce is invalid. I could not perjure my soul by vows of fidelity toward another. Patiently and earnestly, will I do my allotted work here. My better hopes lie all in the heavenly future.

"And now, my friend, we will understand each other better. You have looked deeper into my thoughts and experiences than any other human being. Let the revelation be sacred to yourself. The knowledge you possess may enable you to do me justice sometimes, and sometimes to save me from an intrusion of themes that cannot but touch me unpleasantly. There was a charm about Mrs. Wager that, striking me suddenly, for a little while bewildered my imagination. She is a woman of rare endowments, and I do not regret the introduction and passing influence she exercised over me. It was a *dream* from which the awakening was certain. Suddenly the illusion vanished, as I saw her beside my lost Irene. The one woman was of the earth, earthy — the other of Heaven, heavenly; and as I looked back into her brilliant face, radiant with thought and feeling, I felt a low, creeping shudder, as if just freed from the spell of an enchantress. I cannot be enthralled again, even for a moment."

Back again into his world's work, Hartley returned after this brief, exciting episode, and found in its performance from high and honorable motives that calmly sustaining power which comes only as the reward of duties faithfully done.

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