

After the Storm

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

Chapter 6.

After the storm. Alas! that there should be a wreck-strewn shore so soon! That within three days of the bridal morning, a *tempest* should have raged, scattering on the wind, sweet blossoms which had just opened to the sunshine, tearing away the clinging vines of love, and leaving marks of desolation which no dew and sunshine could ever obliterate!

It was not a blessed honeymoon to them. How could it be, after what had passed? Both were hurt and mortified; and while there was mutual forgiveness and great tenderness and fond concessions, one toward the other — there was a sober, thoughtful state of mind, not favorable to happiness.

Mr. Delancy hoped the lesson — a very severe one — might prove the guarantee of future peace. It had, without doubt, awakened Irene's mind to sober thoughts — and closer self-examination than usual. She was convicted in her own heart of *folly*, the memory of which could never return to her without a sense of pain.

At the end of three weeks from the day of their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Hartley went down to the city to take possession of their new home. On the eve of their departure from Ivy Cliff, Mr. Delancy had a long conference with his daughter, in which he implored her, by all things sacred, to guard herself against that blindness of passion which had already produced such unhappy consequences. She repeated, with many tears, her good resolutions for the future, and showed great sorrow and contrition for the past.

"It may come out right," said the old man to himself; as he sat alone, with a pressure of foreboding on his mind, looking into the dim future, on the day of their departure for New York. His only and beloved child had gone forth to return no more — unless in sorrow or wretchedness. "It may come out right — but my heart has sad misgivings."

There was a troubled suspense of nearly a week, when the first letter came from Irene to her father. He broke the seal with unsteady hands, fearing to let his eyes fall upon the opening page.

"My dear, dear father! I am a happy young wife."

"Thank God!" exclaimed the old man aloud, letting the hand fall that held Irene's letter. It was some moments before he could read farther; then he drank in, with almost childish eagerness, every sentence of the long letter.

"Yes, yes, it may come out right," said Mr. Delancy; "it may come out right." He uttered the words, so often on his lips, with more confidence than usual. The letter strongly urged him to make her a visit, if it was only for a day or two.

"You know, dear father," she wrote, "that most of your time is to be spent with us — all your winters, certainly; and we want you to begin the new arrangement as soon as possible."

Mr. Delancy sighed over the trip. He had not set his heart on this arrangement. It might have been a pleasant thing for him to anticipate; but there was not the hopeful basis for anticipation which a mind like his required.

Not *love* alone prompted Mr. Delancy to make an early visit to New York; a feeling of *anxiety* to know how it really was with the young couple, acted quite as strongly in the line of incentive. And so he went down to the city and passed nearly a week there. Both Irene and her husband knew that he was observing them closely all the while, and a consciousness of this put them under some constraint. Everything passed harmoniously, and Mr. Delancy returned with the half-hopeful, half-doubting words on his lips, so often and often repeated —

"Yes, yes, it may come out right."

But it was not coming out *altogether* right. Even while the old man was under her roof, Irene had a brief season of *self-willed* reaction against her husband, consequent on some unguarded word or act, which she felt to be a trespass on her *freedom*. To save appearances while Mr. Delancy was with them, Hartley yielded and offered conciliation — but all the while, his spirit chafed sorely.

The departure of Mr. Delancy for Ivy Cliff was the signal for both Irene and her husband to lay aside a portion of the *restraint* which each had borne with a certain restlessness that longed for a time of freedom. On the very day that he left, Irene showed so much that seemed to her husband like *perverseness of will* that he was seriously offended, and spoke an unguarded word that was as fire to stubble. It took nearly a week of suffering to discipline the mind of Hartley to the point of conciliation. On the part of Irene, there was not the thought of yielding. Her *will*, supported by *pride* — was as rigid as iron. Reason had no power over her. She felt, rather than thought.

Thus far, both as lover and husband, in all their alienations, Hartley had been the first to yield; and it was so now. He was strong-willed and persistent; but cooler

reason helped him back into the right way, and he had, thus far, found it quicker than Irene. Not that he suffered less or repented sooner. Irene's suffering was far deeper — but she was *blinder* and more *self-determined*.

Again the *sun of peace* smiled down upon them, but, as before, on something shorn of its strength or beauty.

"I will be more guarded," said Hartley to himself. "Knowing her weakness — why should I not protect her against everything that wounds her sensitive nature? Love concedes, is long suffering and full of patience. I love Irene — words cannot tell how deeply. Then why should I not, for her sake, bear and forbear? Why should I think of myself and grow fretted because she does not *yield* as readily as I could desire, to my wishes?"

So Hartley talked with himself and resolved. But who does not know the *feebleness of resolution* when opposed to temperament and confirmed habits of mind? How weak is mere human strength! Alas! how few, depending on that alone, are ever able to bear up steadily, for any length of time, against the *tide of passion!*

Off his guard in less than twenty-four hours after resolving thus with himself, the young husband spoke in captious disapproval of something which Irene had done or proposed to do — and the consequence on her part, was the assumption of a cold, reserved manner, which hurt and annoyed him beyond measure. *Pride* led him to treat her in the same way; and so for days they met in silence or formal courtesy, all the while suffering a degree of wretchedness almost impossible to be endured; and all the while, which was worst of all, writing *bitter things against each other* on their hearts.

To Hartley, as before, the better state first returned — and the sunshine of his countenance, drove the shadows from hers. Then for a season they were loving, thoughtful, forbearing and happy. But the *clouds* came back again, and *storms* marred the beauty of their lives.

All this was sad — very sad. There were good and noble qualities in the hearts of both. They were not narrow-minded and selfish, like so many of your placid, accommodating, calculating people, but generous in their feelings and broad in their sympathies. They had ideals of life that went reaching out far beyond themselves.

Yes, it was sad to see two such hearts beating against and bruising each other — instead of taking the same pulsation. But there seemed to be no help for them. Irene's jealous guardianship of her *freedom*, her quick temper, *pride* and *self-will* made the position of her husband so difficult — that it was almost impossible for him to avoid giving offence.

The summer and fall passed away without any *serious rupture* between the sensitive couple, although there had been seasons of great unhappiness to both. Irene had been up to Ivy Cliff many times to visit her father, and now she was, beginning to urge his removal to the city for the winter; but Mr. Delancy, who had never given his full promise to this arrangement, felt less and less inclined to leave his old home as the season advanced. Almost from boyhood he had lived there, and his habits were formed for rural instead of city life.

He pictured the close streets, with their rows of houses, that left for the eye only narrow patches of ethereal blue — and contrasted this with the broad winter landscape, which for him had always spread itself out with a beauty rivaled by no other season, and his heart failed him.

The brief December days were on them, and Irene grew more urgent.

"Come, dear father," she wrote. "I think of you, sitting all alone at Ivy Cliff, during these long evenings, and grow sad at heart in sympathy with your loneliness. Come at once. Why linger a week or even a day longer? We have been all in all to each other these many years, and ought not to be separated now."

But Mr. Delancy was not ready to exchange the pure air and wide-spreading scenery of the Highlands, for a city residence, even in the desolate winter, and so wrote back *doubtingly*. Irene and her husband then came up to add the persuasion of their presence at Ivy Cliff. It did not avail, however. The old man was too deeply wedded to his home.

"I would be miserable in New York," he replied to their earnest entreaties; "and it would not add to your happiness to see me going about with a sober, discontented face, or to be reminded every little while that if you had left me to my winter's hibernation, I would have been a contented instead of a dissatisfied old man. No, no, my children — Ivy Cliff is the best place for me. You shall come up and spend Christmas here, and we will have a mirthful season."

There was no further use in argument. Mr. Delancy would have his way; and he was right.

Irene and her husband went back to the city, with a promise to spend Christmas at the old homestead.

Two weeks passed. It was the twentieth of December. Without previous intimation, Irene came up alone to Ivy Cliff, startling her father by coming in suddenly upon him one dreary afternoon, just as the leaden sky began to scatter down the winter's first offering of snow.

"My daughter!" he exclaimed, so surprised that he could not move from where he was sitting.

"Dear father!" she answered with a loving smile, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him.

"Where is Hartley?" asked the old man, looking past Irene toward the door through which she had just entered.

"Oh, I left him in New York," she replied.

"In New York! Have you come alone?"

"Yes. Christmas is only five days off, you know, and I am here to help you prepare for it. Of course, Hartley cannot leave his business."

She spoke in an excited, almost mirthful tone of voice. Mr. Delancy looked at her earnestly. Unpleasant doubts flitted through his mind.

"When will your husband come up?" he inquired.

"At Christmas," she answered, without hesitation.

"Why didn't you write, my love?" asked Mr. Delancy. "You have taken me by surprise, and set my nerves in a flutter."

"I only thought about it last evening. One of my sudden resolutions."

And she laughed a low, fluttering laugh. It might have been an error — but her father had a fancy that it did not come from her heart.

"I will run upstairs and put off my things," she said, moving away.

"Did you bring a trunk?"

"Oh yes; it is at the landing. Will you send for it?"

And Irene went, with quick steps, from the room, and ran up to the chamber she still called her own. On the way she met Margaret.

"Miss Irene!" exclaimed the latter, pausing and lifting her hands in astonishment. "Why, where did you come from?"

"Just arrived in the boat. Have come to help you get ready for Christmas."

"Please goodness, how you frightened me!" said the warm-hearted servant, who had been in the family ever since Irene was a child, and was strongly attached to her. "How's Hartley?"

"Oh, he's well, thank you, Margaret."

"Well now, child, you did set me all into a fluster. I thought maybe you'd got into one of your *tantrums*, and come off and left your husband!"

"Why, Margaret!" A crimson flush mantled the face of Irene.

"You must excuse me, child — but just that came into my head," replied Margaret. "You're very *stubborn* and *determined* sometimes; and there isn't anything hardly that you wouldn't do if the spirit was on you. I'm glad it's all right. Dear me! dear me!"

"Oh, I'm not quite so bad as you all make me out," said Irene, laughing.

"I don't think you are bad," answered Margaret, in kind entreaty, yet with a freedom of speech warranted by her years and attachment to Irene. "But you go off in such strange ways — get so *wrong-headed* sometimes — that there's no counting on you."

Then, growing more serious, she added —

"The fact is, Miss Irene, you keep me feeling kind of uneasy all the time. I dreamed about you last night, and maybe that has helped to put me into a fluster now."

"Dreamed about me!" said Irene, with a degree of interest in her manner.

"Yes. But don't stand here, Miss Irene; come over to your room."

"What kind of a dream did you have, Margaret?" asked the young wife, as she sat down on the side of the bed where, pillowed in sleep, she had dreamed so many of girlhood's pleasant dreams.

"I was dreaming all night about you," replied Margaret, looking sober-faced.

"And you saw me in trouble?"

"Oh dear, yes; in nothing but trouble. I thought once that I saw you in a great room full of wild beasts. They were chained or in cages; but you would keep going close up to the bars of the cages, or near enough for the chained animals to spring upon you. And that wasn't all. You put the end of your little parasol in between the bars, and a fierce tiger struck at you with his great cat-like paw, tearing the flesh from your arm. Then I saw you in a little boat, down on the river. You had put up a sail, and was going out all alone. I saw the boat move off from the shore just as plainly as I see you now. I stood and watched until you were in

the middle of the river. Then I thought Hartley was standing by me, and that we both saw a great monster — a whale, or something else — chasing after your boat. Hartley was in great distress, and said, '*I told her not to go — but she is so self-willed.*' And then he jumped into a boat and, taking the oars, went gliding out after you as swiftly as the wind. I never saw mortal arm make a boat fly as he did that little skiff. And I saw him strike the monster with his oar just as his huge jaws were opened to devour you. Dear! dear; but I was frightened, and woke up all in a tremble!"

"Before he had saved me?" said Irene, taking a deep breath.

"Yes; but I don't think there was any chance of saving you; and I was glad that I waked up when I did."

"What else did you dream?" asked Irene.

"Oh, I can't tell you *all* I dreamed. Once I saw you fall from the high rock just above West Point and go dashing down into the river. Then I saw you chased by a mad bull."

"And no one came to my rescue?"

"Oh yes, there was more than one who tried to save you. First, your *father* ran in between you and the bull; but he dashed over him. Then I saw *Hartley* rushing up with a pitchfork, and he got before the mad animal and pointed the sharp prongs at his eyes; but the bull tore down on him and tossed him way up into the air. I awoke as I saw him falling on the sharp-pointed horns that were held up to catch him."

"Well, Margaret, you certainly had a night of horrors," said Irene, in a sober way.

"Indeed, miss, and I had; such a night as I don't wish to have again."

"And your dreaming was all about me?"

"Yes."

"And I was always in trouble or danger?"

"Yes, always; and it was mostly your own fault, too. And that reminds me of what the minister told us in his sermon last Sunday. He said that there were a great many kinds of trouble in this world — some coming from the *outside* and some coming from the *inside*. He said that the *outside* troubles, which we couldn't help, were generally easiest to be borne; while the *inside* troubles, which we might have prevented, were the bitterest things in life, because there was *remorse* as well as suffering. I understood very well what he meant."

"I am afraid," said Irene, speaking partly to herself, "that most of my troubles come from the inside."

"I'm afraid they do," spoke out the frank servant.

"Margaret!"

"Indeed, miss, and I do think so. If you'd only get right here" — laying her hand upon her bosom — "somebody beside yourself would be a great deal happier. There now, child, I've said it; and you needn't go to getting angry with me."

"They are often our best friends — who use the plainest speech," said Irene. "No, Margaret, I am not going to be angry with one whom I know to be true-hearted."

"Not truer-hearted than your husband, Miss Irene; nor half so loving."

"Why did you say that?" Margaret startled at the tone of voice in which this interrogation was made.

"Because I think so," she answered naively.

Irene looked at her for some moments with a penetrating gaze, and then said, with an affected carelessness of tone —

"Your preacher and your dreams have made you quite a *moralist*."

"They have not taken from my heart any of the *love* it has felt for you," said Margaret, tears coming into her eyes.

"I know that, Margaret. You were always too kind and indulgent, and I always too wayward and unreasonable. But I am getting years on my side, and shall not always be a foolish girl."

Snow had now begun to fall thickly, and the late December day was waning toward the early twilight. Margaret went downstairs and left Irene alone in her chamber, where she remained until nearly tea-time before joining her father.

Mr. Delancy did not altogether feel satisfied in his mind about this *unheralded visit* from his daughter, with whose wayward moods he was too familiar. It might be all as she said — but there were intrusive misgivings that troubled him.

At tea-time, she took her old place at the table in such an easy, natural way, and looked so pleased and happy, that her father was satisfied. He asked about her husband, and she talked of him without reserve.

"What day is Hartley coming up?" he inquired.

"I hope to see him on the day before Christmas," returned Irene. There was a falling in her voice that, to the ears of Mr. Delancy, betrayed a feeling of doubt.

"He will not, surely, put it off later," said the father.

"I don't know," said Irene. "He may be prevented from leaving early enough to reach here before Christmas morning. If there should be a cold snap, and the river freeze up — it will make the journey difficult and attended with delay."

"I think the winter has set in;" and Mr. Delancy turned his ear toward the window, against which the snow and hail were beating with violence. "It's a pity Hartley didn't come up with you."

A sober hue came over the face of Irene. This did not escape the notice of her father; but it was natural that she should feel sober in thinking of her husband as likely to be kept from her by the storm. That such were her thoughts, her words made evident, for she said, glancing toward the window —

"If there should be a deep snow, and the boats stop running — how can Hartley reach here in time?"

On the next morning, the sun rose bright and warm for the season. Several inches of snow had fallen, giving to the landscape a wintry whiteness — but the wind was coming in from the south, as genial as spring. Before night, half the snowy covering was gone.

"We had our fears for nothing," said Mr. Delancy, on the second day, which was as mild as the preceding one. "All things promise well. I saw the boats go down as usual; so the river is open still."

Irene did not reply. Mr. Delancy looked at her curiously — but her face was partly turned away and he did not get its true expression.

The twenty-fourth came. No letter had been received by Irene, nor had she written to New York since her arrival at Ivy Cliff.

"Isn't it singular that you don't get a letter from Hartley?" said Mr. Delancy.

Irene had been sitting silent for some time, when her father made this remark.

"He is very busy," she said, in reply.

"That's no excuse. A man is never too busy to write to his absent wife."

"I haven't expected a letter, and so am not disappointed. But he's on his way, no doubt. How soon will the boat arrive?"

"Between two and three o'clock."

"And it's now ten."

The hours passed on, and the time of arrival came. The windows of Irene's chamber looked toward the river, and she was standing at one of them alone when the boat came in sight. Her face was almost colorless, and contracted by an expression of deep anxiety. She remained on her feet for the half hour that intervened before the boat could reach the landing. It was not the first time that she had watched there, in the excitement of doubt and fear, for the same form her eyes were now straining themselves to see.

The shrill sound of escaping steam ceased to quiver on the air, and in a few minutes the boat shot forward into view and went gliding up the river. Irene scarcely breathed, as she stood, with colorless face, parted lips and eager eyes — looking down the road which led to the landing. But she looked in vain; the form of her husband did not appear — and it was Christmas Eve!

What did it mean?

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