

After the Storm

The Fight and the Return

By [Timothy Shay Arthur](#)

1868

Chapter 8.

We will not speak of the *cause* that led to this serious rupture between Irene and Hartley. It was as light as vanity — an airy nothing in itself — a spark that would have gone out on a baby's cheek without leaving a sign of its existence. On the day that Irene left the home of her husband, he had parted from her silent, moody and with ill-concealed anger. Hard words, reproaches and accusations had passed between them on the night previous; and both felt unusually disturbed. The *cause* of all this, as we have said, was light as vanity. During the day Hartley, who was always first to come to his senses, saw the folly of what had occurred, and when he turned his face homeward, after three o'clock, it was with the purpose of ending the unhappy state by revoking a word to which he had given thoughtless utterance.

The moment our young husband came to this sensible conclusion, his heart beat with a freer motion and his spirits rose again into a region of tranquility. He felt the old tenderness toward his wife returning, dwelt on her beauty, accomplishments, virtues and high mental endowments with a glow of pride — and called her *defects* of character, *light* in comparison.

"If I were more a man, and less a child of feeling and impulse," he said to himself, "I would be more worthy to hold the place of husband to a woman like Irene. She has strong peculiarities — who has not peculiarities? Am I free from them? She is no ordinary woman, and must not be confined by ordinary tame routine. She has quick impulses; therefore, if I love her, should I not guard them, lest they leap from her feebly restraining hand in the wrong direction? She is sensitive to *control*; why, then, let her see the hand that must *lead* her, sometimes, aside from the way she would walk through the promptings of her own will? Do I not know that she loves me? And is she not as dear to me as my own life? What folly to strive with each other! What madness to let angry feelings shadow for an instant our lives!"

It was in this state of mind that Hartley returned home. There were a few misgivings in his heart as he entered, for he was not sure as to the kind of *reception* Irene would offer his overtures for peace; but there was no failing of his

purpose to sue for peace and obtain it. With a quick step he passed through the hall, and, after glancing into the parlors to see if his wife were there, went up stairs with two or three light bounds. A hurried glance through the chambers showed him that they had no occupant. He was turning to leave them, when a letter, placed upright on a bureau, attracted his attention. He caught it up. It was addressed to him in the well-known hand of his wife. He opened it and read:

"I leave for Ivy Cliff today. IRENE."

Two or three times Hartley read the line — "I leave for Ivy Cliff today" — and looked at the signature, before its meaning came fully into his thought.

"Gone to Ivy Cliff!" he said, at last, in a low, hoarse voice. "Gone, and without a word of intimation or explanation! Gone, and in the heat of anger! Has it come to this, and so soon! God help us!" And the unhappy man sunk into a chair, as heart-stricken and weak as a child.

For nearly the whole of the night that followed, he walked the floor of his room, and the next day found him in a feverish condition of both mind and body. Not once did the thought of following his wife to Ivy Cliff, if it came into his mind, rest there for a moment. She had gone home to her father with only an announcement of the fact. He would wait some intimation of her further purpose; but, if they met again, *she* must come back to him. This was his first, spontaneous conclusion; and it was not questioned in his thought, nor did he waver from it an instant. She must come back of her own volition, if she came back at all.

It was on the twentieth day of December that Irene left New York. Not until the twenty-second could a letter from her reach Hartley, if, on reflection or after conference with her father, she desired to make a communication. But the twenty-second came and departed without a word from the absent one. So did the twenty-third. By this time Hartley had grown very calm, self-adjusted and resolute. He had gone over and over again the history of their lives since marriage bound them together, and in this history he could see nothing *hopeful* as bearing on the future. He was never certain of Irene. Things said and done in moments of thoughtlessness or excitement, and not meant to hurt or offend — were constantly disturbing their peace. It was clouds, and rain, and fitful sunshine all the while. There were no long seasons of serene delight.

"Why," he said to himself, "seek to prolong this effort to blend into one — two lives which seem hopelessly antagonistic. Better stand as far apart as the *two poles* — than live in perpetual strife. If I should go to Irene, and, through concession or entreaty, win her back again — what guarantee would I have for the future? None, none whatever. Sooner or later we must be driven asunder by the violence of our ungovernable passions, never to draw again together. We are apart now, and it is well. I shall not take the first step toward a reconciliation."

Hartley was a young man of cool purpose and strong will. For all that, he was quick-tempered and undisciplined. It was from the possession of these qualities, that he was steadily advancing in his profession, and securing a practice at the bar which promised to give him a high position in the future. *Persistence* was another element of his character. If he adopted any course of conduct, it was a difficult thing to turn him aside. When he laid his hand upon the plough — he was of those who rarely look back. Unfortunate qualities these for a crisis in life, such as now existed.

On the morning of the twenty-fourth of December, no word having come from his wife, Hartley coolly penned the letter to Mr. Delancy which is given in the preceding chapter, and mailed it so that it would reach him on Christmas day. He was in earnest — sternly in earnest — as Mr. Delancy, on reading his letter, felt him to be. The honeymoon flight was one thing; this abandonment of a husband's home, was another thing. Hartley gave to them a different weight and quality. Of the first act, he could never think without a burning cheek — a sense of mortification — a pang of wounded pride; and long before this, he had made up his mind that if Irene ever left him again — it would be forever, so far as perpetuity depended on his action in the case. He would never follow her nor seek to win her back.

Yes, he was in earnest. He had made his mind up for the worst, and was acting with a desperate coolness only faintly imagined by Irene on receipt of his letter to her father. Mr. Delancy, who understood Hartley's character better, was not deceived. He took the communication in its literal meaning, and felt appalled at the *ruin* which impended.

Hartley passed the whole of Christmas day alone in his house. At meal-times he went to the table and forced himself to partake lightly of food, in order to *blind* the servants, whose curiosity in regard to the absence of Irene was, of course, all on the alert. After taking tea he went out.

His purpose was to call upon a friend in whom he had great confidence, and confide to him the unhappy state of his affairs. For an hour he walked the streets in debate on the propriety of this course. Unable, however, to see the matter clearly, he returned home with the secret of his *domestic trouble* still locked in his own bosom.

It was past eight o'clock when he entered his dwelling. A light was burning in one of the parlors, and he stepped into the room. After walking for two or three times the length of the room, Hartley threw himself on a sofa, a deep sigh escaping his lips as he did so. At the same moment he heard a step in the passage, and the rustling of a woman's garments, which caused him to rise again to his feet. In moving his eyes met the form of *Irene*, who advanced toward him, and throwing her arms around his neck, sobbed,

"Dear husband! can you, will you forgive my childish folly?"

His first impulse was to push her away, and he, even grasped her arms and attempted to draw them from his neck. She perceived this, and clung to him more eagerly.

"Dear Hartley!" she said, "will you not speak to me?"

"Irene!" His voice was cold and deep, and as he pronounced her name he withdrew himself from her embrace. At this, she grew calm and stepped a pace back from him.

"Irene, we are not children," he said, in the same cold, deep voice, the tones of which were even and measured. "That time is past. Nor foolish young lovers, who fall out and make up again twice or thrice in a two weeks; but man and wife, with the world and its sober realities before us."

"Oh, Hartley," exclaimed Irene, as he paused; "don't talk to me in this way! Don't look at me so! It will kill me. I have done wrong. I have acted like foolish child. But I am penitent. It was half in sport that I went away, and I was so sure of seeing you at Ivy Cliff yesterday that I told father you were coming."

"Irene, sit down." And Hartley took the hand of his wife and led her to a sofa. Then, after closing the parlor door, he drew a chair and seated himself directly in front of her. There was a coldness and self-possession about him, that chilled Irene.

"It is a serious thing," he said, looking steadily in her face, "for a wife to leave her husband's house in anger, for that of her father."

She tried to make some reply and moved her lips in attempted utterance — but the organs of speech refused to perform their office.

"You left me once before in anger — and I went after you. But it was clearly understood with myself then, that if you repeated the act it would be *final* in all that appertained to me; that unless *you* returned, it would be a lifelong separation. You have repeated the act; and, knowing your pride and tenacity of will, I did not anticipate your return. And so I was looking the sad, stern future in the face, as steadily as possible, and preparing to meet it as a man conscious of right should be prepared to meet whatever trouble lies in store for him. I went out this evening, after passing the Christmas day alone, with the purpose of consulting an old and discreet friend as to the wisest course of action. But the thing was too painful to speak of yet. So I came back — and you are here!"

She looked at him steadily while he spoke, her face as white as marble, and her

colorless lips drawn back from her teeth.

"Irene," he continued, "it is folly for us to keep on in the way we have been going. I am wearied out, and you cannot be happy in a relation that is forever reminding you that your own *will* and *thought* are no longer sole arbiters of your actions; that there is another *will* and another *thought* that must at times be consulted, and even *obeyed*. I am a man, and a husband; you a woman, and a wife — we are equal as to rights and duties — equal in the eyes of God; but to the man and husband appertains a certain precedence in action; consent, cooperation and approval, if he is a thoughtful and judicious man, appertaining to the wife."

As Hartley spoke thus, he noticed a sign of returning warmth in her pale face, and a dim, distant flash in her eyes. Her *proud* spirit did not accept *this view* of their relation to each other. He went on:

"If a wife has no confidence in her husband's manly judgment, if she cannot even respect him — then the case is altered. Such a woman must lead both him and herself if he is weak enough to consent. But the relation is not a true one; and marriage, under this condition of things, is only a pretension."

"And that is your belief about marriage?" said Irene. There was a shade of *surprise* in her voice which lingered huskily in her throat.

"That is my belief," was Hartley's firmly spoken answer.

Irene sighed heavily. Both were silent for some moments. At length Irene said, lifting her hands and bringing them down with an action of despair,

"In chains! In chains!"

"No, no!" Her husband replied quickly and earnestly. "Not in chains — but in true freedom, if you will — the freedom of reciprocal action."

"Like bat and ball," she answered, with bitterness in her tones.

"No, like heart and lungs," he returned, calmly. "Irene! dear wife! Why misunderstand me? I have no wish to *rule*, and you know I have never sought to place you in chains. I have had only one desire, and that is to be your *husband* in the highest and truest sense. But, I am a man — you a woman. There are two *wills* and two *understandings* which must act in the *same direction*. Now, in the nature of things, the mind of *one* must, helped by the mind of the other to see right — take, as a general thing, the *initiative* where action is concerned. Unless this is so — constant collisions will occur. And this takes us back to the question which lies at the basis of all order and happiness — *which* of the two minds shall lead?"

"A man and his wife are *equal*," said Irene, firmly. The strong individuality of her character was asserting its claims even in this hour of severe mental pain.

"Equal in the eyes of God, as I have said before — but where *action* is concerned, one must take precedence of the other, for, it cannot be, seeing that their office and duties are different, that their judgment in the general affairs of life can be equally clear. A man's work takes him out into the world, and throws him into sharp collision with other men. He learns, as a consequence, to think carefully and with deliberation, and to decide with caution, knowing that action, based on erroneous conclusions, may ruin his prospects in an hour. Thus, like the oak, which, grows up exposed to all the changes of the elements — his judgment gains strength, while his perceptions, constantly trained, acquire clearness. But a woman's duties lie almost wholly within this region of strife and action, and she remains, for the most part, in a tranquil atmosphere. Allowing nothing for a radical difference in mental constitution, this difference of training must give a difference of mental power. The man's judgment in affairs generally must be superior to the woman's, and she must *acquiesce* in its decisions — or there can be no right union in marriage."

"Must lose herself in him," said Irene, coldly. "Become a *cipher*, a *slave*! That will not suit me, Hartley!" And she looked at him with firmly compressed mouth and steady eyes.

It came to his lips to reply, "Then you had better return to your father" — but he caught the words back before they leaped forth into sound, and, rising, walked the floor for the space of more than five minutes, Irene not stirring from the sofa. Pausing at length, he said in a voice which had lost its steadiness:

"You had better go up to your room, Irene. We are not in a condition to help each other now."

Irene did not answer, but, rising, left the parlor and went as her husband had suggested. He stood still, listening, until the sound of her steps and the rustle of her garments had died away into silence, when he commenced slowly walking the parlor floor with his head bent down, and continued thus, as if he had forgotten time and place, for over an hour. Then, awakened to consciousness by a sense of dizziness and exhaustion, he laid himself upon a sofa, and, shutting his eyes, tried to arrest the current of his troubled thoughts, and sink into sleep and forgetfulness.

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