

Ah, Time, what wilt thou? Vanished quite  
 Is all that tender vision now;  
 And like lost snow-flakes in the night,  
 Mute lie the lovers as their vow.

And O thou little, careless brook,  
 Hast thou thy tender trust forgot?  
 Her modest memory forsook,  
 Whose name, known once, thou utterest not?

Spring wakes the rill's blithe minstrelsy;  
 In willow bough or alder bush  
 Birds sing, with golden filigree  
 Of pebbles 'neath the flood's clear gush;

But none can tell us of that name  
 More than the "Mary." Men still say  
 "Bride Brook" in honor of her fame;  
 But all the rest has passed away.

*G. P. Lathrop.*

## PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

### XI.

EASTON began to show signs of decided convalescence. Day by day he became more susceptible of the kindnesses which his sympathizers yearned to lavish upon him, all the more ardently for being so long held aloof by the certainty that the best thing they could do was to let him alone; the ladies got out their recipes for sick-room delicacies again, and broths and broils were debated. One day he sat up in a chair to have his bed made, and then a great wave of rejoicing ran through the house. Mrs. Farrell created a wine-jelly which, when it was turned out of the mold upon a plate, was as worshipfully admired as if it had been the successful casting in bronze of some great work of art.

Her spirits had begun to rise; that day she moved as if on air, and as he grew better and better, she put off the moral and material tokens of her lingering bondage to fear. For some time she had suffered herself to wear those great

hoops of Etruscan gold in her ears; now she replaced her penitential slippers and sober shoes with worldly boots; she blossomed again in the rich colors that became her; on the following Sunday she celebrated her release in a silk that insulted her past captivity, and sang for joy as she swooped through the house in it. On Monday she bought out the small stock of worsteds at the West Pekin store, and sat matching them in her lap when Gilbert came out upon the piazza. He stopped to look at her, and she asked him if he had any taste in colors. "Men have, a great deal oftener than women will allow," she said. "At least they are quite apt to have inspirations in color."

"I don't believe I have," answered Gilbert, still looking at her radiance and not at the worsteds. "I lived long and happily without knowing some colors from others by name."

Mrs. Farrell laughed. "Oh, I did n't mean the names. Women are glibber than men with those. But you 'd have

been able to criticise the effect, would n't you? You'd have known that blue would n't do for a brunette, if you'd seen it on her?"

"I'm not so sure," said Gilbert.

"Why, look!" cried Mrs. Farrell, taking up a delicate shade of blue, and holding it against one cheek, while she fixed her eyes upon his with business-like preoccupation. "There! don't you see how we take the life out of each other? Don't you see that it perfectly kills me?"

"Well, I don't know. I should say that the worsted was getting the worst of it."

"Worsted and worsted; a pun or an opinion?" demanded Mrs. Farrell, still holding the color to her cheek, and her eyes on his.

"Oh, either; one's as good as the other."

"I don't believe you meant either. I'm sorry you can't help me about matching these wools, and I've a great mind to make use of you in another way. But I don't suppose you would do it," she said, glancing up at him as she straightened the skeins of yarn by slipping them over her two hands.

"What do you wish to do?"

"Why, I wish to wind these skeins into little balls, and"—

"Me to hold them, as you're doing, whilst you wind? I don't mind that."

"Really? I think it's the silliest position in the world for a man; and I can't let you. No, no; you shall not."

"Yes, but I will. Come. I wish to show you that my manly dignity can rise superior to holding worsteds."

He took up a skein and stretched it on his hands; she loosened a thread and began to wind; both with gloomy brows. When she had half done, she flung down the ball, and burst into a laugh. "No, no; you can't face it out. You look silly in spite of that noble frown. How do you suppose you appear to those ladies down there under the trees, with your hands raised in that gesture of stage-supplication? You look as if you were imploring me for your life—or something; and here I am making all these

cabalistic motions," she resumed her winding, "as if I were weaving a spell around you! Do let us stop it! And I'll get Miss Jewett to help me."

"No, go on," said Gilbert. "If you offer to stop, I shall clasp my hands!"

"Oh, oh!" shouted Mrs. Farrell.

"Don't, for pity's sake! Was ever a poor sorceress so at her victim's mercy before? This skein is nearly done. Will you put down your hands, you cruel object of my unhallowed arts?"

"I will, if you'll let me put them up again, and help finish the other skeins. If you don't consent, I'll keep holding them so."

"Well, then I'll leave you in that interesting attitude."

"If you dare to rise, I'll follow you all about in it."

"Oh dear me! I really believe you would. There, take up another skein."

"No, you must put it on, yourself; I've just got my hands in the right places."

"But you said you'd put them down if I'd let you put them up again," lamented Mrs. Farrell.

"I've changed my mind. I said that before I perceived that I had you in my power. If you don't hurry, I'll exaggerate the attitude. Quick!"

She was laughing so that she could hardly arrange the yarn upon the frame-work so rigidly presented to her.

"Don't hold your thumbs like sticks," she besought him. "Have a little flexibility, if you have no pity. It's some satisfaction to think you *do* look foolish."

"I have the consolation of suspecting that you *feel* so. I'm quite willing to do the looking."

Mrs. Farrell said nothing, but swiftly wound the yarn upon the ball, and "Don't hurry!" commanded Gilbert. "I'm not going to put my hands down till I like, any way. So you may as well take your time."

"Oh, Mr. Gilbert," pleaded Mrs. Farrell. "How can you threaten me, when I'm so meekly letting you have your own way! I never should have supposed you were that kind of man."

"Neither should I," said Gilbert. "This is the first opportunity I've had to play the tyrant to one of your amiable sex, and I'm determined to abuse it."

"Oh, that's a likely story! With that conceited air of yours, when you are so good as to address a woman! Don't be a humbug, if you *are* a faithless despot."

"And don't you employ harsh language in addressing me, Mrs. Farrell, or I'll sit here all day with my hands outstretched to you."

"All day? Oh, — happy thought! Wind very slowly and tire him out!"

"Do! I could stop here until I changed into a mere figure in a bas-relief — a profile and the back of a lifted hand; and you a classic shape intent upon the flying thread" —

"That's not fair, Mr. Gilbert. To make remarks upon me when you know I can't help myself."

"Don't you like to have remarks made upon you?"

"Not when I can't help myself."

"Why not? I have n't forbidden you to answer back."

"But you would, if my answers did n't suit you. How is it, if you don't know anything about colors, that you dress in such very tolerable taste?"

"Do I? Mrs. Farrell, don't take advantage of my helplessness to flatter me! I suppose it's my tailor's taste — which I always go against. And then, it's New York."

"Yes, New York is well dressed," sighed Mrs. Farrell. "Oh dear me! The *style* of some New York girls that I've seen! I suppose men can't feel it as *we* do."

"Don't be so sure of that. We can't give any but the elementary names of things that a woman has on, but I don't believe the subtlest effect of a dress is ever lost upon men; and I believe the soul of any man of imagination is as much taken with style in dressing as with beauty. Americans all adore it, — perhaps because it's so characteristic of American women that they seem almost to have invented it. It's a curious thing, — something different from

beauty, something different from grace, something more charming than either, and as various as both. I should say it was the expression of personal character, and that American women have more style than any other women because they have more freedom, and utter themselves in dry-goods more fearlessly."

Mrs. Farrell stopped winding the yarn a moment, and instinctively cast down her eyes over her draperies. He smiled.

"For shame!" she cried indignantly, while her eyes dimmed with mortification at her self-betrayal. But she boldly grappled with the situation. "Did you think I was thinking you thought *me* stylish? I know I am so; I had no need to think that. I was thinking that if ever you left the law and followed the true bent of your genius, New York ladies need n't go to Worth for their dresses."

"Is n't that an unnecessarily elaborate bit of insult, considering that I had n't said a word to provoke it?"

"You smiled."

"Why, you've been laughing all the time."

"But I was n't laughing at you."

"Whom were you laughing at?"

"I was laughing at myself."

"Well, I merely smiled at you."

But Mrs. Farrell was plainly hurt past jesting for the present. She wound furiously at the worsted, and they both kept silence.

At last Gilbert asked, "What is all this yarn for?"

"To knit a smoking-cap for Mr. Easton," she said coldly, and then neither spoke again. Presently she caught a half-finished skein from his hand, tossed the balls and skeins together in her lap, and gathering them up swept in-doors, leaving him planted where he had sat confronting her.

In spite of the careless gayety of his banter, Gilbert had worn a look that was neither easy nor joyous. He did not seem much irritated by her excessive retaliation, but presently rose and walked listlessly up to the village to get his letters, and when he came back, he went

to his sister-in-law's room with a letter which he showed her.

"Shall you go?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know. I don't know why I'm not on fire to go, but I don't happen to be so. There's a day or two for thinking it over. If it were not for Easton"—

"He's a long while getting well," said Mrs. Gilbert with an impatient sigh; "I don't see why he's so slow about it."

"Well, Susan," languidly reasoned Gilbert, "you've been about fifteen years yourself getting well, and you haven't quite finished yet. You can't consistently complain of a few weeks, more or less, in Easton. I dare say he would be well at once, if he could; but it is n't a matter that he can hurry, exactly."

"No," said Mrs. Gilbert. "But aren't you losing a great deal of time here, William? You came for two weeks, and you've stayed nearly six. Don't you think Easton could get on without you, now?"

"Why, considering that Easton came here because he thought I'd like to have him, when I was merely a little under the weather, I don't think it would be quite the thing for me to go off now, and leave him before he's fairly on his legs."

"That's true," sighed Mrs. Gilbert. "And I'm glad to have you so faithful to your friend, William. I'm sure you never could forgive yourself if you were recreant to him in the slightest thing. Your friendship has sacred claims upon you both. I have sometimes thought it was a little too romantic, but it's a great thing to have the highest standard in such matters, and you could never let your fidelity be less than Easton's."

Gilbert looked at her and pulled his mustache uneasily, but Mrs. Gilbert kept her eyes upon the sewing she had in hand. "You and Mrs. Farrell seem to be friends at present. I have heard of your holding worsted for her to wind, just now. The ladies who saw you at a little distance thought it a very picturesque group, and seemed grateful for

the topic you had given them. They talked about it a good deal. I suppose it *was* picturesque—at least her part of it. I don't think manly grace is at its best under such circumstances, though I dare say you were n't posing for spectators."

"I had no quarrel with Mrs. Farrell," said Gilbert, choosing to ignore the other points.

"No? I thought there seemed to be a little coldness at one time."

"Perhaps the shyness of comparative strangers, Mrs. Gilbert."

"William," said Mrs. Gilbert, "I wish you would talk seriously with me a moment."

"Then you must start a serious subject. You can't expect me to be very earnest about genteel comedy, or even melodrama."

"Do you mean that she's always playing a part? Why, don't you believe"—

"Excuse me, Susan," said Gilbert, "I haven't formulated any creed on that subject, and I'd rather you'd make your conversation a little less Socratic, this morning, if it's quite the same to you."

"I beg your pardon, William; I know that with your notions of loyalty to your friend, you would n't allow yourself to speculate about the nature of the woman he hoped to make his wife, and I honor you for your delicacy, though she's only another woman to me. Easton would deal the same with himself, if the case were yours."

Gilbert listened with a stolid but rather a haggard air, and his sister-in-law continued:—

"I suppose she must make it difficult to treat her at times with the lofty respect that you'd like to use, and that you have to keep *him* in mind pretty constantly. And yet, I don't know, after all. It seems to me that if you interpret her behavior generously,"—Gilbert winced a little at the words, used almost as Easton had once used them,— "and make due allowance for her histrionic temperament, it can't be so very hard for an honorable man."

"The clemency of your sentiments in regard to Mrs. Farrell is a continual surprise to me, Susan, when I remember what an outfit you gave her the time we first talked of her," said Gilbert.

"Oh, you can easily convict me of inconsistency on any point," answered his sister-in-law. "But why should n't I see a change for the better in her? why should n't I sincerely believe her capable of nobler things than I once did?"

"You have all the reasons in the world; and if you had none, still, optimism is amiable. But really, do you know this is getting very tiresome? Am I to spend all my leisure moments with you in philosophizing Mrs. Farrell? I'm willing to take any version of her that you give me. How can I doubt her devotion to Easton when I see her getting ready to knit him a smoking-cap? I know she's sorry for having made that misunderstanding between him and me, for she said she was. Who would n't believe a handsome young woman when she says she's sorry? Perhaps another handsome young woman. Not I."

"Now you're talking in a very silly, cynical way, William, and you'd better say good morning, and come again when you're in a different mood."

"I'm willing enough to say good morning," returned Gilbert, and went.

He went by an attraction which he could not resist to Easton's room, and experienced again that heartquake with which he now always met his friend's eye, and which he was always struggling to prevent or avert. It was a thing which his nerves might be reasoned out of, with due thought, and it did not come, when he was once in Easton's presence and confronted him from time to time. But in the morning, when their eyes first met, or after any little absence, the shock was inevitable; and he knew, though he would not own it to himself, that he had been trying somehow to shun the encounter. The bitterest rage he had felt against his friend was bliss to this fear of the trust he saw in Easton's face. He could best endure it when he could

meet him in Mrs. Farrell's presence. In the gay talk which he held with them together, he could persuade himself that the harmless pleasure of the moment was all. He found a like respite when alone with her. He did not pretend to himself that he tried to avoid her; he knew that he sought her with feverish eagerness; now and then in the pauses of her voice a haggard consciousness blotted his joy in her charm, but when he parted from her, he was sensible of a stupid and craven apprehension, as if the fascination of her presence were also a safeguard beyond which he could not hope for mercy from himself. At such times it was torture to meet Rachel Woodward, and the shy friendship which had sprung up between them died of this pain. His haunting inward blame seemed to look at him again from her clear eyes; he accused himself in the tones of her voice; she confronted him like an outer conscience, even when her regard seemed explicitly to refuse intelligence of what was in his heart.

At dinner, that day, Mrs. Farrell was very bright-eyed and rather subdued; she looked like a woman who had been having a cry. She talked amiably with everybody, as was now her wont, and when she found herself, late in the afternoon, again on the piazza with Gilbert, she said, "You're sorry, I suppose."

"Not the least," he answered, with nervous abruptness. "Why should I be sorry? Because you made an outrageous speech to me?"

"You are rather a vindictive person, are n't you?" she asked, beginning again.

"No, — I don't think so," returned Gilbert. "Do you?"

"You cherished a grudge against me a good while, and if you had n't happened to overdo it, you'd be still bearing malice, I suppose."

"And because you overdid it this morning you're able to pardon me now. I see the process of your reasoning. Well, hereafter I shall not offend you by smiling; I'm going to frown at everything you do."

"No, don't do that! I want you to be very kind to me."

"Yes? How is a gentleman to be kind to a lady?"

"Everything depends upon character and circumstance. If she is n't the wisest of her sex, — so few of us are, — and has been used to doing and saying quite what she pleased, without regard to consequences, and she finds herself in a position where circumspection is her duty, he ought to look about for her and guard her."

"From what?"

"Oh — hawks, and lynxes, and — cats. They're everywhere."

Mrs. Farrell sat down on the benching and drew from her pocket the balls of worsted which she had loosely rolled in a handkerchief, together with some knitting already begun, and went on with the work, while Gilbert stood before her, looking down at her.

"You ought n't to have helped me with these this morning," she said, pushing the little balls about, and sorting them for the right colors.

"You asked me to do it!"

"But you ought to have refused. It was because I thought you were trying to embarrass me, and take advantage of my foolishness, that I got angry and was rude to you."

Gilbert said nothing, and after a little more comparison of the worsteds Mrs. Farrell made her decision, and took her knitting in hand.

"Help me, don't hinder me!" she went on in a low voice. "Don't be amused at me; let me alone; keep away from me; don't make me talked about!"

"Shall I go now?" asked Gilbert, huskily.

Mrs. Farrell looked up at him in astonishment that dispersed all other emotions. "Oh good gracious!" she cried, "they're all alike, after all! No, you poor — *man*, you! You must stay, now, till some one comes up; and don't run off the instant they do come! And you must keep on talking, *now*. Come, let us converse of various matters —

'Whether the sea is boiling hot,  
And whether pigs have wings.'

There, thank Heaven! there comes Mrs. Stevenson. Pay some attention to her. Ask her about her art, as she calls it, and try to seem interested. Mrs. Stevenson, I'm in despair over these worsteds. I can make nothing of them. Did you see any at the Bazar, the other day, when you were at Quapsaug? There ought to be crewels in that immense assortment. Where is that lavender? Where, oh tell me where, is that little lavender gone? Perhaps it's in my pocket — no! Perhaps it's rolled under the bench — no! Then I've left it in my room, and I'll have to go after it. Excuse!" She caught her worsteds against her dress, and, turning a sidelong glance upon him as she whirled past, made "Talk!" with mute lips, and left him.

When she came back, neither he nor Mrs. Stevenson was there. They had apparently dispersed each other. She sat down a while and knitted contentedly, and then went with her work to visit Mrs. Gilbert, who had not been at dinner.

"I'm very glad to see you," said Mrs. Gilbert, who had a flask of cologne in her hand, and moistened her forehead with it from time to time as she talked.

"Headache?" suggested Mrs. Farrell.

"Yes, only a minor headache, — nothing heroic at all. It's merely something to occupy the mind. Do you happen to know where my brother is?"

"I left him with Mrs. Stevenson on the piazza, a few moments ago — talking art, I suppose." Mrs. Farrell adventured this. "They're not there, now; perhaps he's gone to look at her works."

"That's the smoking-cap, is it?" asked Mrs. Gilbert.

Mrs. Farrell held up at arms-length the small circle of the crown which she had so far knitted, and, gazing at it in deep preoccupation, answered, "Yes. These are the colors," she added. She leaned toward the other, and held them forward in both hands. "I think it's pretty well for West Pekin."



"I've no doubt it will be charming," said Mrs. Gilbert. "I don't approve of smoking, of course, but I hope he'll soon be able to use his smoking-cap. I was just thinking about you, Mrs. Farrell. I want Mr. Easton to get well as soon as possible, so that you can begin to have a good, long, commonplace courtship. If you were a daughter of mine" —

"I should be a pretty old daughter for you, Mrs. Gilbert," said Mrs. Farrell, flatteringly.

"Oh, I fancy not so very. How old are you?"

"I'm twenty-four."

"And I'm forty-five, and look fifty. You're still in your first youth, and I'm in my first old age. I could easily be your mother."

"I wish you were! I should be the better for being your daughter, Mrs. Gilbert."

"I don't know. I should n't like to promise you that. But sometimes I think I could have been a good mother, or at least that children would have made a good mother of me, for I believe that half the goodness that women get credit for is forced upon them by those little helpless troubles. Men could be just as good if they had the care and burden of children — men are so very near being very good as it is."

"I know it," sighed Mrs. Farrell. "I never knew my own mother," she added; "if I had, I might have been a better woman. But are we to blame, I wonder, that we are not so good as we might have been, — you if you'd had children, and I if I had had a mother?"

"Oh, I don't know. I dare say we shall never be judged so harshly anywhere else as we are in this world."

"That's true!" said Mrs. Farrell, bitterly.

"Not that we don't stand in need of judgment," continued the other, "as much as we do of mercy. It's wholesome, and I've never been unjustly blamed yet that I did n't feel I deserved it all, and more. Oh, Mrs. Farrell, if I were really to speak to you as my daughter" —

"Don't call me Mrs. Farrell! Call me by my own name," cried the younger woman impulsively. "Call me — Rosabel."

"Is that your name? I took it for granted you were Isabel. It's a very pretty name, very sweet and quaint; but I won't call you by it; it would make you more of a stranger to me than Mrs. Farrell does."

"Well, no matter. You shall call me what you like. Come; you said if you were to speak to me as your daughter" —

"Oh, I'm not certain whether I can go on, after all. Perhaps what I was going to say would degenerate into a kind of lecture on love and marriage in the abstract. If I had a daughter whose love affair had been so romantic as yours, I believe I should tell her to make all the surer of her heart on account of the romance. I'm afraid that in matters of love, romance is a dangerous element. Love ought to be perfectly ordinary, regular, and every-day like."

"Those are very heretical ideas!" said Mrs. Farrell, shaking her head.

"Yes, yes, I dare say," answered Mrs. Gilbert; "but, as I said before, I hope for both your sakes that you and Mr. Easton will have a good stupid wooing — at least a year of it — when he gets well."

"I shall not object to that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Farrell demurely.

"No, I should hope you were too much of a woman. That's a woman's reign, the time of courtship. Her lover is never truly subject to her again. Make it as long as you can — long enough to get the romance out of your heads. And I wish you a sound quarrel or two."

"Oh! Now you are joking."

"Yes, I am. I hope you may never say an unkind word to each other. Have you a temper?"

"Not much, I believe."

"Has he?"

"I've been a little afraid of him once or twice."

"Already? Well, I think it's a pity you have n't a temper, too. Don't be one of the coldly self-possessed kind

when he is angry; it's far better to be frightened."

"I will try always to be frightened. But I'm not sure that it was any violence of his that scared me, so much as his" —

"What?"

"Well, his goodness — or somebody else's badness. Mine, for example."

"Ah, yes! He is a good man. It's a merit in a husband, goodness is; though I doubt very much if young people often think of that; they're so blinded by each other's idolatry that they have no sense of good or bad; they adore one quite as much as the other. And you must consider yourself a young person. You must have been very young when you were married, Mrs. Farrell."

"Yes, I was very young indeed. It seems a great while ago. And afterwards my life was very unhappy — after his death — they made it so. Mrs. Gilbert," she cried, "I know you don't like a great many things in me; but perhaps you would like more if you knew more."

"Yes, but don't tell them. One must have something to disapprove of in others, or how can one respect one's self?"

"I don't say that the fault was all theirs; I don't pretend that I was a very meek or manageable sister, but only that I could have been better with better people. They were vulgar to the tips of their fingers. And that drove me from them at last."

They sat some moments without saying anything, Mrs. Gilbert keeping her eyes intent upon Mrs. Farrell's face, whose fallen eyes in turn were fixed upon her work. Then the former said with a little sigh, "So you think I don't like some things about you! My dear, I like altogether too many. Yes," she continued absently, studying the beautiful face, "I suppose I should, too."

"Should what?" asked Mrs. Farrell.

"Make a fool of myself, if I were a man. I never could resist such a face as yours; I only wonder they don't have more power. But recollect, my dear,

that somehow, sometime, you'll be held responsible for your power, if you abuse it, even though we poor mortals seem to ask nothing better than to be made fools of by you."

"Was that what you were going to say?" asked Mrs. Farrell, lifting her eyes from her work, and looking keenly at Mrs. Gilbert.

"No, it was n't. But I'm so far off the track, now, I won't say it. After all, it might seem like a glittering generality about" —

The women relaxed their wary regard; the elder did not offer to go on, and the younger did not urge her. Mrs. Farrell knitted half a round on the smoking-cap, as if to gain a new starting-point, and then dropped her work in her lap, and laid her hands, one on top of the other, over it. "Did you ever try inhaling the fumes of coffee for your headaches?" she asked.

"Oh, my dear, I gave that up away back in the Dark Ages," returned Mrs. Gilbert, resorting to the cologne.

"I suppose the cologne does you no good?"

"Not the least in the world. But one must do something."

"Yes," said Mrs. Farrell, drawing the word in with a long breath, "one must do something." She took up her work again and knitted a while before she added, "I wonder if a man would go on forever doing something that he knew did him no good, as a woman does?"

"No, I suppose not. Men are very queer," said Mrs. Gilbert, gravely. "They're quite inert. But that gives them some of their advantages."

"They have pretty nearly all the advantages, have n't they?" asked Mrs. Farrell, quickly. "Even when some woman makes fools of them! At least when that happens they have all the other women on their side." As she knitted rapidly on she had now and then a little tremulous motion of the head that shook the gold hoops in her ears against her neck.

"Well, then they have a right to our pity."

"Oh, do you think so? It seems to



me that *she* has a right to more." She looked down on either side of her at the floor. "I thought I brought both balls of that ashes of roses with me." Mrs. Gilbert looked about the carpet in her vicinity. "Don't trouble yourself. It's no matter. I think I won't use it here, after all. I'll use this brown. A woman never makes a fool of a man unless she respects him very much. Of course there must be something fascinating about him, or she would n't care to have him care for her, at all; it would be disgusting."

"Yes," said Mrs. Gilbert.

"And then," continued Mrs. Farrell, keeping her eyes on her work, and knitting faster and faster, "if she has any heart at all, it must be half broken to think of what she's done. The falsest coquette that ever was would feel like bowing down to true love in a man; and what is she to do if ever the worst comes to the worst, and she finds she's afraid she does n't love him? She must know that his good faith is ten million times stronger than her looks, and that it has a claim which she must try to answer somehow. Shall she marry him out of pity, and put him to the shame of finding it out some day? That would be the worst kind of treachery. No, no; she could n't do that! And can she tell him how wicked she has been, and ask him never to see her face or breathe her name or hear it spoken again? That would be easy, if it were only for her! But if she did this, if she could have the courage to kill his faith in her with such a blow as that, and to blacken his life with shame for having loved her, what better would she be than a murderess?"

She grew pale as she spoke, but no tremor now shook the hoops in her ears; she only wrought the more swiftly and kept her eyes upon the flying needle, while a kind of awe began to express itself in the gaze that Mrs. Gilbert bent upon her.

"What should you think *then* of the power of a pretty face?" asked Mrs. Farrell, flashing a curious look of self-scorn upon her. "What could the pret-

ty face do for her, or for him? Could it help her to forgive herself, or help him to forget her? And which would have the greatest claim to the pity of the spectators?—supposing there were spectators of the tragedy, and there nearly always are. Come, imagine some such woman, Mrs. Gilbert, and imagine her your daughter, — you were imagining *me* your daughter, just now, — and tell me what you would say to her. You would n't know what to say, even to your own daughter? Oh! I thought you might throw some light upon such a case." She had lifted her eyes with fierce challenge to Mrs. Gilbert's, but now she dropped them again upon her work. "But what if the case were still worse? Can you imagine so much as its being worse?"

"Yes, I can imagine its being worse," said Mrs. Gilbert, whose visage seemed to age suddenly with a premonition that a thing long dreaded, long expected, was now coming, in spite of all attempted disbelief.

"Oh yes, certainly! You were wondering just now that beauty did n't have greater power! Suppose that even in all this wretchedness, this miserable daughter of yours was afraid — Ah! Mrs. Gilbert," she cried, starting violently to her feet, "you were trying a minute ago — don't you think I knew your drift? — to peep into my heart! How do you like to have it flung wide open to you?" She confronted Mrs. Gilbert, who had risen too, with a wild reproach, as if she had made the wrong another's by tearing the secret of it from her own breast. Mrs. Gilbert answered her nothing, and in another instant she faltered, "Don't blame him, don't be harsh with him. But oh, in the name of mercy send him away!"

## XII.

It was already dark when Gilbert knocked at his sister's door. She was sitting in the chair from which she had risen at parting with Mrs. Farrell, and into which she sank again at her going.

Gilbert sat down before her, but did not speak.

"Have you made up your mind when you shall go, William?" she asked, gently.

"I have n't made up my mind that I shall go at all," he answered, in a sullen tone.

"But I think you had better," she said as before.

"I am always glad, Susan, of advice that costs me nothing," he returned, with an affectation of his habitual lightness.

"I have been thinking about you, William, and I want you to go to New York at once. Your friend is out of all danger, now, and it's you who are in danger."

"You know I never was good at conundrums, Mrs. Gilbert. May I ask what particular peril is threatening me at present?"

"A peril that an honest man runs from — the danger of doing a great wrong, of committing a cowardly breach of faith."

"Upon my word, Susan, you are using words" —

"Oh, don't catch at my words, my poor boy. Have you nothing to reproach yourself with? If you haven't, I beg your pardon with all my heart, and I will be glad to take back my words, yes, take them back upon my knees!"

"What is all this coil about? What are you worrying me with these emotional mysteries for?" demanded Gilbert, angrily, yet with a note of unguine bluster in his voice. "What are you trying to get at?"

"Your heart, William; your conscience, your honor, your self-respect. Do you think I am blind? Do you think I have not seen it all? If you will tell me you don't know what I mean, and make me believe it, I will never call myself unhappy again."

"If you have suffered yourself to be made uncomfortable by any affair or condition of mine," said Gilbert, "I advise you to console yourself by reflecting that it does n't really concern you. How long is it," he demanded, savage-

ly, "since you have felt authorized to interfere in my questions of honor and conscience?"

"Ever since a motherless boy let a childless woman love him. Oh, think that I do love you, my dear, and speak to you out of my jealousy for your stainless good faith, your sacred friendship, your unsullied life! You know what I mean. Think that she is pledged by everything that is good in her to your friend. If you believe she does not love him, let her break with him how and when she will. But don't you be her wicked hope — wickeder a thousand times than she! — don't be the temptation, the refuge of her falseness. Leave her to herself! You could only add your treason to hers by staying!"

"Wicked hope, temptation, treason — this is all rather theatrical for you, Susan," said Gilbert, with an attempt to smile. He frowned instead. "And what do I owe to Easton in the way of loyalty? Do you know how little care he has had for me? Do you know?" —

"No, no, no! I don't know, I *won't* know! If he has wronged you in any way, you are only the more bound to be faithful to him in such a case as this. But I will never believe that Easton has wronged you willingly, and you don't believe it, either, whatever the trouble is that she made between you — you know you don't. You are talking away your own sense of guilt, or trying to. Well, I can't blame you for that; but keep these things to silence your conscience with when you are alone; you will need them all. How long have you watched by your friend's pillow with the hope of revenge in your heart?"

Mrs. Gilbert rose from her chair and walked to one of the windows, and then came and paused in front of Gilbert, where he now stood leaning against the mantel-piece. "Come," she entreated, "you *will* go away, won't you, William? I know you never meant him wrong. It has all been something that has stolen upon you, but you will go now, won't you?"

"No, I will not go!"

"You will remain?"

"Till such time as I see fit. I am not a boy, to be sent hither and thither."

"What good will you remain for?" demanded the woman, sternly. "Or do you choose to remain for evil? Every hour that you remain deepens your responsibility. Some things have been talked of already. How long will it be before the whole house sees that you are in love with the woman promised to your friend?"

"Do you suppose I care what this houseful of spying, tattling women see or say?"

"They are no spies and no tattlers; but if they were, a man who had n't shut his senses against his own conscience *would* care. No one blames you as yet, but the time will soon be when you will make the blame all your own."

"I would n't ask her to share it."

"Oh, very fine! you think your brave words will make a brave affair of a cowardly, sneaking treason!"

"Susan!"

"William! These people who are beginning to talk you over do not know what I know. They see that you are beginning to be fascinated with her, as *he* was. They don't know that you have believed her false and shallow from the first, and that if you have any hopes of her love now, they are in your belief that after all that has happened she is still too false and shallow to be true to him. *He* was taken with what was best in her, with all that he believed was good. But you have dared to love her in the hope that she had no principles and no heart. You are ready to lay your honor at her feet, to give all that makes life worth having for what would make your whole life a sorrow and a shame. If you could commit this crime against Easton and yourself and her, if you could win the heart you think so empty and so fickle, what would you do with it? If you could make her false enough to love you, how could you ever have peace again? How could you ever meet each other's eyes without seeing the memory of your common falsehood in them? Think — Oh, my dear, dear boy, forgive me! I know that it is n't your *fault*;

I take it all back, all that I have said against you; I don't blame you for loving her — how could you help it? She is charming — yes, she charms me too; and to a man she must make all other women seem so blank and poor and plain! But now you must n't love her: she cannot be yours without a wrong that when you're away from her you must shudder at. And — and — you will go, won't you, William?"

Gilbert's arm dropped from the mantel where it lay, to his side. "I will go," he said, sullenly. "But I acknowledge nothing of all that you have chosen to attribute to me, motive or fact. And you must be aware that you have said things to me that are not to be forgiven."

He turned to go out of the room, without looking at her, but she cried after him, "Never mind forgiving me, my dear. Only go now, in time to forgive yourself, and I will gladly let you hate me all your life. Good-by, good-by; God bless you and keep you!"

He did not answer, nor turn about, but closed the door behind him and left her standing with her hands clenched, in the gesture of her final appeal. She sank into her chair, spent by the victory she had won.

Gilbert went to the room which he had been occupying since his constant attendance upon Easton had ceased to be necessary, and began to gather together the things scattered about the room. It was a great and bewildering labor, but he had succeeded in heaping many of them into his valise when Rachel Woodward appeared with his lighted lamp. Then he knew that he had been working in the dark. "Oh, thank you, thank you," he said, in a strange voice of unconscious, formal politeness. "I — I was just going away, and it's rather difficult getting these things together without a light."

"You are going away?" she asked.

"Yes; I had a letter this morning recalling me to New York, but I had n't made up my mind to go until just now. I'm going to try to catch the express; I'll get a man to drive me over from

the hotel, and I'll send him back from there for this bag."

"And you are going at once?" she said, almost gladly.

"Yes," he said; and he gave her an address, to which he asked her to have her mother send the account of her charges against him. With a little hesitation he offered her his hand, and she took it with something like a show of penitence. "Good-by," said he, "I hope if you ever have occasion to think of me, you'll be lenient to my memory; and if it is n't the thing for me to say that I feel as if I somehow owed you a debt of gratitude for being what you are, why, I hope you'll excuse it to the confusion of the parting moment."

Rachel's face flushed a little, but she did not try to respond to the odd compliment, and Gilbert said he must go and take leave of Easton. He went abruptly to his friend's room, but faltered a moment before he softly turned the door-knob. It was dark within, and the long and even breathing from the bed where Easton lay revealed that he was asleep. Gilbert stood a moment beside him, and then leaned over and peered through the darkness with his face close to the sleeper's. Neither stirred. Gilbert waited another moment, and with a heavy sigh crept from the room. He went to his sister's door, at which he knocked, but impatiently opened it without waiting to be bidden enter. Mrs. Gilbert looked at him without surprise.

"I came back on a small matter of business, Susan. I neglected to say, a moment ago, that I think myself an infamous wretch, totally unworthy of your pains and affection. You are right in everything. I thought I'd mention it in justice to you; we all like to have our little impressions confirmed. Good-by."

"Oh, my dear, good boy! I knew you would n't leave me so; I knew you would come back." She took his hand between her own, and he bent over and kissed the pale fingers that clasped his with their weak, nervous stress. "You're so good, my dear, that I've half a mind not to let you go; but I think you had better go. Don't you?"

"Yes; I don't wish to stay. Very likely I should be able to behave myself; but it would be an experiment, and I have n't time for it. On the whole," he said, with a smile, "I'd as lief be innocent as virtuous."

"Oh, yes indeed," answered Mrs. Gilbert, "it's preferable in some cases, decidedly. You're not so young as you were when I used to kiss you, William," she added, "but neither am I, and I'm really going to give you a kiss now for your exemplary obedience, and for good-by."

"You overwhelm me, Susan. None of the women at Woodward farm seem able to resist my fascinations. I think perhaps I had better go away on *your* account."

He stooped down and took the kiss she had volunteered, and then with another clasp of the hand he went.

The moon had risen, and was striking keenly through the thin foliage of the avenue of white birches which the highway became in its approach to the farmhouse, and in the leaf-broken light he saw drifting before him a figure which he knew. He stopped, and trembled from head to foot. Then, whatever may have seemed the better part for him to choose, he plunged forward again, and overtook her.

"You are going away," she said, half-turning her face upon him. "I came here so that you could not go without seeing me. I could not bear to have you go away thinking I was such a heartless woman as you do, with no care or regret for all the trouble I've made you."

"I was n't thinking of that," said Gilbert; "I was n't thinking so much of you as of a man—excuse the egotism—who has a great deal more to answer for."

"Oh, no, no!"

"Sometime, when you tell Easton about it all, as you must, I want you to excuse me to him; no one else can. Tell him—tell him that all I had to urge in my own behalf was that I loved you."

"No, no, no! You must n't speak to me in that way! It is too dreadful."

"Oh, yes, it's dreadful. But you

can excuse it if he could n't. How could you excuse me if I did n't love you? Why else should we be parting? I must have loved you from the first — before I knew. What else could have made me so bitter with poor Easton about what he told you? I knew he never meant me any harm; I knew he could n't; he was a man to have died for me. I was mad with jealousy. Did you mean it? You managed it well! But I loved you — What a fool I am! Don't come any farther; in Heaven's name go back! No," he said, perceiving that she faltered in her steps, as if she were about to sink, "don't stop — come on." He had caught her hand, and now he drew it through his arm, and hurried forward. "Yes, come! I have something to ask you. I want you to tell me that since you have felt yourself bound to him, you have never — I want you to tell me that I was altogether in a delusion about you, and that you have done nothing to make me recreant to him."

"Oh, oh, oh!" she moaned. "How pitiless you are! How hard, how hard you make it for me!" She released her hand and pressed it against his arm in

the eagerness of her entreaty. "Leave me — do leave me — the poor hope that I have seemed worse than I was!"

He threw up his arm across his forehead and started a few paces onward.

She hastened after him. "And do believe," she implored him, "that I only wanted to meet you to-night to say — to — to — somehow to make it easier for you to go. Indeed, indeed — Don't leave me to despair!"

He halted, and confronted her. "Was that what you came for? I thought it might have been to see if you could n't make me say what I have just said; I fancied you might have wished to send me away beggared in everything that makes a man able to face the past and the future, and to meet the eyes of honest men. I deserved it. But I was mistaken, was I?" he asked, with a bitter derision. "Well, good-by!"

"No, no! You shall never go, believing such a thing as that! If I *hated* you, — hated you to death, — how could I wish to do that to you? Ah, you *don't* believe it. You" —

But he turned from her, and hurried swiftly down the lane without another look or word.

*W. D. Howells.*

### TOLD IN CONFIDENCE.

Vow you'll never, never tell him!  
Freezing star now glittering farthest, fairest on the winter sky;  
If he woo me,  
Not your coldest cruel ray  
Or can or may  
Be found more chill and still to him than I.

Swear you'll never, never tell him!  
Warm red roses lifting your shy faces to the summer dew;  
If he win me,  
Blush your sweetest in his sight  
For his delight,  
But I can be as sweet, as sweet as you!

*Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.*