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FERN LEAVES.

THE STILL SMALL VOICE.

Poor, tired little Frank! He had gazed at that stereotyped street panorama till his eyelids were drooping with wearines: omnibuses, carts, cabs, wheelbarrows, men, women, horses, and children; the same old story. There is a little beggar-boy driving hoop. Franky never drives hoop—no, he is dressed too nicely for that. Once in a while he takes the air; but John the serving-man, or Mary the nurse, holds his hand very tightly, lest he should soil his embroidered frock. Now little Frank changes from one foot to the other, and then he creeps up to his young mamma, who lies half buried in those satin cushions, reading the last new novel, and lays his hand on her soft curls; but she shakes him off with an impatient "Don't Franky!" and he creeps back again to the window.

There winds a funeral slowly past. How sad the mourners look clad in sable, with their handkerchiefs to their eyes! It is a child's funeral, too; for there is no hearse, and the black pall floats from the first carriage-window like a signal of distress. A sudden thought strikes Franky; the tears spring to his eyes, and, creeping again to his mother's side, he says, "Mamma, must *I* die, too?"

The young mother says abstractedly, without raising her blue eyes from the novel she is reading, "What did you say, Frank?"

"Mamma, must *I* die, too?"

"Yes—no! What an odd question! Pull the bell, Charley. Here, John, take Frank up stairs to the nursery, and coax Bruno along to play tricks for him;" and Frank's mamma settles herself down again upon her luxurious cushions.

The room is very quiet now that Franky is banished; nobody is in it but herself and the canary. Her position is quite easy; her favorite book between her fingers; why not yield herself again to the author's witching spell? Why do the words. "Must *I* die, too?" stare at her from every page? They were but a child's words. She is childish to heed them; and she rises, lays aside the book, and sweeps her white hand across her harp-strings, while her rich voice floats musically upon the air. One stanza only she sings, then her hands fall by her side; for still that little, plaintive voice keeps ringing in her ear, "Must *I* die, too, mamma?"

Death!—why, it is a thing she has never thought of; and she walks up to the long mirror. Death for her, with that beaming eye, and scarlet lip, and rosy cheek and sunny tress, and rounded limb, and springing step? Death for her, with broad lands, and full coffers, and the world of fashion at her feet? Death for her, with the love of that princely husband, who covets even the kiss of the breeze as it fans her white brow? Darkness, decay—oblivion! (No, not oblivion! There is a future, but she has never looked into it.)

"Well, which is it, my pet, the opera, the concert, or Madame B's *soiree?* I am yours to command."

"Neither, I believe Walter. I am out of tune to-night; or, as Madame B. would say, 'Vapourish;' so I shall inflict myself on nobody; but—"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Rose; I am fond of a merry face, too. Smile, now, or I'm off to the club, or the billiard-room; or, as husbands say when they are 'hard up' for an excuse, I have 'a business engagement.' What! a tear? What grief can *you* have, little Rose?"

"You know, Walter, what a strange child our Frank is. Well, he asked me such an odd, old-fashioned question today, 'Must I die, too, mamma?' in that little flute-like voice of his, and it set me thinking, that's all. I can't rid myself of it; and, dear Walter," said she, laying her tearful cheek upon his shoulder, "I don't know that I ought to try."

"Oh, nonsense, Rose!" said the gay husband, "don't turn Methodist, if you love me. Aunt Charity has religion enough for the whole nation. You can't ask her which way the wind is, but you have a description of canaan. Religion is well enough for priests—it is their stock in trade; well enough for children and old people; well enough for ancient virgins, who like vestry meetings to pass away a long evening; but for *you*, Rose, the very queen of love and beauty, in the first flush of youth and health—pshaw! Call Camille to arrange your hair, and let's to the opera. Time enough my pet to think of religion, when you see your first grey hair."

Say you so, man of the sinewy limb and flashing eye? See! up Calvary's rugged steep a slender form bends wearily beneath its heavy cross! That sinless side, those hands, those feet are pierced for you. Tortured, athirst, faint, agonised—the dark cloud hiding the Father's face—that mournful wail rings out on the still air, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

The *dregs of life*, our offering for all this priceless love O sinless Son of God! The palsied hand, and clouded brain, and stammering tongue, and leaden foot of age, thy trophies? God forbid! And yet, alas! amid dance, and song, and revel, that "still, small voice" was hushed. The winged hours, mis-pent and wasted, flew quickly past. No tear of repentance fell; no suppliant knee was bent; no household altar flame sent up its grateful incense.

"Must I die, too?"

Sweet child! but as the sun dies; but as the star fades out; but as the flowers die, for a resurrection morn! Close the searching eye beneath the prisoning lid; cross the busy hands over the pulseless heart. Life—life eternal! for thee, young immortal!

Joy to thee, young mother! From that little grave, so tear-bedewed, the flower of repentance springs at last. No tares shall choke it; no blight or mildew blast it! God's smile shall be its sunshine, and heaven thy reward.

Dear reader, so the good Shepherd hides the little lamb in his arms, that she who gave it life may hear its voice and follow.

LOOK ON THIS PICTURE, AND THEN ON THAT.

"Father is coming!" and little round faces grow long, and merry voices are hushed, and toys are hustled into the closet; and mamma glances nervously at the door; and baby is bribed with a lump of sugar to keep the peace; and father's business face relaxes not a muscle; and the little group huddle like timid sheep in a corner, and tea is despatched as silently as if speaking were prohibited by the statute-book; and the children creep like culprits to bed, marvelling that baby dare crow so loud now that "Father has come."

"Father is coming!" and bright eyes sparkle for joy, and tiny feet dance with glee, and eager faces press against the window-pane; and a bevy of rosy lips claim kisses at the door; and picture-books lie unrebuked on the table; and tops, and balls, and dolls, and kites, are discussed; and little Susy lays her soft cheek against the paternal whiskers with the most fearless "abandon;" and Charley gets a love-pat for his "medal;" and mamma's face grows radient; and the evening paper is read, not silently, but aloud; and tea, and toast, and time vanish with equal celerity, for jubilee has arrived, and "Father has come!"

THE WIDOWS TRIALS.

The funeral was over, and Janie Grey came back to her desolate home. There were the useles drugs, the tempting fruits and flowers, which came all too late for sinking the sufferer. Wherever her eye fell, there was some sad reminiscence to torture her. They whose life had been all sunshine came in from cheerful homes, whose threshold death's shadow had never darkened, to offer consolation. All the usual phrases of stereotyped condolence had fallen upon her ear; and now they had all gone, and the world would move on just the same that there was one more broken heart in it. She must bear her weary weight of woe alone. She knew that her star had set. Earth, sea, and sky had no beauty now, since the eye that worshipped them with her was closed and rayless.

"Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth'" said Uncle John, joining the tips of the fingers of either hand, and settling himself in a vestry attitude, to say his lesson. "Afflictions come not out of the ground. Man is cut down like a flower, God is the God of the widow and the fatherless. I suppose you find it so?" said he, looking into the widow's face.

"I can scarcely tell," said Janie. "This was a lightning-flash from a summer-cloud. My eyes are blinded; I cannot see the bow of promise."

"Wrong—all wrong," said Uncle John. "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. You ought to be resigned. I'm afraid you don't enjoy religion. Afflictions are mercies in disguise. I'll lend you this volume of 'Dewdrops' to read. You must get submissive, somehow, or you will have some other trouble sent upon you. Good morning."

Uncle John was a rigid sectarian, of the bluest school of divinity; enjoyed an immense reputation for sanctity, than which nothing was dearer to him save the contents of his pocket-book. It was his glory to be the Alpha and Omega of parish gatherings and committees; to be consulted on the expediency of sending tracts to Kangaroo Islands; to be present at the laying of cornerstones for embryo churches; to shine conspicuously at ordinations, donation visits, Sabbath-school celebrations, colporteur meetings—in short, anything that smacked of a church-steeple, or added one inch to the length and breadth of his pharisaical skirt. He pitied the poor, as every good Christian should; but he never allowed them to put their hand in his pocket: that was a territory over which the church had no control—it belonged entirely to the other side of the fence.

Uncle John sat in his counting-room, looking very satisfactorily at the proof-sheets of *The Morning Star*, of which he was editor. He had just glanced over his long list of subscribers, and congratulated himself that matters were in such a prosperous condition. Then he took out a large roll of bank-bills, and fingered them most affectionately; then he frowned ominously at a poor beggar-child, who peeped in at the door; smoothed his chin, and settled himself comfortably in his rocking-chair.

A rap at the door of the counting-room. "May I come in, uncle?" and Janie's long black veil was thrown back from her sad face.

"Y-e-s," said Uncle John rather frigidly. "Pretty busy; s'pose you won't stay long?" and he pushed his *portemonnaie* further down in his pocket.

"I came to ask," said Janie timidly, "if you would employ me to write for your paper. Matters are more desperate with me than I thought, and there is a necessity for my doing something immediately. I believe I have talents that I might turn to account as a writer. I have literally nothing, Uncle John, to depend upon."

"Your husband was an exfravagant man; lived too fast—that's the trouble—lived too fast. Ought to have been economical as I was, when I was a young man. Can't have your cake and eat it too. Can't expect me to make up for other people's deficiencies. You must take care of *yourself*."

"Certainly; that's just what I wish to do," said Janie, struggling to restrain her tears. "I—I—" but she only finished the sentence with sobs: the contrast between the sunny past and the gloomy present was too strong for her troubled heart.

Now, if there was anything Uncle John mortally hated, it was to see a woman cry. In all such cases he irritated the victim till she took a speedy and frenzied leave. So he remarked again that "Mr. May was extravagant, else there would have been something left. He was sorry he was dead; but that was a thing *he* wsn't to blame lor, and he didn't know any reason why he should be bothered about it. The world was full of widows; they all went to work, he supposed, and took care of themselves."

"If you will tell me whether you can employ me to write for you," said the widow, "I will not trouble you longer."

"I have plenty who will write for nothing," said the old man. "Market is overstocked with that sort of thing. Can't afford to pay contributors, 'specially new beginners. Don't think you have any talent that way, either. Better take in sewing, or something," said he, taking out his watch, by way of a reminder that she had better be going.

The young widow could scarcely see her way out through her fast-falling tears. It was her first bitter lesson in the world's selfishness. She, whose tender feet had been so love-guided, to walk life's thorny path alone; she, for whom no gift was rich, or rare, or costly enough—she, who had leaned so trustingly on the dear arm now so powerless to shield her—she, to whom love was life, breath, being, to meet only careless glances; nay, more, harsh and taunting words! Oh, where should that stricken heart find rest this side heaven?

Yet she might not yield to despair; there was a little, innocent, helpless one for whom she must live on, and toil, and struggle. Was the world all darkness? Bent every knee at Mammon's shrine? Beat every human heart only for its own joys and sorrows?

Days and months rolled on. Uncle John said his prayers, and went to church, and counted over his dear bank-bills; and the widow sat up till the stars grew pale, and bent wearily over long pages of manuscript; and little Rudolph lay with his rosy cheek nestled to the pillow, chrushing his bright ringlets, all unconcious of the weary vigil the young young mother was keeping. And now it was New Year's night; and, as she laid aside her pen, memory called her back to rich, sunny days—to a luxurious home. Again she was leaning on that broad, true breast. Troops of friends were about them. Oh, where were they now? Then she looked upon her small, plainly-furnished room, so unattractive to the eye of taste and refinement; then it fell upon her child, too young to remember that father, whose last act was to kiss his baby brow.

Still the child slumbered on, his red lips parted with a smile; and, for the first time, she noted the little stocking, yet warm from the dimpled foot, hung close by the pillow, with childhood's beautiful trust in angel hands to fill it; and, covering her face with her hands, she wept aloud, that this simple luxury must be denied a mother's heart. Then, extinguishing her small lamp, she laid her tearful cheek against the rosy little sleeper, with that instinctive yearning for sympathy which only the wretched know. In slumber there is, at least, forgetfulness. Kind angels whisper hope in dreams.

The golden light of New Year's morning streamed through the partially-opened shutters upon the curly head that already nestled uneasily on its pillow. The blue eyes opened slowly, like violets kissed by the sun, and the little hand was out-stretched to grasp the empty stocking. His lip quivered and tears of disappointment forced themselves through his tiny fingers; while his mother rose, sad and unrefreshed, to meet another day of toil. And Uncle John, oblivious of everything that might collapse his purse, sat comfortably in his rocking-chair, "too busy" to call on his neice; treading, not in his Lord's footsteps, where sorow, and misery, and want made foot-tracks, but where the well-warmed, well-clad, and well-filled sat at Dives' table.

Time flew on. A brighter day dawned for Janie. She had triumphed over disappointments and discouragements before which stouter hearts than hers had quailed. Comfort and independence were again hers, earned by her own untiring hand. Uncle John was not afraid of her now. He turned no more short corners to avoid her. She needed no assistance. Uncle John liked to notice that sort of people. He grew amiable, even facetious; and one day, in his uproariousness, actually sent a three-cent piece to his nephew, whom he had not inquired for, for three long years.

Janie's praises reached him from every quarter; and he took a great deal of pains to let people know that this new literary light was *his niece*. Had he known she would have turned out such a star, he would have employed her. Now she was swelling other editors' subscription-lists instead of his. That was a feature of the case he was fully prepared to understand.

"No talent that way!" said Janie to herself, as she saw him, at last very cooly transfer, with his editorial hand, her articles to *The Morning Star*, without credit, without remuneration to herself. Sanctimonious, avaricious Uncle John! did you count the weary vigils they cost the writer? Did you count the tears which blistered their pages? Did you dream of the torturing process by which the bird was blinded, ere it could be learned to sing so sweetly? Knew you that those gushing notes reached you through prison-bars, from a weary captive's throat? No, no, Uncle John! how should you? For where your heart should have been, there was a decided vacumm.

MY LITTLE SUNBEAM.

Never saw my little sunbeam? Well, she was a little creature who passed my window each day, on her way to school, and who made my acquaintance, child fashion, with a smile. Perhaps none but myself would have called her pretty; but her eyes were full of love, and her voice of music. Every day she laid a little bunch of violets on my window. You might have thought it a trifling gift, but it was much to me; for, after my little sunbeam had vanished, I closed my eyes, and the fragrance of those tiny flowers carried me back, oh, whither?

They told of a fragrant, shadowy wood; of a ripling brook; of a bird's song; of whispered leaf-music; of a mossy seat; of dark, soul-lit eyes; of a voice sweet, and low, and thrilling; of a vow that was never broken till death chilled the lips that made it. God shield my little Sunbeam! May she find more roses than thorns in her earthly pathway!

SELF-CONQUEST.

"Well, Bridget, what do you think of the bride?"

"Oh, she's a pretty young thing; but if she had known as much as you and I do of her husband's mother, she never would have come to live with her. She's a regular old hyena; and if she dont bring the tears into those blue eyes before the honeymoon is over, my name isn't Bridget. Why she's the most audacious old thing! She overhauled all her wardrobe yesterday, before she could get here; and, as I passed through the entry, I heard her muttering to herself, "Silk stockings, humph! ruffled under-clothes! Wonder if she thinks I'll have them ironed here? Embroidered night-caps, silk dresses! Destruction and ruin!"

"I'll tell you what, Bridget, there never was a house built yet, that was big enough for two families to live in; and you'll find out that this wont be, I reckon."

"What! tears, Emma? tears?" said the young husband, as he returned from his counting-room one day, about a month after their marriage; and, with a look of anxiety, he drew her closer to his breast. "Tell me; you do not so soon repent your choice?" The little rosy mouth was held up temptingly for a kiss; and in those blue eyes he read the answer his heart was seeking.

"What, then, is your pet canary sick? Can't you dress your hair to suit you? Or are you in despair because you can't decide in which of all your dresses you look prettiest?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Harry!" said Emma, laughing and crying together. "I feel nervous, that's all. I'm so glad you've come home."

Harry felt sure that was not all; but he forbore to question her, for he felt very sure she would tell him all in good time.

The truth was, Harry's mother had been lecturing her daughter-in-law all the morning upon the degeneracy of the times—hoped she would not think of putting on all the fine things her friends had been so foolish to rig her out in—times were not as they used to be—that if Harry gave her pocket-money, she had better give it to *her* to keep, and not be spending it for nonsense—that a young wife's place was in her husband's house—and she hoped she would leave off that babyish trick of running home every day to see her mother and sisters.

Emma listened in silent amazement. She was a warm-hearted, affectionate girl, but she was very high-spirited. The colour came and went rapidly in her cheek; but she forced back the tears that were starting to her eyes, for she had too much pride to allow her to see them fall.

After old Mrs. Hall retired, she sat for a moment or two, recalling her words. "'Babyish,' to love my own dear home, where I was as merry as a cricket from morning till night; where we all sang, and played, and read in mother's dear old room, and father and mother the happiest of us all—'babyish!' I won't be dictated to!" said the young wife. "I'm married, if I am only nineteen, and my own mistress;" and the rebellious tones would come in spite of her determination. But then she thought of Harry, dear Harry, whom she had already learned to love so well. Her first impulse was to tell him. But she had a great deal of good sense, if she was young; and she said to herself, "No, that won't do; then he'll have to take sides with one or the other, and either way it will make trouble. It may wean his love from me, too. No, no, I'll try to get along without; but I wish I had known more about her before I came here to live."

And so she smiled and chatted gaily with Harry, and hoped he had set it down to the account of "nervousness." Still the hours passed slowly when he was absent at his business; and she felt uneasy every time she heard a step on the stairs, lest the old lady should subject her to some new trial.

"I wonder what has come over our Emma?" said one of her sisters; "she has grown so grave and matronly. I half hated Harry when he carried her off, and I quite hate him now, for she's so sedate and moping. I desire to keep my neck out of the matrimonial noose."

Shortly after this, Emma's mother sent her some little delicacy, manufactured by herself, of which she knew her daughter to be particularly fond. Mrs. Hall brought it into her room, and set it down on the table as if she were testing the strength of the dish, and said, "I wonder if your mother is afraid you'll not have enough to eat here. One would think you were a child at a boarding-school.'

Emma controlled herself by a strong effort, and made her no reply, simply taking the gift from her hands with a nod of acknowledgment. Every day brought her some such petty annoyance; and her father-in-law, who was old and childish, being quite as troublesome as his wife in these respects, it required all Emma's love for Harry to carry her through.

She still adhered to her determination, however, to conceal her trouble from her husband; and though he noticed she was less vivacious, perhaps he thought the mantle of matronly dignity so becoming to his young wife that he felt no disposition to find fault with it. In the meantime, old Mrs. Hall being confined to her room with a violent influenza, the reins of government were very unwillingly resigned into Emma's hands. What endless charges she received about the dusting, and sweeping, and cooking, ending always with this soliloquy, as the door closed upon Emma's retreating form: "I am a goose to tell her anything about it. She's as ignorant as a Hottentot—it will all go in one ear and out the other." And the old lady groaned in spirit as the vision of the nose of the tea-kettle pointing the wrong way, or the saucepan hung on the wrong nail, flitted through her mind. Emma exerted herself to the utmost to please her; but the gruel was always "not quite right," the pillows not arranged easily behind her back, or she expected to find "Bedlam let loose" when she got down stairs, and various other encouraging prognostications of the same character.

"Emma," said Harry, "how should you like living five miles out of the city? I have seen a place that just suits my fancy, and I think of hiring it on trial."

Emma hesitated. She wished to ask, "Does your mother go with us?" but she only said, "I could not tell, dear Harry, how I should like the place till I saw it; but I should fear it would take you too much from me. It would seem so odd to have five miles' distance between us for the whole day. Oh, I'm very sure I shouldn't like it, Harry!" and the thought of her mother-in-law clouded her sunny face, and, in spite of herself, a tear dropped on her husband's hand.

"Well, dear Emma, now I'm very sure you will like it"—and his large dark eyes had a look she did not quite understand, even with all her skill and practice in reading them—"and so I'm going to drive you out there this afternoon, and we'll see," said he gaily kissing her forehead.

"Oh, what a little Paradise, Harry! Look at that cluster of prarie roses! What splendid old trees? See how the wind sweeps the drooping branches across the tall grass! And that little, low window, latticed over with sweet-brier; and that pretty terraced flower-garden—O Harry!"

"Well, let us go inside, Emma;" and, applying a key he held in his hand, the door yielded to his touch, and they stood side by side in a little rustic parlour, furnished simply, yet so tastefully: tables, stands, and mantel, covered with vases, sending forth fragrance from the sweetest of wild-wood flowers; the long white muslin curtains looped away from a window, whence could be seen wooded hill, and fertile valley, and silvery stream. Then they ascended into the old chamber, which was quite as unexceptionable in its appointments. Emma looked about in bewildered wonder.

"But who lives here now, Harry?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody? What a tease you are! To whom does all this furniture belong? and who arranged everything with such exquisite taste? I have been expecting every minute to see the mistress of the mansion step out."

"Well, there she is," said Harry, leading her gaily up to the looking-glass. "I only hope you admire her half as much as I do. Do you think I've been blind and deaf, because I've been dumb? Do you think I've not seen my high-spirited little wife struggling with trial day by day, suffering, enduring gaining the victory over her own spirit, silently and uncomplainingly? Do you think I could see all this, and not think she was the dearest little wife in the world?" and tears and smiles struggled for mastery as he pressed his lips to her forehead. "And now you will have nobody to please here but me, Emma, Do you think the task will be difficult?"

The answer, though highly satisfactory to the husband, was not intended for you, dear reader; so please excuse Fanny Fern.

OUR HATTY.

She might have had twenty other names, but that was the only appellation I ever heard. It was, "Get out of the way, Hatty?" "I dare say Hatty broke that vase, or lost that book!" "Don't come here; what a fright you are, Hatty! till the poor sensitive child almost felt as if she had the mark of Cain upon her forehead. She had brothers and sisters, but they were bright, and saucy, and bold; and cunning; and, when they wished to carry out a favourite scheme, could throw their arms about the parental neck, flatter some weak side, carry the day, and laugh at their juvenile foresight; so their coffers were always filled, while poor Hatty's was empty; and she laid all these things up in her little grieved heart, and, as she saw duplicity better rewarded than sincerity, began to have little infidel doubts whether the Bible, that her father read so much out of, was really true; while Joseph's "coat of many colours" flaunted ever before her tearful eyes! All her sweet, childish impulses were checked and crushed; and where the sweet flowers of love and confidence should have sprung up, the weeds of distrust and suspicion took bitter root!

She took no part in the conversation of the domestic circle, "She was stupid," so they told her; and she had heard it till she believed it true. Sometimes, as was often the case, some talented person made part of the family circle; on such occasions, Hatty would listen in her corner till her great, wild eyes glowed and burned like living coals of fire. But there was one spot where none disputed Hatty's right to reign—a little lonely room at the top of the house, which she had fitted up in her own wild way, and where she was free from reproof or intrusion.

You should have seen her there, with her little yearning heart half broken by neglect, doubtful of her own powers, and weeping such passionate tears that she was "so stupid, and ugly, and disagreeable," that nobody could ever love her! And so she made friends with the holy stars, the fleecy clouds, and the brilliant rainbow, the silver moon-beam and the swift lightning; and an artistic eye, seeing her soul-lit face at that small window, might have fancied her some Italian improvisatrice! There the fetters fell off, the soul was free, and the countenance mirrored it forth. Back in the family circle, she was again "Our Hatty!"

"That young daughter of yours differs very much from the rest of the family, Mr. Lee," said a maiden lady, who was visiting there.

"Yes yes!" said the old man, with a shrug "She don't look much like a Lee; in fact, she's very plain. She's a stranger, unaccountable child, likes her own company better than anybody else's, and don't care a rushlight for all the nick-nacks other girls are teasing for. Sometimes I think she belongs to another brood—got changed in the cradle, or something."

"How does she spend her time?" said Miss Tabetha.

"I'm sure I don't know. Wife says she has a little den at the top of the house, where she sits star-gazing. Queer child, that Hatty! plain as a pike-staff;" and Mr. Lee took up his newspaper, and put his feet on the mantel.

Miss Tabetha was confounded. She had an uncommonly warm heart for an old maid. She had never been a parent; she wished she had just to show some people what a nice one she'd have made! She inwardly resolved to know more of "Our Hatty."

(To be Continued.)