THE MORTGAGE.

We worked through spring and winter, through summer and through fall,
But the mortgage worked the hardest and the steadiest of them all;
It worked on nights and Sundays, it worked each holiday;
It settled down among us and it never went away.

Whatever we kept from it seemed a'most as bad as theft:
It watched us every minute, and it ruled us right and left.
The rust and blight were with us sometimes, and sometimes not;
The dark browed scowling mortgage was forever on the spot.

The weevil and the cut-worm, they went as well as came;
The mortgage stayed forever, eating hearty all the same.
It nailed up every window, stood guard at every door,
And happiness and sunshine made their home with us no more.

Till with failing crops and sickness we got stalled upon the grade,
And there came a dark day on us when the interest wasn't paid;
And there came a sharp foreclosure and I kind o' lost my hold
And grew weary and discouraged, and the farm was cheaply sold

The children left and scattered, when they hardly yet were grown;
My wife she pined and perished, an' I found myself alone.
What she died of was "a mystery," and the doctors never knew;
But I knew she died of mortgage—just as well as I wanted to.

If to trace a hidden sorrow were within the doctors' art,
They'd ha' found a mortgage lying on that woman's broken heart.
Worm or beetle, drought or tempest, on a farmer's land may rail,
But for first-class ruination, trust a mortgage 'gainst them all.

—Will M. Carleton.

MY ONE LOVE PASSAGE.

CHAPTER I.

I wish I could so describe my mother that you should realize the sweetness of her nature and the pleasantness of her ways. She was of medium height, of clear complexion and soft brown hair, and a face that tapered from a broad and rather low forehead, with a small and beautifully shaped chin.

She was fair to look upon, dear mother, but her beauty was not her greatest charm. There was about her an indescribable brightness and freshness that reminded one of early sunshine and sweet morning air, and that soothed and cheered and invigorated as only sunshine and pure air can. She charmed me from my mournful grieving after my lost sisters, and made me quietly happy.

None of the gladness of her own nature descended to me—I was always calm and sedate. From a melancholy child I passed into a serious, self-contained woman. Beautiful girlhood, with its wild impulses, eager friendships, erratic energy and pretty bashfulness had no part in my life. Sometimes I have grieved that it was so, for I have thought that this absence of one phase of existence made me an imperfect woman, and prevented me from possessing some of the most endearing attributes of my own sex.

But I grieve no longer, and as I think of my mother, I wonder much that with her bright face to look upon and her wise and cheerful words to listen to, I ever grieved at anything. But I suppose in every woman's life there is a time when a mother's love is but a secondary love, and this time came to me in my twenty-sixth year. Until then, though I was rich and handsome, and knew all the neighborhood for miles round, nobody had come to woo me.

A small estate close to our village changed hands, and its new possessor was introduced to us.

He was of middle age, good-looking and dignified, and was often by my side. He had traveled much, and for me his conversation had great interest. And there was in his eyes a glance of energy, a fire that seemed to kindle in me a corresponding energy. In his presence I could sing better than when with others; conversing with him I seemed to acquire an eloquence that at times startled myself; his well-considered opinions found an echo in my untrained mind; his lofty thoughts were my thoughts. I did not stand in awe of him, such as some women do for lovers superior to themselves. I was simply lifted above myself and placed upon the same plane with him, where I gazed upon him as equal, and felt a warm and just appreciation of his talents and good qualities.

I know not when I first began to love him, but I know that one evening as he bade me good night my heart fluttered, and when I sought for a reason for this unusual symptom I blushed and was ashamed. Nor was I long troubled with fears of being an old maid, for the next morning he gave me the right to love him.

We sat in the oak dining room, the bright spring shone cheerfully in, lighting up the dark wainscoting and placing in brilliant relief the high carved mantle-piece, where grinning goblin faces stared and leered and peeped from twining wreaths of flowers, leaves and corn.

Stephen stood by; he had been expatiating on the beauty of the workmanship. I looked at him and I saw also the grinning heads, and their grotesqueness formed a strong contrast to the calm and manly beauty of his face. As I looked an earnest and kindling light beamed in his eyes; instinctively I rose from my seat, attracted by that glance. He took my hand and said:

"Sarah, be my wife; I cannot live without you."

His face glowed like a cloud at sunset. I looked no more. He put his arm around me, and whispered softly:

"Sarah, you love me; your heart says so." It was beating under his hand. "It says you love me, my own, and I worship you! Darling, speak; one little word will be enough!"

My head was on his shoulder, and I murmured "Yes."

He clasped me closer in his arms. Then I thought, "I am foolish—that is not a fitting answer;" and I freed myself from his embrace, and stood calm and dignified, and said, with all my heart in my voice:

"Stephen, I love you!"

"Heaven bless you, my wife!"

One kiss, and we stood silent, calming our excitement.

Presently we sat down and talked of the future, of our unchanging love, and of the great happiness the coming years promised.

When he left me I hastened to my mother. She was delighted, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure. When I went to rest that night joy at being so beloved prevented me from sleeping.

We were to be married in the autumn. The days passed very swiftly; there was no hindrance to our happiness; we were both rich; the future lay smiling before us, while the present was full of delight.

I loved Stephen with all my heart. He said he loved me devotedly, and there was an admiration—a sort of worship—with his love that is so dear to woman. He said I was queenly, and that I was a glorious creature; and held my head higher and was more stately than ever; and when I looked in the glass I saw a beauty in my face that I had never seen there before, and I exulted in my good fortune, and thought in my foolishness that no woman had ever before been so happy.

There were festivities in our house then, and the grinning, goblin faces looked upon gayeties they had not seen since the first years of my mother's married life. We welcomed all our friends and neighbors and made merry. My mother determined that the last months of my stay should be as happy and beautiful and bright, as much company and fine taste could make it, but, alas! her intention was frustrated.

A schoolfellow and dear friend of my mother's had been for some years a widow, and at that time we received a letter to say that she was dead, and had bequeathed her only child, a girl of 17, to my mother's love and care. A few days later Annie Forsyth arrived, and her grief and black clothes threw a gloom over us that, notwithstanding our pity and sympathy for the poor child, we felt was oppressive and unwelcome.

Poor Annie cried almost incessantly at first, but after a few days she would look up into our faces with sadly mournful eyes, and say she was sorry she was so unhappy, but she would be better soon.

Dear mother charmed and consoled her as she had charmed and consoled me in the past, when my father and sister died, and now and then there was a smile in the beautiful eyes, and the pale, pinched face grew pretty and youthful, and I began to hope that when her sorrow had worn itself out she would prove to be a merry little sprite, and I rejoiced that she was there to take my place in the old home when I left it for the new one. My mother loved her already, and would easily take her to her heart as a second daughter.

CHAPTER II.

Annie's complexion was very fair, her features small and regular, with a timid, pleading expression in them. Her hair was of pale gold falling in masses of curls about her neck. She was small, slight and singularly graceful and there was an intangible something about her that claimed for every one a special tenderness.

I particularly recommended her to Stephen's kindness, and he good-naturedly told her stories and did his best to divert her mind from its sad memories, and he succeeded well. Sometimes, when he talked to her, she would look up into his face with a wondering, reverential expression in her mournful eyes, and then I was more proud than ever of his talents, and more than ever thankful that he was my promised husband.

At first, when I sent Stephen from me to talk to Annie, he went with regret; a little while, and there was no regret; and then, oh! woeful thought, I fancied he went with pleasure.

Once, as he sat by her, chatting and amusing her, I thought he looked like her father, and I pictured him in the future adapting his conversation to the intelligence of a little child who should call me mother, and bringing her bright smiles into her face and overshadowing her with loving kindness and protection; and my heart grew warmer, and I loved him more fervently than ever before. And, as watching him, I wished that my love might grow as great as his goodness, he caught my eyes and his face colored.

A chill ran through me, a fear, indefinite but terrible, oppressed me. I went into the garden and walked among the flowers and trees, and let the fresh evening breeze blow upon my head.

I tried hard to collect my thoughts, but I could not. A strange doubt, dread and horror possessed me. I could not think—I seemed to have no mind—I could only feel.

I walked down the fir-tree avenue. Its darkness claimed kindred with me. It led to an open glade, where a fountain sparkled in the setting sun; its waters fell in jewels of many colors. I saw them not, but throwing myself on the grass rested my head on the cool margin of its marble basin.

Presently my hand played with the cool water; then I bathed my forehead with it, and soon I found myself counting the golden fish that sported in its cool depths and watching their gambols. I vaguely wondered how many heart-broken women had bathed their foreheads in that fountain.

Then I remembered an ancestress of mine whose betrothed had died on the eve of her wedding day.

I saw her day by day at the fountain, and each day more shadowy and ethereal until at last her soul passed from the music of its waters to the music of the beautiful spirit land; and her friends found the frail body on the turf, the head on the fountain's margin, its eyes seemingly gazing at the fish, and its long curls floating in the water.

I remembered this clearly and was thankful. My mind had come back—the strange, hateful madness had passed away; but I bathed my head again and again and kept very quiet. I was afraid of myself. I knew that I had been jealous and I scorned myself; yet I was such a poor, weak thing that I must treat myself carefully, tenderly, lest I fell again into my past foolishness.

I sat by the pool looking into its waters. I pressed the green leaves of the water lily against my forehead and its gracious coolness made me more myself, and I looked still into the water, blue with the sky and rosy with sunlit cloud, and I felt that hope and happiness endured forever; grief might come and dim their brightness, but could do no more.

I felt the demon of jealousy had entered into me. I was humbled and I longed that evil thoughts might pass from me, and I grew calm and rational once more. The peace of night settled all around me. An odorous perfume filled the air and a darkness came down like a protecting genius, shrouding the earth softly.

I was at rest. The fear that had so strangely disturbed me was dead, and once again I believed that the love of my promised husband was all my own.

For some days Stephen kept always by my side, and I enjoyed again the long conversations that were so delightful to me and the evil thought returned no more to disturb my peace.

Our wedding day was very near. All preparations had been made; fair, new garments of every description were being inspected by my friends. I was to begin the new life with everything new—new clothes, new house, new happiness.

Alice relapsed into her old sadness and grew day by day more beautiful, for her face was flushed a little and there was mournfulness in her large eyes that touched the gazer's heart.

One evening I observed Stephen looking at her, and there was that in his glance that roused all my dread once more. Frightened and trembling at what I might learn, I yet courageously set myself to seek for information. Stephen was always kind and affectionate, but I felt with sinking heart that he was not the same, that the warmth of his love was less than the warmth of its expression. And once again I saw that terrible look of sorrow, regret, as he gazed at Annie, and my resolution was taken.

I suppose the first terrible shock had broken the force of my discovery, for the calamity affected me less severely than the doubt. I was rational now and could understand my position. I saw its difficulties and its dangers and wanted to work my way clearly through them to the end. I must not marry Stephen, that was certain, and I must tell him so myself.

My own affection was my greatest danger. I felt that I must show no relenting, no lingering tenderness. I must build up a barrier between us; at least around my own heart I must put a strong wall of separation, through which no sound of grief could pass. His, alas! would open so readily to the new love as to need no defense from the old. I would be brave—I would! But my sorrow lay heavy upon me; the air of the house suffocated me, the dear voices seemed mocking voices, tormenting me. I went out amid the trees for rest and strength. I went up the fir tree avenue to the fountain. The sun shone, the birds sang, the water sparkled—all around me was joy and beauty, and in my heart was a desolation as of death.

I had dreamed a beautiful dream. Oh, that I could dream a little longer—my awakening was all too soon. I lay still, wooing back the beautiful dream; but its thread had been broken. I was sad unto bitterness, but my will was strong to do right and to bear my grief silently.

It wanted but four days to my wedding day. I must act promptly. I nerved myself to my great trial. I loved Stephen more than ever, and I felt that to make him happy I could lay down my life, or, what then seemed to me the harder fate, live without his love.

As I left the breakfast room mother said: "Come back soon, dear; this day week we shall be without you, so we want as much of your company as possible."

I went into the dining room; the mellow autumn sun streamed upon the grinning goblin faces on the high mantel-piece, and I turned from them—they seemed to mock me.

Stephen came soon. I said, as he entered, "Stephen, I have something of importance to say to you."

His face grew pale; he was about to speak, when I said quickly:

"Listen to me for one moment."

To my own ear my voice sounded dismally hollow, but by a great effort I spoke calmly.

"Stephen, I love you dearly. I love you far too well to cause you one regret, or to cloud your life with one shade of sorrow. I have felt proud and happy in the thought of becoming your wife. But I am not so now. I must have the whole heart of my husband. I could not be content with his esteem and affection. You have changed, Stephen! I do not blame you that it is so, but I must not shut my eyes to the consequences of this change. I must not bring sorrow upon you and remorse upon myself, so I say be friends, for the future."

"Sarah, have pity," he said.

"I have pity," I said—"pity for myself and for you. I am saving us both from misery in the future."

"I love you earnestly, soberly!" he replied sadly. "I have always loved you! If once or twice my fancy has changed, pardon me, Sarah! It will not do so again. I have resisted the temptation. Forget and forgive! Our wedding day is very near. I love you faithfully, and guard you with a husband's fondest care!"

"Stephen," I continued, "your heart is cold to me still. You would wreck your own happiness to try and insure mine and to keep plighted troth. Take back that troth—be free! Go; live where you will and be happy! It would break my heart to be your bride now! I could not live to be coldly loved! I must be the joy of my husband, not the clould that shadows his life!"

"Sarah——" he began.

"Hush!" I said. "I will tell you all. I have looked into your eyes and read there what you had not the courage to read in your own heart. I have read there that you love another. Your heart was never wholly mine, and now is not your own; it has gone from you to Annie."

His face was blanched; his strong hand, that rested on the back of a chair, trembled.

"Hear me, for Heaven's sake," he cried. "I have never spoken a word of love to Annie. Her sorrow, her beauty, her childishness touched me; but that is past. We will see her no more, and you shall be as happy as ever you dreamed."

"Never!" I said fiercely; for I felt that he was not thoroughly frank with me; that his love for me was weak, and that he was only maintaining an engagement for the sake of honor—"never!" Our engagement is at an end! We will go our separate ways. Heaven grant that yours may be a happy one!"

And I turned to leave the room.

"Pause—consider!" he cried.

"I have considered. My decision cannot be changed. I will tell my mother. Bless you, Stephen, you shall always be my best friend."

I offered him my hand.

"Bless you!" he replied, and kissed my hand.

That kiss made me shiver, it was so cold.

As I went to my room I met Annie.

"I am not going to be married, Annie," I said. "I have changed my mind."

"I am so sorry! I thought you would have been so happy!" she replied and began to cry.

"She does not love him yet," I thought and was pleased.

I sought my mother and told her what I had done; and then her bright, cheerful eyes were dull with tears, and soon she wept as she had not done since my lost sister's death.

"Mother, mother, do not be so distressed!"

"You suffer so, my darling."

"Yes," I said, sternly; "it is hard to bury my love—to bury it deep, that none may see its grave and to hold no thought of it in my heart—to put it from me forever—to be as if it had not been. Oh, mother, I cannot!"

"Patience, darling. Soon you will gain the power. My heart grieves for you, my dearest. We will try to forget him," she said gently, "we will learn the task together. I, too, have made a loss. I thought I had gained a son and had bright visions of the future. We will put him from our minds and go back to the old, quiet life. We will each be all to the other, as in the old time."

"It shall be so," I said. "My love is buried. It may rest in peace; our tears have watered its grave. I will put it from my thoughts. But there is a love that lives, and is fresh and strong and vigorous—a love that cannot die and that knows no change—our love, my mother."

She held me in her arms; she hushed and soothed me as though I were a child once more, and I wept away the great bitterness of my grief.

We sorrowed long—my mother, myself and the gentle Annie, who grew very dear to me, with her earnest sympathy and pleading, child-like love.

Stephen had not touched her heart, and I was glad of this, although I settled that he should do so in the future.

We sorrowed, I say; yet it was hardly so, for we each tried to cheer the other and forget the past; but a settled depression was upon us and we decided to endeavor to dispel it by change of scene.

We went to the seaside and the great ocean gave us strength, and my mother was fresh and bright as the morning sunshine once more, and she cheered and cherished me until I was happy in a subdued fashion and could almost forget the past.

Annie grew strong and merry, but her figure was still slight and fragile, and her eyes kept their sadness, and her manner was still simple and pleading like that of a timid child. She would never grow womanly, my mother said, regretfully. It was best she should not, I thought; the clinging plant always finds the strong support. And I went to my music; I could not be idle or have reveries yet my cure was not complete. I had to keep my mind well occupied, to fill it with plans, hopes and ideas; to bar entrance to thoughts that should not have admittance. And well my good mother helped me. Love has its instincts, and told her always when my mind was straying, and when it was partly empty and forbidden memories were stealing in, and she would rouse me with cheerful words of ordinary conversation and a look that spoke her heartfelt sympathy. Oh, blessings on thee, my mother! thy love was the joy that knew no change; it was strong, it was steadfast, it was invigorating, it cheered me, it kept me firm to do right, it made my happiness.

We had been from our old home a year, when it was decided that my mother and Annie should return there while I still remained with some friends.

Three months later I received a sweet letter from Annie, saying she had accepted Mr. Hawthorne. Stephen and I had met as friends—rather distant and ceremonious friends, I am afraid, for we could not quite forget the past—its shadow seemed to hang over us.

And thus Annie went from us, and I remained always at the old home, and my dead love ceased altogether to trouble me, and if my dear mother grieved that the bright hopes she had cherished at the first were not realized, she never let me guess her secret sorrow.

We were very happy; we did all the good in our power with our wealth and we brightened the lives of many of our poor neighbors and soothed the last hours of many a poor woman by promising to take an interest in her children. And as I grew older I thought I knew why Annie had won Stephen's love from me. The shy, winning, girlish ways, that had never been mine, were her chief charm.

Voracious Birds.

Should any one possess a caged thrush it will be as well to keep a separate cage for snail-eating, as the bird is so eager to break up the snail that he covers the cage with slime. A large stone should be put in this feeding cage, and the bird will soon learn to pass into it when a snail is ready for him. The appetite of the bird is wonderful. A thrush will eat at a meal the largest snail that England produces. If a man could eat as much in proportion, he would consume a whole round of beef for his dinner. The redbreast, again, is a most voracious bird. It has been calculated that to keep a red breast up to its normal weight an amount of animal food is needed daily equal to an earth worm 14 feet in length. Taking a man of average weight and measuring bulk for bulk with the redbreast, I tried to calculate how much food he would consume in twenty-four hours, if he ate as much in proportion as the bird. Assuming a sausage nine inches in circumference to be a fair equivalent of the earthworm, I find that the man would have to eat sixty-seven feet of such sausage in every twenty-four hours. I mention this in order to illustrate the amount of work which is done by insect eating birds. Here it must be remembered that even the hard billed seed-eating birds are obliged to feed their young on insects until their beaks are sufficiently hardened to eat the seeds. And we must again notice that the young of these birds are hatched just at the time of year when the destructive insects are most plentiful.—Good Words.

In Rome a small Egyptian obelisk has been discovered in an excavation behind the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, near the site of the Temple of Isis and Serapis. It lies at a depth of fifteen feet and is in a good state of preservation. A sphinx in basalt was also found, with a cartouch on the breast.

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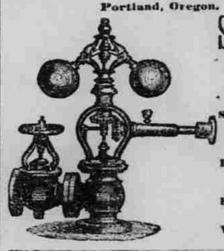

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