



THE night before Thanksgiving! And how it snows! Matthew Torrance slipped the little cabin window back over its channeled grooves. The prospect of turbid greenish waves below, and white, fast-falling wildernesses of snow obscuring the atmosphere above was scarcely so enlivening as the cheery coal fire within, and the lamp swinging softly from the low, arched roof.

The falling leaf—she was only a little sailing vessel, bound to the bleak shores of Maine from a Sicilian port—was within a day's sail of home, and her two passengers, long exiled from the rocky coast of their nativity, were alone together, trying to realize that their journey's end was so near.

Matthew Torrance walked up and down the warm cabin with folded arms and downcast eyes, whose lambent fire contrasted strangely with the streaks of silver in his luxuriant black hair. Suddenly he paused, and turned abruptly to the old man who sat directly underneath the circle of light thrown by the swinging lamp.

"What are you reading, Mr. Hayes?" The old gentleman looked up with a tranquil smile.

"The book I read oftenest, Mr. Torrance—the book that answers to every want and mood of my nature."

"Oh, the Bible. Can you find the parable of the Prodigal Son?"

"Yes."

"It seems as if I should like to hear that to-night."

Samuel Hayes turned to the place and softly read aloud the sweet old Bible story. As his voice died away Torrance drew a deep, long sigh.

"I suppose that parable is meant to illustrate God's patience and long suffering."

"Undoubtedly."

"Ah! but that prodigal son only spent his substance and wasted his life foolishly. He was not beyond the pale of forgiveness."

The old minister pushed his spectacles up on his forehead.

"What do you mean?"

Matthew Torrance stopped in front of the table.

"I had a friend once—a near and dear friend, who—well, he had his faults, I won't deny that. He was a wild, passionate fellow, but there were good points about him, too. He had a twin brother, and one day, in a sudden gust of rage—there was plenty of provocation, for both loved the same girl, and she was a heartless coquette—he raised his hand against his brother, and—"

"Well."

"And murdered him! Killed him! Struck him down as Cain struck Abel. Then he fled the country, and has never been heard of since. But, if I know my friend's nature, he has repented it long and bitterly since—repented it with an anguish of despair that is past description! Now tell me, Mr. Hayes, is there mercy and forgiveness for such as he?"

"Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow! though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool!" softly repeated the old clergyman.

"Yes," replied Matthew; "but such a sin! My God! Cain bore the accused mark of murder to his grave!"

"There is forgiveness for all within the limits of infinite love!"

Matthew Torrance resumed his walk and said no more; and through the tempest and darkness of the November night the little Falling Leaf plodded on towards the beacon lights that starred the far-off, rock-bound coast of Maine.

And when the lurid light of dawn fluttered its sullen banners athwart the east they ran merrily into port, with snow-covered rigging and bulwarks ridged with royal ermine.

Matthew Torrance was home again after twenty long years of exile and solitude.

"It's a perilous business," said Matthew to himself, "but I can't endure it any longer. I am changed in every respect; my own mother would scarcely know me now; and I must breathe in the air of home once more or I shall die!"

Matthew plodded up the hill where the hazel copses grew, and the dead leaves rustled softly in the hollows under the road. Half-way up the hill a little church nestled among the low-growing pines and spruces, with white-gleaming stones sloping down the descent behind. Matthew Torrance turned away his head with a shudder.

"He lies buried there," he murmured, with a face that was paler than ashes; "he, the fair-haired brother Paul, that was almost like a portion of myself, the brother that I murdered. Oh, God! the years of anguish and remorse that I have endured might almost have atoned for it, and yet—yet—why did I return to re-open the old wounds? Shall I turn back even now? It is not yet too late."

He stood a moment irresolute.

"No—I will go on—I will take one peep into the old window where the cinnamon roses grew—the window of the keeping-room—and then I will go forth once more into my exile and solitude. Alas! it is a hard punishment to endure for one act of heedless passion—a hard, hard punishment—and yet I must bear it to the bitter end."

"Shall I light the candles, Uncle Ebenezer?"

"What for, child? Isn't a sight pleasanter to sit here by the blaze of these hickory logs? What do you say, mother?"

Mrs. Torrance started.

"I—I don't know; what was it you asked me, Ebenezer? I was thinking about something else."

She was a mild-faced matron, with large hazel eyes, once bright as jewels, but now dim with many tears—a matron whose silver hair lay in shining bands over a furrowed brow, and Ebenezer, a bowed-down old man, sitting opposite in his easy-chair, had something of the same trouble in his face.

But Clara Willis, kneeling on the rug between them, with her bright face turned to the fire, was lovely enough to redeem the darker shadows. Blue-eyed, with hair of reddish brown, lit up with golden gleams, cheeks velvet red and dimpled, and lips like cut coral, you never would have believed that Clara had passed her thirty-sixth year. There are some faces to which capricious Nature has granted the boon of perennial youth, and Clara's was one of these.

"Well, just as you please, uncle," said Clara, straightening the folds of the ruffled white apron that she wore. "Supper is all ready."

She looked around with a glance of housewifely pride at the daintily garnished table that was spread in the center of the apartment. It was a very old-fashioned room, with a home-made carpet, and curtains trimmed with knotted fringe, while the window seats were full of thrifty geraniums and petunias. A tall clock in the corner ticked monotonously, and the brass candlesticks gleamed from the mantel as brightly as if they had been fashioned out of gold.

"A quarter past five," said Ebenezer Torrance, adjusting his iron spectacles to glance at the clock. "I don't see what keeps that boy so. Clara, I must wish you could have made up your mind to marry him, and then we shouldn't ha' had him chasing down to Squire Dean's after Margaret half the time. There, child, you needn't turn so pale—I'm not in earnest."

Mrs. Torrance put out her motherly hand to smooth Clara's golden hair, as the fair woman shrank as from a blow.

"Clara, Clara, it wasn't your fault."

"But it was my fault, Aunt Miriam—it was my fault. Do I not know where your thoughts have been all this day, when other mothers have their happy families gathered around them? Oh, Aunt Miriam, if I could only have died instead!"

At this moment, while the firelight was filling the homely room with such a glow and fulness of ruddy life, Matthew Torrance was slowly toiling up the road, in the chill gloom of the fast darkening night. As he paused a moment to rest against the gnarled trunk of a deformed willow, where he had many and many a time played as a boy, a tall, straight figure passed him, striding swiftly along and whistling an old-fashioned air. As it passed, Matthew shrank back as if a sword had pierced his heart.

"He used to whistle that tune. I have not heard it in twenty years before."

So Matthew toiled on.

There it was, the old familiar light in

ing to listen. "What noise is that outside?"

"Only the wind among the bushes; how nervous you are getting, puss."

"No—but, Paul, do, please, look; I thought I heard some one's voice."

Paul Torrance burst into a merry laugh, half derisive, half fond, and strode to the door.

"Of course there's no one here; I told you so, Clara, but—hold on, though! Hallo, you! what are you doing under our windows?"

He made a step forward, but stopped suddenly, holding his hand to his breast as if a ball had pierced it.

"Mother, it's Matthew! It's our Matthew!"

And the two brothers, separated by long years and racking doubts, were in each other's arms before Clara could reach the door.

In after years, Matthew Torrance never could have told how he reached the wide, cheery fire-place, nor how he found his mother sobbing on his breast, and his father clasping both his hands, while Clara—foolish little Clara, hid away behind the big geraniums, and cried as if her heart would break. He only felt that he was at home once more—free, safe, happy.

"Paul!" he stammered, "come here and let me look at you—let me feel your hands. Oh, my brother! I thought I had murdered you!"

Paul burst into a laugh.

"You didn't hit quite hard enough, old boy; my skull was thicker than you thought for. Oh, Mat! why have you hidden yourself away from us all these years?"

And Paul's laugh became a sob.

"But we won't be fools!" said Paul, resolutely. "Clara, come here, you little goose! Don't be afraid to take her hand, Mat! She loved you best, and she has been waiting patiently for you twenty years."

"DAT 'POSSUM SMELL POW'FUL GOOD."



The old familiar window, gleaming out like a star.

Torrance hesitated.

"Am I right in pressing on? Who knows but one coveted glance may bring sharper pain than years of silence and doubt? Who knows but that the chairs are empty, the hearthstone surrounded by other faces and forms? Were it not best to leave the old homestead shrouded in merciful uncertainty? No; I have dared too much to pause now."

He softly lifted the latch of the garden gate and passed up the narrow path.

Yes; there was his father, old and silver-haired, but living still; and his mother sat opposite, with the half-finished stocking on the gleaming needles, just it had been twenty years ago, and the black silk holiday dress fastened at the throat with the little gold pin, fashioned like a sea shell, that he remembered so well. And Clara, as beautiful as ever, with a ripened, mature loveliness, how royally the fire turned her heavy coronals of hair to coils of gold, as she bent to light the tall candles in the polished brass candlesticks. Like a sleeping giant the old love rose up once more in his heart as he looked on the face of the girl whose siren-like charms had maddened him to the one desperate act of his life. And—Father of all mercies! was he dreaming, or was the great horror of his darkest anticipations overwhelming him—madness?

Even as he looked, a tall figure passed from an obscure part of the room into the full glow of fire and candles, standing with one hand on the old lady's shoulder.

"Paul! Paul!"

The words strove to shape themselves, but the parched tongue refused to give them utterance. Matthew Torrance struggled like a man under the dreadful spell of nightmare.

"Hush!" said Clara, suddenly paus-

ing to listen. "What noise is that outside?"

"Only the wind among the bushes; how nervous you are getting, puss."

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An Expensive Dinner.

A trio were sitting on the postoffice guard rail one night telling stories. One of them related this: "I know of a fellow who had spent a very quiet life in the country and had never been to the city. Coming into a little money he suddenly developed a desire to be a sportsman and immediately departed for the city. It was his habit after arriving to lounge around the corners in the central part of the city, and he naturally heard the gilded youth talking about the amount of money they spent."

"Say, I had a great dinner last night," he heard one say, "and it cost me \$20."

"Many other remarks like this he heard, and the rustic sport decided to get into the swim too. He made up his mind at once to get an expensive dinner, not realizing that the most of the money spent by the boasters he had overheard had been for wine. Walking into a swell restaurant, he called the waiter over. 'Say, look here,' said he, 'I want an expensive dinner like the best of the bloods. Bring me \$20 worth of ham and eggs.'"

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NOT TO BE TREATED LIGHTLY.



The Pride of the Farm—"How now, Monsieur Reynard! Are you taking chickens, when your preference for turkey is so well known? I consider that a personal slight!"

"Hush!" said Clara, suddenly paus-