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CHAPTER I.

A SUDDEN BEREAVEMENT.

"Awake, my dear child, awake!" These were the words I heard: I started up, gazing in a bewildered manner into the face of my mother, who had, with some difficulty, succeeded in arousing me from the sweet, healthful sleep of childhood. My mother drew nigh to me and whispered, "My dear Clara, your papa is dying." With a frightened cry, I threw my arms around her neck, and begged her to tell me what had happened. I was unable to comprehend the meaning of her words. Since my earliest recollection, my father had never experienced a day's illness, and so the reader may be able to form some idea of the shock occasioned by her words—uttered, as they were, at the hour of midnight. When my mother had succeeded in soothing me, in some degree, to calmness, she informed me, in a voice choked with sobs, which, for my sake, she tried to suppress, that my father had, two hours since, been stricken with apoplexy, in so severe a form that his life was despaired of. She further informed me that his attending physician thought he would not live to see the light of another [Pg 2] morning. Well do I remember the nervous terror with which I clung to my mother as we entered my father's apartment, and the icy chill which diffused itself over my body, as I gazed upon the fearfully changed features of my father. I had never before seen death in any form. I believe the first view of death is more or less terrible to every child; it certainly was terrible for me to first view death imprinted upon the countenance of a fond father. I have ever since thought that my father recognized me when my mother led me to his bed-side; but power of utterance was gone. It was a fearful trial to me, who had seen but ten years of life. After the first shock, a strange calm took possession of me. Though many years have passed since that period, I remember, as though it were but yesterday, how I sat during those long hours, scarcely for an instant removing my eyes from my father's face, but shed not a tear; for, after the first burst of grief, tears refused to come to my relief. Just as the day began to dawn I heard the physician say, in a whisper, to a kind neighbor who stood by, I think he is going. At that

moment my father opened his eyes, and, looking upward with a pleasant smile, expired without a struggle. I could never clearly remember how I passed the intervening days between my father's death and burial. I have an indistinct recollection of the hushed voices and soft footsteps of friends and neighbors, who kindly came to aid in performing the last offices of love and friendship to the remains of my departed father. I [Pg 3] also remember being led by my almost heart-broken mother into the darkened room, where lay the lifeless body of my father, now prepared for the grave; but I have a more vivid recollection of standing with my mother beside an open grave, and hearing our pastor, in a solemn voice, utter the words, "Earth to earth—ashes to ashes—dust to dust." Oh! the falling of that first earth upon my father's coffin, shall I ever forget the sound? Child as I was, it seemed to me that my heart would break; but tears, the first I had shed since my father's death, came to my relief. Those blessed tears. I may well call them blessed, since the physician afterwards told my mother that they saved either my reason or my life. Kind friends besought my mother and me to allow ourselves to be conveyed home and not await the filling up of the grave. But no. We could not leave the spot till the last earth was thrown upon the grave, and a mound covered with grassy sods was to be seen, where a little before was only a mournful cavity. Then indeed we felt that he was gone, and that we must return to our desolate home—the home which ever before his presence had filled with joy and gladness.

I must pass over, with a few words only, the first year of our bereavement, as even now I shudder to recall the feeling of loneliness and desolation which took possession of us, when we found ourselves left alone in the home where everything reminded us so strongly of the departed one. There was a small apartment adjoining our usual [Pg 4] sitting-room which my father was wont to call his study, and, being fond of books, he used there to pass much of his leisure time. It was quite a long time after his death before my mother could enter that apartment. She said to me one day, "Will you go with me, Clara, to your father's study?" I replied, "Can you go *there*, Mamma?" "Yes, dear," said my mother, and led the way to the door. No one had entered that room since my father left it on the last night of his life, the door having been locked on the day suc-

ceeding his death. As my mother softly turned the key and opened the door, it seemed almost that we stood in my father's presence, so vividly did the surroundings of that room recall him to our minds. There stood his table and chair, and his writing desk stood upon the table, and several books and papers were scattered carelessly upon the table. The last book he had been reading lay open as he had left it; it was a volume of Whitfield's sermons; it was a book which my father valued highly, and is now a cherished keep-sake of my own. My mother seemed quite overcome with grief. I know she had striven daily to conceal her grief when in my presence, for she knew how I grieved for my father; and she was aware that her tears would only add to my sorrow, so for my sake it was that she forced herself to appear calm—almost cheerful; but upon this occasion her grief was not to be checked. She bowed her head upon the table, while convulsive sobs shook her frame. I tried, in my childish way, to comfort her. I had never seen her so much moved since my father's [Pg 5] death. When she became more composed, she rose, and I assisted her in dusting and arranging the furniture of the room; and after this first visit to the room, we no longer avoided entering it. Since quite a young man my father had been employed as book-keeper in a large mercantile house in the city of Philadelphia, where we resided. As he had ever proved trustworthy and faithful to the interests of his employers, they had seen fit, upon his marriage, to give him an increase of salary, which enabled him to purchase a small, but neat and convenient dwelling in a respectable street in Philadelphia, where we had lived in the enjoyment of all the comforts, and with many of the luxuries of life, to the time of the sad event which left me fatherless and my mother a widow. I had never, as yet, attended any school. My mother had been my only teacher, and as her own education had been thorough, she was amply qualified for the task.

CHAPTER II.

SUCCESS AT SCHOOL.

About a year after my father's death, my mother decided upon sending me to school, as she thought I was becoming too sedate and serious for a child only eleven years of age. I had never been very familiar with the neighbouring children of my own age, and after the death of my father I cared still less for their companionship. My chief enjoyment was in the society of my mother; and as we kept no servant, I found many ways of making myself useful to her; and every afternoon she devoted two or three hours to my lessons and needlework. Thus passed away the first year after our great sorrow, when, as I have already said, my mother decided upon sending me to school. It seemed to me, at the time, quite a formidable undertaking—this going to school. I had never been separated from my mother, and the five hours to be spent daily in the school-room seemed to my childish mind a very long time. I had ever been shy and diffident in the presence of strangers, and the idea of entering a large school a stranger to both teacher and pupils, was very unpleasant [Pg 7] to me. But when I found it to be my mother's wish that I should go, I endeavoured to overcome my reluctance, and assisted my mother in her preparations for entering me as a pupil at the beginning of the ensuing term.

It was with a feeling of timidity that I accompanied my mother through several streets to the school taught by Miss Edmonds. My mother accompanied me to relieve me from any awkwardness I might feel in presenting myself for admission. It was a select school for girls. As my education had thus far been entirely conducted by my mother, I had of course, never been subjected to the rules of a school-room; and I must confess that I had formed an idea of school teachers in general that was not at all flattering. I fancied them all to be old, sour and cross—a mere walking bundle of rules and regulations, and I was quite unprepared to see the sweet-looking young lady who answered to my mother's summons at the door. Surely, thought I, this young lady cannot be Miss Edmonds; and when my mother enquired if such were her name and she replied in the affirmative, I thought going to school might not be so bad after all. After giving Miss Edmonds my name and age, my mother held some conversation with her regarding my studies, and left me with an encouraging smile. I felt all my timidity return when I thought of entering the school-room with Miss Edmonds, but her kind and

friendly manner reassured me. The school consisted of about thirty girls, many of them older than myself. I had [Pg 8] feared that my attainments would be inferior to those of the youngest of the pupils, and I was equally pleased and surprised when Miss Edmonds, after a long and careful examination in regard to my acquirements, placed me in one of the higher classes. There was to me an irresistible attraction in the countenance and manner of my teacher; and, from the first moment I saw her I loved her. Although her home is now far distant from mine, and we have not met for many years, I love her as dearly now as when she took me by the hand when a child of eleven years. She conducted her school in a very systematic and orderly manner, and was very particular to require perfect recitations from her pupils; but as I possessed a retentive memory, I found my tasks much lighter than did many of my classmates.

When I had been about a year at school, Miss Edmonds offered a prize, in the class to which I belonged, to the young lady who should write the most able composition upon a given subject. The prize was to be a small gold pencil-case, and was to be awarded at the close of the summer term. The closing day at length came; there was much suppressed excitement when we were called to order that morning. As we expected no visitors till the afternoon, we spent the morning mostly in reviewing our various studies. By two o'clock our school-room was crowded. We first passed a very searching examination in the different studies we had pursued during the past year. I believe we passed our examination in a manner creditable both to our teacher and to ourselves.

[Pg 9] The reading of our compositions was reserved, as the closing exercise. The compositions, with the name of the writer, were read by Miss Edmonds. Each person present was at liberty to write down each name as it was read by our teacher, annexing to it the numbers one, two or three, according to their opinion of the merits of the composition, each desk being furnished with paper, pens and ink for the purpose. When the compositions had all been read, the slips of paper were collected and handed to our pastor, who was to read aloud the fortunate name with the greatest number of ones annexed. What then was my amazement and that of all present when our pastor, after carefully examining the papers, rose and said,—"Miss Clara Roscom will please come forward, and receive

from the hands of Miss Edmonds the reward of so much merit." I remember I felt a nervous dread of crossing the large school-room alone, when I knew every eye would be directed to me. Composing myself by a strong effort, I rose and walked up to the raised platform, where at her desk sat Miss Edmonds, with our pastor and several other friends. As I bowed low in acknowledgement of the gift, Miss Edmonds, with a few kind words, dismissed me to my seat. I heard many flattering remarks among our assembled friends; but the proudest moment of all, to me, was when I gained my mother's side and she said to me in a low voice, "My dear Clara, this seems to me a token that you will prove a blessing to your poor widowed mother."

[Pg 10] Miss Edmonds often remarked that I made wonderful progress in my studies, and these commendations, coming from my teacher, incited me to still greater diligence. I take no credit to myself for superior talent, but I certainly did my best, for, be it remembered, I was studying to please my dear mother, who often said to me, "You must, my dear Clara, make the best of your opportunities for improvement, as the time may come when your education may be your only means of support." My mother often regretted that we did not own a piano, for she was very anxious that I should study music; but our means did not justify the purchase of an instrument, and she thought that lessons without the necessary practice would be useless. The parents of Miss Edmonds resided in the city. They had once been wealthy, but owing to those reverses to which all are liable they had become reduced in circumstances, so much so that Miss Edmonds gladly turned to account the superior education she had received in their prosperous days, and she had for some time been a teacher when I became a member of her school. My mother happened to mention to Miss Edmonds one day her regret that I was unable to take music-lessons, for want of opportunity for the needful practice, when she informed my mother that she still retained her piano out of the wreck of their former affluence, and that, if she wished me to take lessons, I was at liberty to practice daily upon it. My mother accepted for me the kind offer, and I at once began taking lessons. I remained [Pg 11] four years under the instruction of Miss Edmonds, with much profit to myself. At the end of this time, Mr. Edmonds removed with his family to the city of

New York, having through the influence of friends, obtained the situation of cashier in one of the banks in that city. It was a severe trial for Miss Edmonds to resign the school where she was so much beloved by her pupils; but she thought it her duty to accompany her parents to their new home.

CHAPTER III.

CLARA AT MRS. WENTWORTH'S BOARDING SCHOOL.

As it was my mother's intention to give me a thoroughly good education, she began, after the departure of Miss Edmonds, to consider the propriety of sending me to a noted seminary for young ladies, about two hundred miles from Philadelphia, as she learned from various sources of the excellence of the institution. There was but one difficulty in the way, and that was the money needful for defraying my expenses. At my father's death, he left us the owners of the house we occupied, and a sum of money, though not a large one, in the Savings' Bank. Up to the time of which I speak, we had only drawn the annual interest of our money, while the principal remained untouched, my mother having obtained needle-work to eke out our small income; but, in order that I should finish my education according to the wishes of my mother, as well as my own, a portion of the principal must be withdrawn. After some reflection upon the subject, my mother decided that a good education might prove of more value to me than money, so a portion of the money was drawn, and we began the preparations for my departure from home. [Pg 13] It was the high reputation which the school sustained that influenced my mother in her decision to send me so far from home. There was a lady residing in the near vicinity of the school who had been a loved school-mate of my mother in their youthful days. My mother wrote to her upon the subject and received a very friendly reply, informing her that, owing to their own early friendship, she would be most happy to fill a mother's place to me, so long as I should wish to remain at school. I should have been much elated at the proposed journey had it not been for the thought of leav-

ing my mother, who had ever been my confidant and adviser. My mother also felt keenly the coming departure, although she strove to conceal her feelings as much as possible. I strongly objected to leaving her alone, but we had as yet been unable to devise any plan to avoid so doing. My mother would have rented a portion of our dwelling, but it was not adapted for the convenience of two families, neither could she endure the disquiet of keeping boarders.

"Clara," said my mother one day, as we sat at work, "I think I will send for Aunt Patience to come and stay with me during your absence."

She laughed outright at the look of dismay with which I regarded her, occasioned by the recollection which I retained of a visit she paid us when I was eight years of age. She was a maiden lady somewhat advanced in years, possessed of a very kind heart and many excellent qualities; but the name of Patience seemed to me a [Pg 14] misapplication in her case, for she certainly possessed but a small quantity of that valuable article. Early in life she had passed through many trials, which might have tended to sour her disposition. I remember that during the visit referred to, my mother had occasion to spend a day from home, leaving me in care of Aunt Patience. It seemed a very long day to me. Like all children, I was restless and troublesome, and to one unaccustomed to the care of children it was doubtless very annoying. During the day I received a severe box on the ear from Aunt Patience, for saying to her in an outburst of childish anger, when provoked by her continued fault-finding,

"I don't know what makes them call you Aunt Patience, for you scold all the time."

She informed my mother of it upon her return, and she gave me a reproof for allowing myself to speak disrespectfully to my relative; although, while listening to the relation of the difficulty by Aunt Patience, she found it extremely difficult to repress a smile. However, my mother both loved and respected her, and thought she could live very comfortably with her during my absence; indeed my mother thought her quite a desirable companion, for, setting aside her irritability at petty annoyances, she was a woman of good sense, and was well informed upon most subjects, so I gladly joined in the

invitation which my mother sent her, to come and make our house her home for an indefinite period. As she lived only a day's journey by railway from Philadelphia, [Pg 15] she arrived a week before I left home. She did not like the idea of my mother spending so much money in sending me to school. To all of her remarks upon the subject my mother replied pleasantly, for she was her own aunt, and she would not treat her with disrespect. During the few days I remained at home after her arrival, I formed a much more favorable opinion of Aunt Patience than I had done during her visit in the days of my childhood; and when I observed how kind she was to my mother I found it easy to love her.

I felt very sad the morning I bade adieu to my mother and Aunt Patience, to go into the world alone. My mother had before given me many kind counsels regarding my future conduct, now she only said, as she embraced me at parting, "My dear daughter, I trust you will improve your time and talents, and conduct yourself in a manner that will not disappoint your mother." As Aunt Patience bade me good-bye, she said, with a countenance of much solemnity, "You must remember, Clara, all the advice I have given you." Sad as I felt, I could not repress a smile, for during the past week her advices regarding my future conduct had been so numerous, that it would have required a memory more retentive than mine to have remembered them all; but I knew they were intended for my good, and I readily promised to try and observe them. I wish not to weary the reader by giving a detailed account of my journey. I arrived safely at my destination, and met with a very [Pg 16] cordial welcome at the house of Mrs. Armitage, my mother's friend; two days later I became a member of the celebrated school for young ladies, taught at that time by Mrs. Wentworth, aided by competent assistance.

Mrs. Wentworth was a widow lady, of superior education and noble mind. I spent four happy years in this institution, having visited my mother but once during the time. It was very pleasant for me to find myself once more at home, with the opportunity for rest and relaxation, after four years, application to books. During my absence, my mother and Aunt Patience had lived very quietly, they saw but little company, and were much occupied with their needles as a means of support. During the first three years of my absence my mother enjoyed good health, but, during my last year at school,

she was visited by a long and painful illness, through which she was attended, with the utmost kindness and attention, by her aunt; my mother being unwilling to recall me from school, if it were possible to avoid it; and she had been obliged, on account of her illness, to withdraw most of the sum remaining in the Savings' Bank. On my return home I found her enjoying a tolerable degree of health, but I feared that such close application to her needle had been too much for one whose constitution was naturally delicate. She seemed like one weary both in mind and body. After my arrival, however, she seemed to regain her usual cheerfulness, and in a short time seemed quite herself again. It was now [Pg 17] I felt it my duty to turn the education which my mother had been at so much pains to give me to account by teaching, in order to assist her, and also to obtain a support for myself. We had decided to offer Aunt Patience a home for the remainder of her life, indeed I felt that I owed her a debt of gratitude for her past kindness to my mother. We therefore told her that so long as we possessed a home, we would gladly share it with her, provided she felt contented to remain with us. She at first demurred a little, as she was aware that our means were limited; but when my mother told her that she would not know what to do without her, it seemed to set her mind at rest, and she gladly assented to our proposal, and it was settled that for the future her home was to be with us.

I had as yet settled upon no definite plan in regard to teaching. My mother wished me to apply for the situation of governess in a family, as she thought that position would command a higher salary, and would prove less laborious than a situation in a school. About this time we noticed in a daily paper an advertisement for a governess, wanted in the family of a Mr. Leighton, residing in the suburbs of the city; the salary offered was liberal, and I thought, with my mother, that I had best apply for the situation.

CHAPTER IV.

GOVERNESS IN MR. LEIGHTON'S FAMILY.

It was with a feeling of trepidation, such as I never before experienced, that I ascended the steps of the splendid residence of Mr. Leighton. When I found myself at the door, my courage well nigh failed me, but without giving myself much time for reflection, I rang the door bell. After some little delay the door was opened by a domestic, of whom I enquired if I could see Mrs. Leighton. The servant replied that she did not know, but that she would see if her mistress was disengaged. "What name?" enquired the servant, "Miss Roscom," I replied. The servant ushered me into the parlor, and left the room. Being left alone, I amused myself by taking a survey of the apartment. It was evident that I had entered the abode of luxury and wealth. The sofas and chairs were covered with rich velvet, while satin curtains draped the windows. An elegant and costly piano occupied one corner of the room; the walls were adorned by costly pictures, and on the marble centre-table were many books in elegant bindings; and rare and exquisite ornaments were scattered with lavish profusion. Upon the entrance of a tall, and, [Pg 19] as I thought at the time, rather haughty-looking lady, I rose, bowed and continued standing, as she said,—

"My servant informs me your name is Miss Roscom."

I replied in the affirmative, and added, "I have the pleasure, I presume, of addressing Mrs. Leighton?"

The lady acknowledged her claim to that name, and I continued,— "Seeing your advertisement for a governess, I have made bold to apply for the situation."

The lady bent upon me a searching look, as she replied,—

"Pray be seated Miss, and we will converse upon the matter."

I gladly obeyed her request that I should be seated, for I felt nervous and agitated. After a moment's silence she addressed me, saying,—

"You look rather young, for the responsible duties of a governess."

I replied that I was not yet nineteen years of age, that I had not as yet been engaged in teaching, having only myself left school three months since,—but that I found it necessary that I should do some-

thing for my own support and that of my widowed mother,—and that I would gladly do my utmost to give satisfaction, could I obtain a situation.

Mrs. Leighton, after a moment's thought, said,—"Although you are young for the position, your countenance pleases me, and I feel inclined to give you a trial."

[Pg 20] She then informed me that my pupils would consist of two girls, the eldest twelve, the other ten years of age, also a little boy of seven. She added, "I had almost forgotten to enquire if you have brought any references?"

Whereupon I handed her the certificate of qualifications given me by Mrs. Wentworth when I left school. She looked pleased as she replied,

"Your being for four years a member of Mrs. Wentworth's school is in itself a recommendation."

I also handed her the names of several ladies well known in the city, telling her she was at liberty to make any enquiries of them she might think proper. She replied that she felt almost certain she would engage me, but that she would send me a decided answer in the course of two or three days. I thanked her, and, bidding her good morning, set out on my return home, much elated with the success of this my first application.

The salary offered by Mrs. Leighton was a weighty consideration to me, and although aware that my duties would often prove unpleasant and irksome, I felt that I could endure much with the consciousness that I was assisting my dear mother.

My mother advised me not to be too sanguine as I might not obtain the situation; but, on the third day after my application, my suspense was relieved by receiving a note from Mrs. Leighton, saying that she would gladly engage me, if I still wished for the situation; and she named an early day when she wished me to enter [Pg 21] upon my duties. I replied that I gladly accepted the situation, and would be ready to begin duties at the day appointed.

Now that I had accepted the position, I began to experience many doubts as to my success in the undertaking. I had no knowledge as