“Childless,” was the word which she murmured in her heart, as she entered the building which had once been the Presidential Mansion of Jefferson Davis and now is the Confederate Museum. Why the thought of her estranged daughter flashed upon her as she came to do honor to the memory of her long dead husband, Mrs. Desborough could not have told, but so overwhelming was the sadness of her mood that she could hardly wonder if this bitter memory took advantage of her moment of weakness to obtrude itself. She set her lips tightly and put it determinedly into the background. She would not think of the daughter who was lost to her; to-day and here no thought but should go back in loving homage and passionate grief to the hero whose name she bore.

She went at once to the Virginia Room, bowing quickly but kindly to the custodian of the Museum, and as she pushed open the door of the sad place, she thought herself alone. The heavy April rain which was drenching Richmond outside kept visitors away, and the building was almost deserted. In her yearly visits to this spot, those pilgrimages which she had made as to a shrine, she had once before had the Virginia Room to herself, untroubled by the presence of strangers; and now with a quick sigh of relief she realized how great had been the comfort of that solitude. To her sensitive nature it was hard to stand before the memorials of her dead and yet to be aware that strange eyes, eyes curious if sympathetic, might be reading in her face all the emotions of her very soul. To preserve the calm necessary before the public had always seemed to her almost like being untrue to the memory she came to consecrate; and to-day it was with a swelling sigh of relief that she threw back her heavy widow’s veil with the free, proud motion which belonged to the women of her race and time—the women bred in the South before the war. She was an old woman, though not much over sixty, for pain can age more swiftly than time. The high-bred mien would be hers as long as life remained, and wonderful was her self-control. Again and again she had felt unshed tears burn in her eyes like living fire, yet had been sure that no stranger had had reason to look upon her as more than a casual visitor to the museum; but to be able to let her grief have way seemed almost a joy. She felt the quick drops start at the bare thought. Life had left her no greater blessing than this liberty to weep undiscovered over the memorials of her dead.

At the instant a man came from behind one of the cases, so near that she might have touched him. Instinctively she tried to take her handkerchief from her chatelaine, and in her confusion detached the bag. It fell at the feet of the gentleman, who stooped at once to pick it up. As he held it out, she forced a smile to her fine old face.

“Thank you,” she said; “I—I was very awkward.”

“Not at all,” he responded. “Those bags are so easily unhooked.”

The tone struck her almost like a blow. To the disappointment of finding that she was not alone in this solemn place was added the bitter fact that the intruder who had come upon her was not of her people. An impulse of bitterness from the old times of blood and of fire swept over her like a wave. The room had carried her back as it always did to the past, and after almost two-score years she for the first time broke through the stern resolve that had kept her from hostile speech.

“You are a Northerner!” she exclaimed.

The words were nothing, but the tone, she knew, was hot with all the long pent-up bitterness. She felt her cheek flush as, almost before the words were spoken, she realized what she had said. The stranger, however, showed no sign of resentment. He smiled, then grew grave again.

“Yes. Do not Northerners visit the Museum? I supposed nobody came to Richmond without coming here.”

She was painfully annoyed, and felt her thin cheeks glow as hotly as if she were still a girl. To be lacking in politeness was sufficiently humiliating, but to seem rude to one from the North, to fail in living up to her traditions, was intolerable.

“I beg your pardon,” she forced herself to say. “To come through that door is to step into the past, and I spoke as I might have when—”

“When a Yankee in the house of President Davis would have required explicit explanation,” the stranger finished the sentence she knew not how to complete.

Even in her discomposure she appreciated both the courtesy which spared her the embarrassment of being left in the confusion of an unfinished remark and the adroitness which gave to his reply just the right tone of lightness. He was evidently a man of the world. Her instinct, not to be outdone in politeness, least of all by one of her race, made her speak again.

“I was rude,” she said stiffly. “To-day is an anniversary on which I always come here, and I forgot myself.”

“Then I must have seemed doubly obtrusive,” he returned gravely.

He was certainly a gentleman. He was well groomed, moreover, with the appearance of quiet wealth. One of his hands was ungloved, and she noted appreciatively how

finely shaped it was, how white and well kept. The North had all the wealth now, she reflected involuntarily, while so many of the descendants of old Southern families were forced to earn their very bread by occupations unworthy of them. They could not keep their fine hands, hands that told of blood and breeding for generations, as could this stranger before her. His attractiveness, his air of prosperity, were offensive to her because they emphasized the pitiful poverty of so many of her kin whose forefathers had never known what want could be.

“The Museum is open to the public,” she replied, with increasing coldness.

She expected him to bow and leave her. Not only did he linger, but she seemed to see in his face a look of pity. Before she could resent this pity, however, she met his eyes with her own, and the look seemed to her to be one of sympathy.

“Will you pardon my saying that I too came here to-day because it is an anniversary?”

“An anniversary?” she echoed. “How can an anniversary bring a Northerner here?”

“It is n’t mine exactly. It is my son’s. His mother is a Virginian.”

So highly strung was her mood that she noticed almost with approval that he had said “is” and not “was.” He had at least not deprived his wife of her birthright as a daughter of the sacred soil. She began to be aware of a growing excitement. She could hardly have heard unmoved any allusion to a marriage which had taken from the South a woman born to its traditions and to its sorrows. She felt a fresh impulse of anger against this prosperous son of the North who had carried away from a Virginia mother a daughter as she had been robbed of hers. The cruel pang of crushed motherhood which ached within her at the remembrance of her own child, the child she had herself cast off because of her marriage, was so fierce that for a moment she could not command her voice. She could not shape the question which was in her heart, but she felt that with her eyes she all but commanded the stranger to tell her more.

“We live in the North,” he explained, “but she has long promised the boy that when he was eight he should see the relics of his Virginian grandfather which are in the museum here. Unfortunately, when the time came, she was not well enough to come with him; and as she wished him to be here on this especial day, I have brought him.”

The Southern woman felt her heart beating tumultuously, and it was almost as if another spoke when she said in a manner entirely conventional:—

“I trust that her illness is not serious.”

“If it were, I should not be here myself,” he answered.

She collected her strength, which seemed to be leaving her, and forced herself to look around the room. She could not have told what she expected, or whether she most hoped or feared what she might see.

“But your son?” she asked.

The man’s face changed subtly.

“My father,” he replied, “was an officer in the Union army. I wished to see this place first, to be prepared for Desborough’s questions. It is n’t easy to answer the questions of a clever lad whose two grandfathers have been killed in the same battle, fighting on opposite sides.”

The name struck her like a blow. She leaned for support against the corner of the nearest case, and fixed her gaze on the pathetic coat of General Lee behind the glass which showed her as a faint wraith the reflection of her own face. Desborough had been her husband’s name, and this the anniversary of his death; she felt as if the dead had arisen to confront her, and that some imperative call in the blood insistently responded. Yet she could not believe that her son-in-law was before her, regarding her with that straightforward, appealingly honest gaze; she said to herself that the name was merely a coincidence, that every day in the year was the anniversary of the death of some Virginian hero, and that this could not be her daughter’s husband.

“Have you decided what to tell your son?” she heard her voice, strange and far off, asking amid the thrilling quiet of the room.

The stranger regarded her as if struck by the note of challenge in her tone. His serious eyes seemed to her to be endeavoring to probe her own in search of the cause of her sharpness.

“I can do no more,” was his answer, “than to tell him what I have always told him—the truth, as far as I can see it.”

“And the truth which you can tell him here—here, before the sacred relics of our dead, the sacred memorials of our Lost Cause—”

She could not go on, but stopped suddenly that he might not hear her voice break.

“He has never been taught anything but that the men of the South fought for what they believed, and that no man can do a nobler thing than to give his life for his faith.”

She became suddenly and illogically sure that she was talking to her son-in-law, although the ground of her conviction was no other than the one she had just before

rejected. The whole thing flashed upon her mind as perfectly simple. Her daughter knew that on this day she was always to be found here, and had meant to meet her, with the little son bearing his grandfather's name. The question now was whether the husband knew. Something in his air, something half-propitiatory, something certainly beyond the ordinary deference offered to a lady who is a stranger, gave her a vague distrust. She was not untouched by the desire for reconciliation, but she had again and again resisted that before, and least of all could she tolerate the idea of being tricked. The possibility that her son-in-law might be feigning ignorance to work the more surely upon her sympathy angered her.

"Do you know who I am?" she demanded abruptly.

"I beg your pardon," he answered, evidently surprised, "but I have never been in Richmond before. If you are well known here, or are the wife of some man famous in the South, I am too completely a stranger to recognize you."

"Yet you seemed to wish to explain yourself to me. Why?"

"I don't know," he began hesitatingly, searching her face with his straightforward gray eyes. Then he flushed slightly, and broke out with new feeling: "Yes; I do know. You came just as I was going away because I could not endure the sadness of it; when every one of these cases seemed to me to drip with blood and tears. That sounds to you extravagant, but the whole thing came over me so tremendously that I could n't bear it."

"I do not understand," she returned tremulously. "You have such collections at the North, I suppose."

"But here it came over me that to all the sorrow of loss was added the bitterness of defeat. I felt that no Southerner could come here without feeling that all the agony this commemorates had been in vain; and the pity of it took me by the throat so that when I spoke to you, you were a sort of impersonation of the South—of the Southern women; and I wanted to ask for pardon."

She drew a deep breath and raised her head proudly.

"Not for the war," he said quickly, with a gesture which seemed to wave aside her pride and showed her how well he had understood her triumph at the admission seemingly implied in his words. "I am a Northern man, and I believe with my whole soul that the North was right. I believe in the cause for which my father died. Only I see now that if he had lived in the South, the same spirit would have carried him into the Confederate army."

"But for what should you ask pardon, if the North was in the right?"

“For myself; for not understanding—for being so dull all these years that I have lived with a wife faithful in her heart to the South and too loyal to me to speak. We in the North have forgiven, and we think that the South should forget. It has come over me to-day how easy it is for the conquerors to forgive and how hard that must be for the conquered.”

“You do not understand even now,” she said, her voice low with feeling. “Because we are conquered we can forgive; but we should be less than human to forget.”

The room was very still for a little, and then, following out her thought, she said as if in wonder: “And you, a Northerner, have felt all this!”

He shook his head, with a little smile.

“It is perhaps too much to ask,” returned he, “that you Southern women should realize that even a Northerner is still human.”

“Yes, yes; but to feel our suffering, to see—”

“It has always been facing me, I understand now, in my wife’s eyes—the immeasurable pathos of a people beaten in a struggle they felt to be right; but she had been so happy otherwise, and she never spoke of it.”

“In the heart of every Southern woman,” she said solemnly, though now without bitterness, “is always the anguish of our Lost Cause. We cover the surface, we accept, and God knows we have been patient; but each of us has deep down a sense of the blood that was poured out in vain, of the agony of the men we loved, of how they were humiliated—humiliated, and of the great cause of liberty lost—lost!”

For long, bitter years she had not spoken even to her nearest friends as she was talking to this stranger, this Northerner. The consciousness of this brought her back to the remembrance that he was the husband of her daughter.

“Has your wife no relatives in the South who might have made you understand how we Southern women must feel?” she asked.

He grew instantly colder.

“I have never seen her Southern relatives.”

“Pardon the curiosity of an old woman,” she went on, watching him keenly; “may I ask why?”

“My wife’s mother did not choose to know the Yankee her daughter married.”

“And you?”

“I did not choose to force an acquaintance or to be known on sufferance,” he answered crisply. “I was aware of no wrong, and I did not choose to ask to be forgiven for being a Northerner.”

She knew that in her heart she was already accepting this strong, fine man, alien as he was to all the traditions of her life, and she was not ill pleased at his pride.

“But have you ever considered what it must have cost the mother to give up her daughter?”

“Why need she have given her up? Marriages between the North and the South have been common enough without any family breach.”

She was utterly sure that he knew neither to whom he was talking nor what had been the real cause of her separation from her daughter. She experienced a sort of wild inner exultation that at last had come the moment when she might justify herself; when she might tell the whole dreadful story which had been as eating poison in her veins. She raised her head proudly, and looked at him with her whole soul in her eyes.

“If you have patience to listen,” she said, feeling her cheeks warm, “and will pardon my being personal, I should like to tell you what has happened to me. My husband was a colonel in the Confederate army. We were married when I was seventeen, in a brief furlough he won by being wounded at the battle of the Wilderness. I saw him, in the four years of the war before he fell at Five Forks, less than a dozen times, and always for the briefest visits—poor scraps of fearful happiness torn out of long stretches of agony. My daughter, my only child, was born after her father’s death. Our fortune had gone to the Cause. My father and my husband both refused to invest money abroad. They considered it disloyal, and they put everything into Confederate securities even after they felt sure they should get nothing back. They were too loyal to withhold anything when the country was in deadly peril.”

She paused, but he did not speak, and with swelling breast and parching throat she went on:—

“At Five Forks my husband was killed in a hand-to-hand fight with a Northern officer. He struck his enemy down after he had received his own death-wound. I pray God he did not know the day was lost. He had gone through so much, I hope that was spared him. On the other side of death he must have found some comfort to help him bear it. God must have had some comfort for our poor boys when he permitted the cause of liberty to be lost.”

She pressed her clenched hand against her bosom, and as she did so her eyes met those of her companion. She felt the sympathy of his look, but something recalled her to the sense that she was speaking to one from the North.

“It is not the cause of liberty to you,” she said. “I have forgotten again. I have not spoken of all this for so long. I have not dared; but to-day—to-day I must speak, and you must forgive me if I use the old language.”

He dropped his glance as if he felt it an intrusion to see her bitter emotion, and said softly: “I think I understand. You need not apologize.”

“After the war,” she went on hurriedly and abruptly, “I lived for my daughter. I worked for her. She—she was like her father.”

She choked, but regained the appearance of composure by a mighty effort.

“When she was a woman—she was still a child to me; over twenty, but I was not twice her age—she went North, and there she fell in love. She wrote me that she was to marry a Northerner, and when she added his name—it was the son of the man who killed her father.”

“It is not possible!” the other exclaimed. “You imagined it. Such things happen in melodramas—”

She put up her hand and arrested his words.

“This happened not in a melodrama, but in a tragedy—in my life,” she said. “I need not go into details. She married him, and I have never seen her since.”

“Did he know?”

“No. It was my wedding gift to my daughter—that I kept her secret. That was all I had strength to do. You think I was an unnatural mother, of course; but—”

She saw that his eyes were moist as he raised them in answering.

“I should have said so yesterday without any hesitation; to-day—”

“To-day?” she echoed eagerly, as he paused.

“To-day,” he answered, letting his glance sweep over the pathetic memorials so thick about them—“to-day at least I understand, and I do not wonder.”

She looked at him with all her heart in her eyes, trying to read his most hidden feeling. Then she touched his arm lightly with the tips of her slender black-gloved fingers.

“Come,” she said.

She led him across the room, and pointed to a colonel’s sash and pistols which lay in one of the cases under a faded card.

“Those were my husband’s.”

“Those!” he cried. “You Louise’s mother? It is impossible!”

“It may be impossible; but, as I said of the other thing, it is true.”

“The other thing?” he repeated. “What—do you mean the thing you said—that my father and he— That cannot be true. I should surely have known!”

“It is true,” she insisted. “At the moment it happened they were surrounded by our soldiers, and his own men probably did not realize just what happened. But I—I know every minute of that fight! One of my husband’s staff had been at West Point with them both, and he told me. He saw it, and tried to come between them. Your wife married you, knowing you to be the son of the man who killed her father.”

The Northerner passed his hand across his forehead as if to wipe away the confusion of his mind. His eyes were cast down, but she saw that their lids were wet.

“Poor Louise!” he murmured, seemingly rather to himself than to her; “how she must have suffered over that secret. Poor Louise!”

“You come here,” Mrs. Desborough went on, feeling herself choke at his words, but determined not to give way to the warmer impulse of her heart, “and even you are moved by these sacred relics. What do you think they are to us?”

She was half conscious that she was appealing to the memorials around her to strengthen her in her purpose not to yield, not to make peace with the son of the man who had slain her husband, her hero, her love; she felt that in harboring for an instant such an impulse she was untrue to the Cause which, though lost, was for her forever living with the deathless devotion of love and anguish.

“These relics do move me,” her son-in-law said gently. “They move me so deeply that they seem to me wrong. I confess that I was thinking, before you came in, that if I were a Southerner, with the traditions of the South behind me, and the bitter sense of failure to embitter me, they would stir me to madness; that I should feel it impossible ever to be loyal to anything but the South. The war is over. The South at last is

understood. She is honored for the incredible bravery with which, under crushing odds, she fought for her conviction. Why prolong the inevitable pain? Why gather these relics to nourish a feeling absolutely untrue—the feeling that the Union is less your country than it is ours?"

"Because it is just to the dead," she answered swiftly. "Because it is only justice that we keep in remembrance how true they were, how gallant, how brave, how noble, and—O God!—that we make some poor record of what we of the South have suffered!"

He shook his head and sighed. She saw the tears in his eyes and did not attempt to hide her own.

"Would you have it forgotten," she demanded passionately, "that the grandfather of your son—the father of your wife—was one of God's noblemen? Would you have him remembered only as a beaten rebel? I tell you that if we had not gathered these memorials, every clod that was wet with their blood would cry out against us! In the North you call these men rebels; there is no battlefield in the South where the very rustle of the grass does not whisper over their graves that they were patriots and heroes! And this, poor though it be"—and she waved her hand to the cases around them—"is the best memorial we can give them."

He made a step forward, and held out both his hands impulsively. She did not take them, and they dropped again. He hesitated, and then drew back.

"It must be as it is," he said sadly. "Even if I blamed you women of the South, I could not say so here. Only," he added, his voice falling, "can you forget that the women of the North suffered too? I grew up in the shadow of a grief so great that it sapped the very life of my mother, and in the end killed her. Do you think I could visit that upon the innocent head of Louise?—I did not mean, though, to speak of myself, now that I know who you are. I will not intrude on you; but my little son, with your husband's name and his mother's eyes, is certainly guiltless. I will not come with him, but may I not send him with my man to see you this afternoon, so that I may say to Louise that you have kissed him and given him your blessing? Sorrow has taken away his other grandmother."

It seemed to her that she could not endure the speaking of one syllable more. Her whole body trembled, and she raised her hands in an impulsive gesture which implored him to be silent. All the old mother-love for Louise, the passionate crying of her lonely heart for this unseen grandson with the blood of her dead husband warm in his veins, the grief of black years and fidelity to old ideals, warred within her, and tore her like wolves. She cast a glance around as if to find some way by which she could flee from this position which it was too terrible to face. Then she saw her companion look at her with infinite pity and sadness.

“Then,” he said, “I can only say good-by.”

But she sprang forward as if she burst from chains, and threw herself upon his breast, the agony of the long, bitter past gushing in a torrent of hot tears.

“Oh, my son! my son!” she sobbed.