

A watercolor illustration depicting two children from behind, looking out over a landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of purple, pink, and orange, with several black birds in flight. The foreground shows the backs of the children's heads and shoulders, rendered in shades of blue and purple. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

After the Storm

by T. S. Arthur



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1

The War of the Elements

NO June day ever opened with a fairer promise. Not a single cloud flecked the sky, and the sun coursed onward through the azure sea until past meridian, without throwing to the earth a single shadow. Then, low in the west, appeared something obscure and hazy, blending the hill-tops with the horizon; an hour later, and three or four small fleecy islands were seen, clearly outlined in the airy ocean, and slowly ascending--avant-couriers of a coming storm. Following these were mountain peaks, snow-capped and craggy, with desolate valleys between. Then, over all this arctic panorama, fell a sudden shadow. The white tops of the cloudy hills lost their clear, gleaming outlines and their slumbrous stillness. The atmosphere was in motion, and a white scud began to drive across the heavy, dark masses of clouds that lay far back against the sky in mountain-like repose.

How grandly now began the onward march of the tempest, which had already invaded the sun's domain and shrouded his face in the smoke of approaching battle. Dark and heavy it lay along more than half the visible horizon, while its crown invaded the zenith.

As yet, all was silence and portentous gloom. Nature seemed to pause and hold her breath in dread anticipation. Then came a muffled, jarring sound, as of far distant artillery, which died away into an oppressive stillness. Suddenly from zenith to horizon the cloud was cut by a fiery stroke, an instant visible. Following this, a heavy thunder-peal shook the solid earth, and rattled in booming echoes along the hillsides and amid the cloudy caverns above.

At last the storm came down on the wind's strong pinions, swooping fiercely to the earth, like an eagle to its prey. For one wild hour it raged as if the angel of destruction were abroad.

At the window of a house standing picturesquely among the Hudson Highlands, and looking down upon the river, stood a maiden and her lover, gazing upon this wild war among the elements. Fear had pressed her closely to his side, and he had drawn an arm around her in assurance of safety.

Suddenly the maiden clasped her hands over her face, cried out and shuddered. The lightning had shivered a tree upon which her gaze was fixed, rending it as she could have rent a willow wand.

"God is in the storm," said the lover, bending to her ear. He spoke reverently and in a voice that had in it no tremor of fear.

The maiden withdrew her hands from before her shut eyes, and looking up into his face, answered in a voice which she strove to make steady:

"Thank you, Hartley, for the words. Yes, God is present in the storm, as in the sunshine."

"Look!" exclaimed the young man, suddenly, pointing to the river. A boat had just come in sight. It contained a man and a woman. The former was striving with a pair of oars to keep the boat right in the eye of the wind; but while the maiden and her lover still gazed at them, a wild gust swept down upon the water and drove their frail bark under. There was no hope in their case; the floods had swallowed them, and would not give up their living prey.

A moment afterward, and an elm, whose great arms had for nearly a century spread themselves out in the sunshine tranquilly or battled with the storms, fell crashing against the house, shaking it to the very foundations.

The maiden drew back from the window, overcome with terror. These shocks were too much for her nerves. But her lover restrained her, saying, with a covert chiding in his voice,

"Stay, Irene! There is a wild delight in all this, and are you not brave enough to share it with me?"

But she struggled to release herself from his arm, replying with a shade of impatience--

"Let me go, Hartley! Let me go!"

The flexed arm was instantly relaxed, and the maiden was free. She went back, hastily, from the window, and, sitting down on a sofa, buried her face in her hands. The young man did not follow her, but remained standing by the window, gazing out upon Nature in her strong convulsion. It may, however, be doubted whether his mind took note of the wild images that were pictured in his eyes. A cloud

was in the horizon of his mind, dimming its heavenly azure. And the maiden's sky was shadowed also.

For two or three minutes the young man stood by the window, looking out at the writhing trees and the rain pouring down an avalanche of water, and then, with a movement that indicated a struggle and a conquest, turned and walked toward the sofa on which the maiden still sat with her face hidden from view. Sitting down beside her, he took her hand. It lay passive in his. He pressed it gently; but she gave back no returning pressure. There came a sharp, quick gleam of lightning, followed by a crash that jarred the house. But Irene did not start--we may question whether she even saw the one or heard the other, except as something remote.

"Irene!"

She did not stir.

The young man leaned closer, and said, in a tender voice--

"Irene--darling--"

Her hand moved in his--just moved--but did not return the pressure of his own.

"Irene." And now his arm stole around her. She yielded, and, turning, laid her head upon his shoulder.

There had been a little storm in the maiden's heart, consequent upon the slight restraint ventured on by her lover when she drew back from the window, and it was only now subsiding.

"I did not mean to offend you," said the young man, penitently.

"Who said that I was offended?" She looked up, with a smile that only half obliterated the shadow. "I was frightened, Hartley. It is a fearful storm!" And she glanced toward the window.

The lover accepted this affirmation, though he knew better in his heart. He knew that his slight attempt at constraint had chafed her naturally impatient spirit, and that it had taken her some time to regain her lost self-control.

Without, the wild rush of winds was subsiding, the lightning gleamed out less frequently, and the thunder rolled at a farther distance. Then came that deep stillness of nature which follows in the wake of the tempest, and in its hush the lovers stood again at the window, looking out upon the wrecks that were strewn in its path. They were silent, for on both hearts was a shadow, which had not rested there when they first stood by the window, although the sky was then more deeply veiled. So slight was the cause on which these shadows depended that memory scarcely retained its impression. He was tender, and she was yielding; and each tried to atone by loving acts for a moment of willfulness.

The sun went down while yet the skirts of the storm were spread over the western sky, and without a single glance at the ruins which lightning, wind and rain had scattered over the earth's fair surface. But he arose gloriously in the coming morning, and went upward in his strength, consuming the vapors at a breath, and drinking up every bright dewdrop that welcomed him with a quiver of joy. The branches shook themselves in the gentle breezes his presence had called forth to dally amid their foliage and sport with the flowers; and every green thing put on a fresher beauty in delight at his return; while from the bosom of the trees--from hedgerow and from meadow--went up the melody of birds.

In the brightness of this morning, the lovers went out to look at the storm-wrecks that lay scattered around. Here a tree had been twisted off where the tough wood measured by feet instead of inches; there stood the white and shivered trunk of another sylvan lord, blasted in an instant by a lightning stroke; and there lay, prone upon the ground, giant limbs, which, but the day before, spread themselves abroad in proud defiance of the storm. Vines were torn from their fastenings; flower-beds destroyed; choice shrubbery, tended with care for years, shorn of its beauty. Even the solid earth had been invaded by floods of water, which ploughed deep furrows along its surface. And, saddest of all, two human lives had gone out while the mad tempest raged in uncontrollable fury.

As the lover and maiden stood looking at the signs of violence so thickly scattered around, the former said, in a cheerful tone--

"For all his wild, desolating power, the tempest is vassal to the sun and dew. He may spread his sad trophies around in brief, blind rage; but they soon obliterate all traces of his path, and make beautiful what he has scarred with wounds or disfigured by the tramp of his iron heel."

"Not so, my children," said the calm voice of the maiden's father, to whose ears the remark had come. "Not so, my children. The sun and dew never fully restore what the storm has broken and trampled upon. They may hide disfiguring marks, and cover with new forms of life and beauty the ruins which time can never restore. This is something, and we may take the blessing thankfully, and try to forget what is lost, or so changed as to be no longer desirable. Look at this fallen and shattered elm, my children. Is there any hope for that in

the dew, the rain and sunshine? Can these build it up again, and spread out its arms as of old, bringing back to me, as it has done daily, the image of my early years? No, my children. After every storm are ruins which can never be repaired. Is it not so with that lightning-stricken oak? And what art can restore to its exquisite loveliness this statue of Hope, thrown down by the ruthless hand of the unsparing tempest? Moreover, is there human vitality in the sunshine and fructifying dew? Can they put life into the dead?

"No--no--my children. And take the lesson to heart. Outward tempests but typify and represent the fiercer tempests that too often desolate the human soul. In either case something is lost that can never be restored. Beware, then, of storms, for wreck and ruin follow as surely as the passions rage."



2

The Lovers

RENE DELANCY was a girl of quick, strong feelings, and an undisciplined will. Her mother died before she reached her tenth year. From that time she was either at home under the care of domestics, or within the scarcely more favorable surroundings of a boarding-school. She grew up beautiful and accomplished, but capricious and with a natural impatience of control, that unwise reactions on the part of those who attempted to govern her in no degree tempered.

Hartley Emerson, as a boy, was self-willed and passionate, but possessed many fine qualities. A weak mother yielded to his resolute struggles to have his own way, and so he acquired, at an early age, control over his own movements. He went to college, studied hard, because he was ambitious, and graduated with honor. Law he chose as a profession; and, in order to secure the highest advantages, entered the office of a distinguished attorney in the city of New York,

and gave to its study the best efforts of a clear, acute and logical mind. Self-reliant, proud, and in the habit of reaching his ends by the nearest ways, he took his place at the bar with a promise of success rarely exceeded. From his widowed mother, who died before he reached his majority, Hartley Emerson inherited a moderate fortune with which to begin the world. Few young men started forward on their life-journey with so small a number of vices, or with so spotless a moral character. The fine intellectual cast of his mind, and his devotion to study, lifted him above the baser allurements of sense and kept his garments pure.

Such were Irene Delancy and Hartley Emerson--lovers and betrothed at the time we present them to our readers. They met, two years before, at Saratoga, and drew together by a mutual attraction. She was the first to whom his heart had bowed in homage; and until she looked upon him her pulse had never beat quicker at sight of a manly form.

Mr. Edmund Delancy, a gentleman of some wealth and advanced in years, saw no reason to interpose objections. The family of Emerson occupied a social position equal with his own; and the young man's character and habits were blameless. So far, the course of love ran smooth; and only three months intervened until the wedding-day.

The closer relation into which the minds of the lovers came after their betrothal and the removal of a degree of deference and self-constraint, gave opportunity for the real character of each to show itself. Irene could not always repress her willfulness and impatience of another's control; nor her lover hold a firm hand on quick-springing

anger when anything checked his purpose. Pride and adhesiveness of character, under such conditions of mind, were dangerous foes to peace; and both were proud and tenacious.

The little break in the harmonious flow of their lives, noticed as occurring while the tempest raged, was one of many such incidents; and it was in consequence of Mr. Delancy's observation of these unpromising features in their intercourse that he spoke with so much earnestness about the irreparable ruin that followed in the wake of storms.

At least once a week Emerson left the city, and his books and cases, to spend a day with Irene in her tasteful home; and sometimes he lingered there for two or three days at a time. It happened, almost invariably, that some harsh notes jarred in the music of their lives during these pleasant seasons, and left on both their hearts a feeling of oppression, or, worse, a brooding sense of injustice. Then there grew up between them an affected opposition and indifference, and a kind of half-sportive, half-earnest wrangling about trifles, which too often grew serious.

Mr. Delancy saw this with a feeling of regret, and often interposed to restore some broken links in the chain of harmony.

"You must be more conciliating, Irene," he would often say to his daughter. "Hartley is earnest and impulsive, and you should yield to him gracefully, even when you do not always see and feel as he does. This constant opposition and standing on your dignity about trifles is fretting both of you, and bodes evil in the future."

"Would you have me assent if he said black was white?" she answered to her father's remonstrance one day, balancing her little

head firmly and setting her lips together in a resolute way.

"It might be wiser to say nothing than to utter dissent, if, in so doing, both were made unhappy," returned her father.

"And so let him think me a passive fool?" she asked.

"No; a prudent girl, shaming his unreasonableness by her self-control."

"I have read somewhere," said Irene, "that all men are self-willed tyrants--the words do not apply to you, my father, and so there is an exception to the rule." She smiled a tender smile as she looked into the face of a parent who had ever been too indulgent. "But, from my experience with a lover, I can well believe the sentiment based in truth. Hartley must have me think just as he thinks, and do what he wants me to do, or he gets ruffled. Now I don't expect, when I am married, to sink into a mere nobody--to be my husband's echo and shadow; and the quicker I can make Hartley comprehend this the better will it be for both of us. A few rufflings of his feathers now will teach him how to keep them smooth and glossy in the time to come."

"You are in error, my child," replied Mr. Delancy, speaking very seriously. "Between those who love a cloud should never interpose; and I pray you, Irene, as you value your peace and that of the man who is about to become your husband, to be wise in the very beginning, and dissolve with a smile of affection every vapor that threatens a coming storm. Keep the sky always bright."

"I will do everything that I can, father, to keep the sky of our lives always bright, except give up my own freedom of thought and independence of action. A wife should not sink her individuality in that of her husband, any more than a husband should sink his

individuality in that of his wife. They are two equals, and should be content to remain equals. There is no love in subordination."

Mr. Delancy sighed deeply: "Is argument of any avail here? Can words stir conviction in her mind?" He was silent for a time, and then said--

"Better, Irene, that you stop where you are, and go through life alone, than venture upon marriage, in your state of feeling, with a man like Hartley Emerson."

"Dear father, you are altogether too serious!" exclaimed the warm-hearted girl, putting her arms around his neck and kissing him. "Hartley and I love each other too well to be made very unhappy by any little jar that takes place in the first reciprocal movement of our lives. We shall soon come to understand each other, and then the harmonies will be restored."

"The harmonies should never be lost, my child," returned Mr. Delancy. "In that lies the danger. When the enemy gets into the citadel, who can say that he will ever be dislodged? There is no safety but in keeping him out."

"Still too serious, father," said Irene. "There is no danger to be feared from any formidable enemy. All these are very little things."

"It is the little foxes that spoil the tender grapes, my daughter," Mr. Delancy replied; "and if the tender grapes are spoiled, what hope is there in the time of vintage? Alas for us if in the later years the wine of life shall fail!"

There was so sad a tone in her father's voice, and so sad an expression on his face, that Irene was touched with a new feeling

toward him. She again put her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly.

"Do not fear for us," she replied. "These are only little summer showers, that make the earth greener and the flowers more beautiful. The sky is of a more heavenly azure when they pass away, and the sun shines more gloriously than before."

But the father could not be satisfied, and answered--

"Beware of even summer showers, my darling. I have known fearful ravages to follow in their path--seen many a goodly tree go down. After every storm, though the sky may be clearer, the earth upon which it fell has suffered some loss which is a loss for ever. Begin, then, by conciliation and forbearance. Look past the external, which may seem at times too exacting or imperative, and see only the true heart pulsing beneath--the true, brave heart, that would give to every muscle the strength of steel for your protection if danger threatened. Can you not be satisfied with knowing that you are loved--deeply, truly, tenderly? What more can a woman ask? Can you not wait until this love puts on its rightly-adjusted exterior, as it assuredly will. It is yet mingled with self-love, and its action modified by impulse and habit. Wait--wait--wait, my daughter. Bear and forbear for a time, as you value peace on earth and happiness in heaven."

"I will try, father, for your sake, to guard myself," she answered.

"No, no, Irene. Not for my sake, but for the sake of right," returned Mr. Delancy.

They were sitting in the vine-covered portico that looked down, over a sloping lawn toward the river.

"There is Hartley now!" exclaimed Irene, as the form of her lover came suddenly into view, moving forward along the road that approached from the landing, and she sprung forward and went rapidly down to meet him. There an ardent kiss, a twining of arms, warmly spoken words and earnest gestures. Mr. Delancy looked at them as they stood fondly together, and sighed. He could not help it, for he knew there was trouble before them. After standing and talking for a short time, they began moving toward the house, but paused at every few paces--sometimes to admire a picturesque view--sometimes to listen one to the other and respond to pleasant sentiments--and sometimes in fond dispute. This was Mr. Delancy's reading of their actions and gestures, as he sat looking at and observing them closely.

A little way from the path by which they were advancing toward the house was a rustic arbor, so placed as to command a fine sweep of river from one line of view and West Point from another. Irene paused and made a motion of her hand toward this arbor, as if she wished to go there; but Hartley looked to the house and plainly signified a wish to go there first. At this Irene pulled him gently toward the arbor; he resisted, and she drew upon his arm more resolutely, when, planting his feet firmly, he stood like a rock. Still she urged and still he declined going in that direction. It was play at first, but Mr. Delancy saw that it was growing to be earnest. A few moments longer, and he saw Irene separate from Hartley and move toward the arbor; at the same time the young man came forward in the direction of the house. Mr. Delancy, as he stepped from the

portico to meet him, noticed that his color was heightened and his eyes unusually bright.

"What's the matter with that self-willed girl of mine?" he asked, as he took the hand of Emerson, affecting a lightness of tone that did not correspond with his real feelings.

"Oh, nothing serious," the young man replied. "She's only in a little pet because I wouldn't go with her to the arbor before I paid my respects to you."

"She's a spoiled little puss," said the father, in a fond yet serious way, "and you'll have to humor her a little at first, Hartley. She never had the wise discipline of a mother, and so has grown up unused to that salutary control which is so necessary for young persons. But she has a warm, true heart and pure principles; and these are the foundation-stones on which to build the temple of happiness."

"Don't fear but that it will be all right between us. I love her too well to let any flitting humors affect me."

He stepped upon the portico as he spoke and sat down. Irene had before this reached the arbor and taken a seat there. Mr. Delancy could do no less than resume the chair from which he had arisen on the young man's approach. In looking into Hartley's face he noticed a resolute expression about his mouth. For nearly ten minutes they sat and talked, Irene remaining alone in the arbor. Mr. Delancy then said, in a pleasant off-handed way,

"Come, Hartley, you have punished her long enough. I don't like to see you even play at disagreement."

He did not seem to notice the remark, but started a subject of conversation that it was almost impossible to dismiss for the next ten

minutes. Then he stepped down from the portico, and was moving leisurely toward the arbor when he perceived that Irene had already left it and was returning by another path. So he came back and seated himself again, to await her approach. But, instead of joining him, she passed round the house and entered on the opposite side. For several minutes he sat, expecting every instant to see her come out on the portico, but she did not make her appearance.

It was early in the afternoon. Hartley, affecting not to notice the absence of Irene, kept up an animated conversation with Mr. Delancy. A whole hour went by, and still the young lady was absent. Suddenly starting, up, at the end of this time, Hartley exclaimed--

"As I live, there comes the boat! and I must be in New York to-night."

"Stay," said Mr. Delancy, "until I call Irene."

"I can't linger for a moment, sir. It will take quick walking to reach the landing by the time the boat is there." The young man spoke hurriedly, shook hands with Mr. Delancy, and then sprung away, moving at a rapid pace.

"What's the matter, father? Where is Hartley going?" exclaimed Irene, coming out into the portico and grasping her father's arm. Her face was pale and her lips trembled.

"He is going to New York," replied Mr. Delancy.

"To New York!" She looked almost frightened.

"Yes. The boat is coming, and he says that he must be in the city to-night."

Irene sat down, looking pale and troubled.

"Why have you remained away from Hartley ever since his arrival?" asked Mr. Delancy, fixing his eyes upon Irene and evincing some displeasure.

Irene did not answer, but her father saw the color coming back to her face.

"I think, from his manner, that he was hurt by your singular treatment. What possessed you to do so?"

"Because I was not pleased with him," said Irene. Her voice was now steady.

"Why not?"

"I wished him to go to the arbor."

"He was your guest, and, in simple courtesy, if there was no other motive, you should have let his wishes govern your movements," Mr. Delancy replied.

"He is always opposing me!" said Irene, giving way to a flood of tears and weeping for a time bitterly.

"It is not at all unlikely, my daughter," replied Mr. Delancy, after the tears began to flow less freely, "that Hartley is now saying the same thing of you, and treasuring up bitter things in his heart. I have no idea that any business calls him to New York to-night."

"Nor I. He takes this means to punish me," said Irene.

"Don't take that for granted. Your conduct has blinded him, and he is acting now from blind impulse. Before he is half-way to New York he will regret this hasty step as sincerely as I trust you are already regretting its occasion."

Irene did not reply.

"I did not think," he resumed, "that my late earnest remonstrance would have so soon received an illustration like this. But it may be as well. Trifles light as air have many times proved the beginning of life-long separations between friends and lovers who possessed all the substantial qualities for a life-long and happy companionship. Oh, my daughter, beware! beware of these little beginnings of discord. How easy would it have been for you to have yielded to Hartley's wishes!-how hard will it to endure the pain that must now be suffered! And remember that you do not suffer alone; your conduct has made him an equal sufferer. He came up all the way from the city full of sweet anticipations. It was for your sake that he came; and love pictured you as embodying all attractions. But how has he found you? Ah, my daughter, your caprice has wounded the heart that turned to you for love. He came in joy, but goes back in sorrow."

Irene went up to her chamber, feeling sadder than she had ever felt in her life; yet, mingling, with her sadness and self-reproaches, were complaining thoughts of her lover. For a little half-playful pettishness was she to be visited with a punishment like this? If he had really loved her--so she queried--would he have flung himself away after this hasty fashion? Pride came to her aid in the conflict of feeling, and gave her self-control and endurance. At tea-time she met her father, and surprised him with her calm, almost cheerful, aspect. But his glance was too keen not to penetrate the disguise. After tea, she sat reading--or at least affecting to read--in the portico, until the evening shadows came down, and then she retired to her chamber.

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