AMANDA OF THE MILL*

By Marie Van Vorst

BOOK II

THE CAPTIVES

. . . Nor does a woman know at once she loves;
Subtle, intangible, a change has come
In fibre and in blood. The world grows wide
In one day—dwindles to a span the next.
Heaven touches her, then Hades mocks her bliss.

Suddenly she is all made of tears and strange
Sweet tremblings . . . and yet she is deceived,
Till sharp and swift and deep a knife has pierced
Her uttermost life; she holds her aching heart,
And finds how she can suffer—then she knows.

CHAPTER I.

Six weeks later Euston, on a bed in the McCullough gaol, was awakened by a shaft of sunlight falling lightly across his closed eyelids. It was morning. His routine called him to rise and dress, but he was not in a hurry to obey.

It was the day of his trial. To-day should see him either freed, or condemned to whatever justice South Carolina might see fit to extend to a man who had struck another in his indignant claim for the body of his wife. Euston thought not at all of the outcome. His mind, on the contrary, went to his past as though this seclusion were a hive, into which at appointed hours the bees came swarming home. So his hours swarmed around him.

CHAPTER II.

He had been born on a farm in —— County, an only child of a mother he adored. She taught him to read, and later there was a small stock of good books to be enjoyed. He was not made to work, and never did anything but those things which he wanted to do, until he was a big boy, and then his mother broke to him the fact that he was to go to school.

On the day his mother told him this news she held an open letter, and from it a cheque for money rustled to the ground. Henry picked it up and gave it into her hand, not without remarking a name, never very clear to him, and the bank engraving surrounded by a grey sea of pictures.

"You are to go to school, Henry, in Boston."

To his weeping refusal to leave her Mrs. Euston replied:

"It isn't what I want, nor what you want; it is what *he* wants."

When Henry had said, "Who is *he?*" she had replied: "Your father;" and that was the first time this factor of his life had been mentioned.

He exclaimed with childish frankness: "I didn't know as I had one."

Through her tears—for she had been crying—Mrs. Euston laughed a little.

"Well, of course you've got a father! Every little boy's got a father, and he wants you should go to school."

"What is that money for?"

And she answered quickly:

"For your schooling, and for nothing else."

Henry, who had never learned to work with his hands, worked as well with his mind as he knew. He was more than an average scholar, and when at length another letter came, with another display of bank engraving on the cheque, and he was prepared for college, at seventeen he found himself more advanced than the average man of his age. By nature extremely indolent, he accepted everything without question. But in his junior year he was determined to ask his mother much, when he should go back to the farm for his holidays. Before those holidays fell, he was summoned home by telegram, and hurried with sinking heart to find his mother very ill. He stood by her side in a passion of grief, one of her beloved hands between his own.

"There isn't anything to say to you,

Henry, excepting don't ever be too hard on a woman."

The message was so extraordinary that, his breaking heart in his throat, he bent and listened closely. His mother managed to make him understand thus far.

"Your father, he *is* your father, Henry —*has never been my husband.* I wasn't meant to be like that; it has broken my heart."

"*Mother,* do you mean to tell me I have no name?"

Greater grief could not settle over the features of the woman before him than had already possessed them.

"I mean to say that he has promised to come every year to marry me; he has never come."

Although Euston, as gently as he could, besought for the name of the man, he could gain no information. The young man sitting on the bed by her side never left her throughout the afternoon and late into the evening. There was an iron in his soul, as there was infinite grief in his heart. He listened to her wanderings, and as one listens to intangible things in dreams, and with the consciousness of another identity strives to grasp the meaning of the visions of sleep, so he strove to gain some revelations from her lips. There was none. At sunset she closed her eyes, drew a long breath, like a sigh, which was her way of delivering up her spirit. She did this silently, and with no tirade against the world of wrong, with no blaming of the man who had made her a victim, and her son nameless.

His position regarding the world was different. His attitude was in strong contrast to her feminine acquiescence.

CHAPTER III.

He found himself after the settlement of farm and properties with a hundred dollars to his name. In his own humiliated eyes he had no name! He went back to Boston, feeling that it would have been his mother's wish, and made up his mind to work his way through college. The experiment was a failure. He had never been ambitious, and whatever might have grown to stand in ambition's stead was nipped in the bud by the morbid, recurring fact of his birth. The desire to discover the personality of his father became an obsession with him. He believed that the stopping of the cheques of this man at the last period of his mother's life had hastened her death. At all events, he felt sure, now that he was older and more enlightened, that a sacred grief had been at his mother's heart for years. He determined to seek out the man who marred her life, and who dared to fling him a nameless and unprotected existence, and to heavily charge him with responsibilities.

It is not strange that his misery ill prepared him for study. At the very thought of his father his morals folded their wings. The aerial creature, his spirit, fell to nothing more than a crawling thing—a veritable expression of the beast, kin with the animalism which had called forth his nameless existence.

He drank at first because he wanted to drown his thoughts. It did not take him long to discover that he had more than a taste for it, and he decided it was in his case an inheritance, and therefore useless to battle against it. Little by little he grew to consider himself a reproduction of his father's indulgences, and longed to present himself, an accusing entity, to his parent.

He was obliged to work very hard in order to pay his tuition, and he waited at a club restaurant and studied at nights. Intelligent and of unusual refinement, Euston could have only fraternised with men from whom, by his own knowledge of his birth, he felt himself to be ostracised. He rejected all expressions of friendship from class men whose social position was better than his. He was good looking, of an attractive personality, and when perfectly sober possessed of great charm. But his morose, ungenial qualities repelled anyone who sought to force an intimacy upon him. One young man in particular, son of a New York millionaire, vainly tried to chum with Euston. After repeated rebuffs the young fellow withdrew chagrined. That a chap who worked his way through college, whose habits were already looked upon askance, should have the aplomb to refuse his society! Indeed, he damned Euston with the decision that he was devilish queer, and going to the dogs as fast as a man can. After this he was left alone.

CHAPTER IV.

All of this he reviewed as he lay in his prison cell. Now, long debarred the solace and excitement of drink, he found himself regarding his past debauches with disgust. His body bore the record acutely of all he had undergone; his thin limbs, his emaciated hands, his face, displayed history he had no desire to read.

The episode of his advent into the South and his marriage was half to him a nightmare and half a reality.

Thus he lay musing until a clanging clock without and the clash of the bells from the church tower warned him of the advancing day.

When he was dressed, he turned to the table whereon stood the breakfast which the gaoler had brought him an hour before. He had scarcely finished when the door of his cell was pushed open. With the light that streamed in from the corridor, a little figure entered, preceding the gaoler.

"Hyar's a lady to see you; try to treat her like a gentleman."

With this singular recommendation, the functionary withdrew, and the girl he had ushered in came forward.

"Whar's my sister? Whar's Lily Bud?"

Euston blinked at her. He had not seen many objects of interest during these past three weeks. His cell was dark. He stared at Amanda, for it was she.

"Where did you come from?"

She did not reply; she was trembling with the excess of her feelings; her breast was heaving; her hands were clasped to her.

"Why did you come here?" exclaimed Euston. "Sit down on my cot beside me. You look as if you had been sick."

The girl shook her head, refusing his invitation and his interest as well.

"Whar's my sister?"

He frowned.

"I don't know."

"You-all carried her down from gran'-maw's, an' gran'maw sayde: 'Mr. Euston you suttinly look after Lily Bud.'" She paused. Euston did not seem moved by the appeal. "Gran'maw's dayde." She nodded her fine little head at him, accusing him of being false to his vow. Her face was thin as a lily, and very pale. Her grey eyes, deepened by grief, and from which sorrow had smitten all merriment, made a shadow against her face. Her hair, cut short, lay warm and heavy around her brow. She had no hat, and over her calico dress was pinned a little grey shawl; it covered her shoulders, and added to the meek appearance of her extreme youth. She repeated, "Gran'maw's dayde."

"I am sorry—very sorry," said the man. "What was the matter?"

"Ih do'no," said the child, "and never mind, anyway. Ih want you to give me back ma sister."

Euston put his hand on her shoulder, and, without much resistance from her, forced her to sit on his cot; he sat down beside her.

"You are played out. You are not the same girl I left in the hills. I don't know where your sister is, and I wish to God I could give her back to you just as I took her from Mrs. Henchley's."

"What's happened to her?"

He said: "Well, let me tell you how it was. But first answer me, who brought you to the gaol?"

"Is Lily Bud dayde?"

"No, indeed."

"Porely?"

"No; she was well enough when I saw her last."

These details satisfied for the moment the anxious sister.

"Ih come down with Falloner. We was going to find Cally Griscom. You-all remembers him?" (Euston had good reason to remember him!) "We struck Radnor's tavern no more 'n an hour ago, and when Falloner was seekin' out Cally, Ih asts for Lily Bud. They-all didn't know her name hyarabout; then Ih ast fer you, and the gentleman reckoned you wuz in gaol, so Ih ast where et was. He laughed at me so's he could skeercely pint the way, but Ih came hyar, and ast if Mr. Henry Euston was hyar; they said 'Yes,' and Ih told them Ih was from where *he* come from. . . ."

"Is that all they told you at Radnor's?"

Amanda nodded.

"Yes, you-all kin tell me the rest."

"I will," said Euston. "When I married your sister——" Amanda's hands went to her heart; she gave a start, and said "Oh!" in a soft, birdlike way, something between a call and an appeal. Eus-

ton saw it, and misinterpreted her emotion. He said apologetically: "I know you don't think I was fit to marry her. I should not have done so, but I couldn't help it. We were alone there, and she needed someone; and if I hadn't done what I did, something worse would have happened; and we had to find work immediately. The mill-owner of Crompton turned me off, but I got a job for us both in the Ralings Mills, and they advanced us a week's pay." Euston frowned as he talked. "The men were crazy about Lily Bud; they couldn't leave her alone. I was trying to keep sober those days, so that I could get along with my work, but one night I came out on the porch of our boarding-house, and Lily Bud was holding a man's hand; he was a weaver in my room. I didn't say anything, but just turned around and went in. Pretty soon she came in to me, crying, and said she hadn't wanted him to make love to her, and I forgave her."

Here Amanda interrupted him.

"She was coaxin' allers—she suttinly was, tew."

Euston ignored this.

"I told the fellow the next day that if he did not get out of our boarding-house by night he would go out too fast for his own pleasure. Well, he went!" Euston began to walk up and down the room. "That was the first. . . ." Then he appeared to forget the little girl on his bed and her white, pathetic face as she listened, and he broke forth into fury. "That was the first, but there were many others! I couldn't trust the girl out of my sight. . . . I fought two men at the boarding-house . . . then the landlady put us out, and we had to go into a hotel. Here they didn't regard dispensary law, and I made a beast of myself over and over again. One night I was coming out of the back of the hotel where I had been drinking, and I saw my wife with Griscom. He had his arms around her, and it was unlucky for him that I had my gun on me! When he saw me he dropped the girl, and I saw him reach for his pistol. I got mine out first, and they say I nearly killed him. He'll get well, thank God! I don't want his blood on my soul; I have about as much as I can carry without that. I'm not at all afraid they'll do anything to me; they can't."

"Ih'm right glad you didn't kill him!" Amanda was breathless.

Euston stopped, and faced her.

"Well, what about *me?*" His voice was irritated, like a child's asking in vain for sympathy. "Aren't you sorry for *me?*"

Her hands were folded in her lap, and Euston had never seen anything like the face raised to him; it made him think of certain pictures of the Virgin and Saints.

"Ih *am* right sorry," she said gently. "You hadn't ought tew of merried her; if you'd of ast *me,* Ih could of told you. She was always that a-way."

Euston sat down on the bed beside Amanda.

"Your grandmother was a good woman; it's not her fault if one of you has gone wrong. Tell me about her—if it doesn't make you feel too bad."

"It makes me sayde," the little thing said slowly—"powerful sayde. . . . Ih ain't ne-vah goin' to git over it! . . . Sometimes Ih hyar her trampin' round in the night. . . . Sometimes Ih hyar her callin'. Las' night she called . . . 'Lily Bud'—plain as plain! You-all ain't goin' back on her?" she asked timidly.

Euston exclaimed: "I don't ever want to see her again, to tell you the truth."

"Yo' suttinly *must,*" the child said firmly. "Why, Ih come all the way from Daco tew fin' her. Thayre was a washout to the railroad, so Dex Falloner an' me got an ole boat jest below Daco, and we come down the river, 'cause Ih was tew weak f'om the fever tew walk. We travelled that a-way all night. . . . Sometimes the wind blowed the boat into the reeds . . . but Dex, he waded out, and drug her into the stream."

"What do you want me to do?"

He looked hopelessly down between his hands on the floor of the gaol.

"Why, Ih want you-all should take her back again."

"She doesn't want to come back to me."

"She will," encouraged the child, "fast 'nough, you'll see. It's her ways."

Euston said restlessly: "I'm shut up here; I don't know when they will let me out."

"Well," said Amanda, "Ih kin git a lift over tew the mills where Dex Fal-

loner works, and Ih'll make him dew somethin' or other 'bout you."

She didn't look more than fifteen years of age as she stood before him, small and thin. He put out his own slender hand, and laid it on the shoulder of the grey shawl.

"You're worth your weight in gold."

She stirred from under his touch.

"Ih reckon Ih'll be quite a fortune to the one what gits me," she said, with her sweet, short laugh.

He was glad to hear it, and looked at her affectionately.

"No one's good enough to get you! Have you any money, Amanda?"

She shook her head.

He thrust his hands into his trouser-pockets, uselessly—he knew how empty they were—then he shrugged his shoulders, and smiled at her; but the smile was sadder than tears. He shook his head without speaking. Amanda understood.

"Don't you-all fret; Ih'll git hold of Dex—we'll fix up somethin'."

At the click, click of the gaoler's key both started.

"Come, young lady."

She put out her hand, and Euston clung to it. There awoke within him a great gratitude to her, and a dawning appreciation of what she was; but as he clung to her hands it was not so much gratitude for her help of him as a desire to protect this frail, kind little creature.

"If they don't get me out, you will come back?" he asked eagerly.

"Ih suttinly will."

"What's that?" he asked.

He put out his hand on her hair, and took from it a brown leaf.

"Ih reckon it felled from a tree as Ih come along in the boat. Like as not thayre's burrs in it, tew."

"Come," said the gaoler, "don't stay spooning any longer."

Amanda had on her grandmother's slippers; they hung on her feet as she pattered out of the cell into the corridors. She cast a terrified glance from side to side at the grated doors that they passed. She slunk close to the gaoler. Despite her terror, tears came to her eyes for the man she had left and for herself; she wiped them on the end of her shawl.

"Come along," said the man not unkindly. "You've no call to be afraid of those fellows. The only difference between them and some of the rest outside is that these are caged up safe and the others *ain't.*"

CHAPTER V.

In what is known as a six-roomed shanty, in this case part and parcel of Jacob Grismore's mill property, one evening in May, 189-, a group of mill-hands sat before their evening meal.

There were only two women: one a corpulent, blowsy creature, who plied her knife and fork both at once, piling into her mouth, as fast as she could, hominy and bread. She was a weaver. Her companion, Lily Bud, indifferently sat before her plate, on which was a bit of bread and some molasses, just as the "bo'din'-haouse keeper" had placed them.

At a timid knock on the door the inmates of the kitchen looked up, and Gerkins went out to see who it might be, and returned, followed by a strange girl.

"Hyar's a caller for you-all, Mis' Euston."

And Mrs. Euston, starting in expectation of at the worst Griscom or Euston, beheld none other than Amanda. But, as though she had never expected anything but the appearence of her pale sister, bareheaded, wrapped in an old grey shawl, Lily Bud made her way from between pine dinner-table and seat and slowly advanced into the kitchen.

"Howdy, 'Manda. . . ."

Amanda had no smile to give her. Glancing at the curious faces around her, she said:

"Ih suttinly hev got to speak to you-all, Lily Bud."

Congeniality had never existed between these two vividly distinct natures forced by birthright (arbitrary conjunctive, too often of enemies) to be companions. The vain, light mind of Lily Bud resented with positive hatred even Amanda's sense of humour.

"Folks always laugh when 'Manda sayde anythin', and *she* suttinly didn't see no fun in et."

Now, scornful of the queer figure before her, ashamed of her relationship, she said:

"Ef you want to tell me anythin', go on. You-all fetched youse tongue, Ih reckon."

At this the mill-hands laughed aloud, enchanting Lily Bud, who could not recall ever having awakened merriment by her sallies before.

But Amanda's sober face did not change its expression as she said quietly:

"Gran'maw's dayde," and looked dry-eyed at her sister.

One by one the men rose awkwardly, but with comprehending courtesy, and left the kitchen.

Lily Bud's face softened a little. She began to cry.

In an undertone, Amanda slowly told her simple account of "Gran'maw's" death, her own flight and illness, then said, and with effort:

"Ih come from Rexington—bin thayre ever sense day befo' yesterday. Ih seen yo' husban'." Lily Bud dried her eyes. "Yesterday Ih was done comin' out to fin' you-all, but Dex Falloner reg'larly run agin et. So we went to the Co't Haouse 'n waited twell the Jedge calls 'Henry Euston!' Well, suh, thayre suttinly wasn't no one fer to speak agen him, so he come out."

This news was vital indeed to his wife. Euston free! He would look her up and make enough money when he was sober, so that she need not work in the hated mills. She was at once alarmed and pleased.

"Whar's Henry?"

Amanda started violently. It was the first time she had heard Euston's Christian name, and it seemed to her like a liberty on her sister's part. She gave Lily Bud a hostile glance, and said sharply:

"*That's* what you-all call him?"

Lily Bud giggled.

"Well, et's his name, ain't it? You-all don't reckon Ih call him '*Mister Euston,*' ef he does give himself airs?"

Amanda interrupted quickly:

"He's to Rexington, 'n he-all's a-goin' to stay thayre."

"Fer what?"

"Twell you-all seeks him out 'n tells him you'll be good."

She said petulantly:

"He-all dew drink so po'ful; I reckon you-all ain't got no idee."

Amanda smiled subtly.

"He ain't drunk fer weeks, anyhow," she said, " 'nd ef you-all acts pretty, like's not he'll give it up."

Here Lily Bud, whose train of thought brought her up to a sigh and whimper, looked curiously at her sister.

"You-all suttinly mus' of got the fevah agin; yo' eyes is wild and yo' cheeks is so rayde." She yawned and stretched out her arms. "Them darned spools!" she said. "Ih cayn't run enough sides yet to pay fer ma bode."

Cinny Jones, the other mill-hand who hadn't left the room, broke in:

"You-all suttinly should take this hyar gyrl to bade. Gerkins will fix yo' up, ma'am."

"Ih kin pay," said Amanda hastily, "and Ih reckon to git work to-morrer. Is thayre any?"

Gerkins appeared on the scene, followed by a shuffling negro in rags, a humble, brow-beaten creature who slunk in softly to attract as little notice as possible. The host replied to Amanda's question:

"Work? Wal, I reckon! I've lived in the world forty-eight years, 'n I've seen all kynds of yarn run out, but that thayre brand ez always handy. Whar you want to work, ma'am?"

She liked him, and smiled, tired as she was.

"To wharever they're a-lookin' fer 'Manda Henchley," she said. "Ih ain't particular. Can Ih get bode hyar?"

"You kin tew," he said heartily. "Thar's nobody but Mis' Euston and Mis' Jones 'n the lof." I reckon you-all kin fit in with 'em."

CHAPTER VI.

It was noon at Crompton some five months after Amanda had come to the mills. The steam was not entirely shut off, and an undertone—a semi-panting vibration—kept the monster in evidence to a little group at their luncheon, lest they might chance to dream of absolute freedom and repose!

One girl, seated on the floor in a nest of filth and grease, held between her knees a piece of newspaper containing a bit of bread and pork. Perspiration ran down her cheeks; under her eyes were blue rings. The hands, busied with her wretched food, were discoloured with work. Her feet were bare; the collar of her brown wrapper was open at the

throat, disclosing a neck white as snow. Cinny Jones and Lily Bud sat talking near her. Lily Bud was hot, greasy and dirty; she seemed in good health and animal spirits. Her girlishness had disappeared, her figure was changed. The clothes at her waist were loosely knotted, and in front her dress rose well above the floor.

She was talking with animation to Cinny Jones.

"*He-all* ain't no good!" Lily Bud said in a contemptuous undertone. "No, he don't want I should speed! First it was spoolin' 'too hayrd on ma side'; now it's speedin' too hayrd on ma arms; he-all wants I should stay thar to the bodin'-'ouse and do nothin'."

"Wal, that suttinly ain't hayrd to dew."

"It *is* hayrd, tew!" contradicted the other. "Who'll I talk to? Thayr ain't nobody but the ole niggar thayr, en ef I wus to look at anybody full in the face, why, Henry'd hev his gun on him, like es not." She lowered her voice a little, and wiped her face on her cotton sleeve. "Why, who's goin' to pay fer our keep if I don't work?"

"Don't he make good money?" Cinny asked; and the wife laughed scornfully.

"Money?" she said. "He suttinly *weaves* all right, Henry does, but he spends every cent on drink, suh . . . !"

Here the reclining figure on the floor got up, and Amanda rose and came over to them.

"That's a lie!"

Lily Bud turned indolently, and fixed an insolent look on her sister; her lip curled.

"Et's the truth," she said. "I am married to a drunken man; an' ef I didn't come hyar en speed fourteen hours a day, why, I reckon I wouldn't hev a bayde to lie on to."

Amanda faded paler. She was so white that even her nose looked pinched.

"It's a lie!" she repeated; "and you-all never did tell the truth sense yo' was bo'n. Who's the best weaver to Crompton? He done beat the record max'mum speed; thar ain't a man to the mills can tech him!"

The little thing spoke with pride that would have sat well on his wife. She drew her thin body up in her queer dress; the veins in her neck commenced to swell and palpitate.

Lily Bud regarded her with curiosity and a dawning intelligence in her eyes, and for once in her life she was attentive to the quick words that Amanda was powerless to restrain.

"Thayr ain't a girl to this country thet's got a man like you-all. Why don't you stay to the house, and keep it like gran'maw told us tew—clean and pretty?"—she looked at her sister firmly —"and keep washed up and pretty, 'stead of showin' yo'self to the mill—*now, as yo' is?*"

Here Lily Bud made a desperate move forward, and struck her sister a quick, short slap in the face. The pale cheek reddened under the blow.

"You shut up, gyrl!"—advancing her chin toward her sister; "though ef you-all is so quick to remember me of gran'maw —why she sayde, *"When a pusson kin tell you the way to the well, it's a po'ful good sign he's drunk the water thayr."* How you-all know so much 'bout Henry? . . . I reckon I'd be doin' better things 'fore I stole my sister's husban'."

Amanda's patience was at its ebb. The suffering of the past weeks had worn away her self-control, and had developed a morbid rebellion against the state of domestic misery in which the man she loved was a victim.

She raised her own hand threateningly.

"Don' you dast speak to me so!"

But Lily Bud was roused to a greater fury than Amanda knew, and she was obliged to defend herself against a cat-like onslaught from her elder sister. The two locked in a hand-to-hand struggle, and were nothing but a pair of panting, furious young animals. Although Amanda's first blow was defence, the attack altered. The aisle of the mill was all too narrow for the sisters' struggle. Amanda, the less angry, and the stronger and better fitted to overcome, got an easy victory. She forgot Lily Bud's condition; she fought with all the vigour and strength of youth, and she had the satisfaction, such as it was, in a second or two of seeing her sister stagger, and her lips grow white. Lily Bud put her hand to her head, and fell backward full length on the floor. Amanda was herself again.

Cinny alone had watched the battle, for the hands had not returned from lunch. When Lily Bud fell, Cinny took flight, and just at this time the mill-bell

rang. The noon hour was past, and the power, once more panting and humming, echoed through the mill. Cinny returned, scuffling after the boss from the spooling-room, whom she had persuaded to come to the scene of attack. Bachman was the young Yankee who had brought the Daco "hands" to Crompton. He now wandered in, as he had been in the habit of doing, to direct his very questionable attentions to Amanda Henchley. He found her bending in tears and terror over the figure of Lily Bud.

"What's up, little girl?"

She raised her streaming eyes to him.

"I reckon I done killed my sister."

"Oh no," he said soothingly—"oh no, you haven't. She's a bad lot, anyway. You go and get some water, Cinny."

When the dipper came he dashed the contents mercilessly over the face of poor Lily Bud, but her eyes remained terrifyingly closed and her lips terrifyingly blue. She was so changed that even Bachman himself began to think the affair more serious than usual.

"You go down and call her husband from the weaving-room, Mrs. Jones, and we'll get her home; she can't work any more to-day."

CHAPTER VII.

To poor Amanda the ensuing weeks had been repetitions of toil and weariness sharpened by distress and fear. Lily Bud was terribly ill; if she should die, Amanda would be little less than a murderess. She ventured not a foot towards the Eustons' boarding-house; and was given to understand by Cinny that it was just as well for her to keep away, and, in truth, she was glad to do so. Euston stayed close to his wife, and Amanda's news—hearsay—garbled by some was by Cinny made as bad as possible.

This Saturday afternoon she had finished cleaning her machine, and as she refilled her ropers, deep in dreams of the backwoods, the clicking mill sound seemed to soften to calls like the birds who used to nest in the clearing. There were nightingales there, too! How often she had listened to their enchanting song! The speeders swam before her eyes. She was crying.

"What's the matter, little girl?"

It was Euston. She turned to meet his smile fixed on her. The tears dried on her lashes.

"I came to tell you some news of Lily Bud."

Amanda ran to him, and put her hand on his arm. He little dreamed what salvation he represented.

"Take me to ma sister," she urged; "Ih want to see Lily Bud."

He led Amanda along the aisles out of the mill. But no sooner were they alone together and she safe than the shyness she always felt in his presence came over her. She longed to appeal to him, to cling to him, but the very character of her affection for him made it impossible.

"Let's go along over here a little way and find some shade."

He led her to where a row of new mill-houses were in process of building; the work, deserted on this Saturday afternoon, left the scaffolding a shelter from the sun and the boards a seat for these two.

"Lily Bud's coming along all right," Euston informed her before she had a chance to ask. "She'll be up and around in a little while now."

Amanda's expression was flushed and grateful. She wore even her graceless cotton wrapper with charm. Perhaps as much to protect her face from him as from the sun, she put on her sun-bonnet; it completely shut her away.

"Mrs. Cardlin thinks the doctor won't come any more. We haven't any money to pay him, and I owe her already for three weeks." He spoke his troubles out to her selfishly, no doubt, but the fact of having a human being to speak to, and one, moreover, whose sympathy was so quick as Amanda's, was too strong a temptation to be resisted. "I find I can sell myself, as it were, to the Company; that is, I can go and get some coupons and work them off. I hate it," he continued; "it's absolute slavery, but it will only be the last grain of self-respect gone." She remained silent, and he followed his thoughts: "It's better, of course, than to owe that poor woman, and I must have the doctor a few times more."

Here Amanda turned her sun-bonnet to him, and he saw her face framed by it.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "what a sight you are, Amanda! You're killing

yourself." The pinched suffering of the little face struck him above his own anxieties. "What's the matter, child? Are you worried about Lily Bud? It wasn't your fault."

Amanda was beyond tears: she had shed them night after night, day after day, at her speeder; they were all gone now, and her eyes were hard and dry. The control she was exercising not to sob and wring her hands before him made her body rigid as a little pole.

"Ih reg'larly ort to be killed! Ih didn't go fer to hurt her, that away. Ih wist somebody would kill me—Ih dew so!"

Euston took both her hands in his—poor, thin, convulsed little hands. He said tenderly:

"Look here, Amanda, don't you go on so; you're a good little girl—the best little girl I ever saw. Everybody knows just what she is. If she is my wife, I say it. I won't have you fret your life out so; do you hear?"

She drew a long, sobbing breath, but even as he was speaking she took heart again; his tone of tenderness fell softly about her bleeding heart.

"It ain't only the worry," she said, and hesitated. "Et's the work. I'm so tyard!" She longed to throw herself in the arms of the pale, dark man whose eyes, fastened on her, were so deep and full of kindness and pity. "Ih don't reg'larly git no sleep. When Ih come in, Ih cayn't skeercely git up them laddah stayres; et seems ez ef thar's somethin' a-holdin' onto ma laigs, 'n' ef Ih dew fall to sleep the mill sings 'n' ma hayde all night. Ih reckon et's a-callin' me 'n' straitchin' aout ets han's like et's boun' to hev me, sleep or 'wake."

Comfort came to her as she talked, but she disguised the existence of the greatest danger of all—Bachman. Embarrassment, shame, fear kept her silent about the worst haunting evil. The mill could only wear her body out of the hard life from which she was better away; this other peril could corrode her soul.

Euston held her hands strongly whilst she talked.

"These hyar las' nights seems ef Ih could git a leetle rest ef the mills ud rest tew! Whar Ih bode, you kin hyar it all night, 'n' Ih cayn't bear to think o' Cinny Jones' little gyrl spinnin', spinnin' all night long." (This one who pitied so readily was scarcely more than a child herself!) "Th' other day th' boss fetched Milly to ma speedin'-frames, 'n' got her to clean the frames. It's awful dang'ros," she said. "Ih seen one gyrl git her haynd ketch thayr."

"Don't you clean any machinery, Amanda!" Euston's tone was quite different from any she had ever heard him use. She looked up surprised.

"Why, Ih suttinly am boun' tew!"

"No," he said slowly, "you are not. There's the spool-room. . . ."

She shook her head and flushed.

"Ih don' want tew go thayr; Ih make bettah money speedin'."

Euston had forgotten who was the foreman of the spool-room.

"I can get you put there—it's safe and clean—and you have no one but yourself to keep."

Without reply to this, she made one of her hands free, and took from the bosom of her dress a handkerchief tied up in a knot at one end. She undid the knot, and took out a five-dollar bill.

"Ih saved this hyar—fer Lily Bud; et's all Ih could lay up."

Euston exclaimed: "Saved!"

"Why, Ih make clost ter fifty cents a day, 'n' Ih saved up sence two weeks 'n' more." Seeing his face so working in its expressions, and expecting a refusal, she pressed the bill upon him. "You-all gotter tek et—et's all Ih kin dew to make up to her."

The bill fluttered between them. Euston's eyes were fixed on his sister-in-law with intensity.

"You couldn't have saved up five dollars, Amanda."

"Ih did so!" she flamed. "Where'd you-all think et come from?"

"You only make three dollars a week, and there's your board to pay," he persisted.

"Ih ain't paid no bode," she said slowly, her eyes on her hands.

"What do you mean?"

"Gerkins he done give me free, tew weeks. His nigger's took sick, 'n' Ih do chores fer him when Ih gets in from th' mill, 'n' Ih gits up 'n' cooks th' vittles fer th' bo'ders."

Euston gave a cry; he passed his hand over his pale brow. He bit his lips, and murmured things she could not fathom.

"Ef you don't tek it, I'll never speak tew you agin. . . ."

"Take it!" Once more he put his hands over the devoted ones. "Not if I was starving to death . . . not if it could buy for me all the things which would have made me a man . . . a man! Put it up again . . . there, in your handkerchief—so. Take it, and pay your next week's board, and rest—*and rest!"* His eyes were full of tears.

"Don't go fer tew feel so," she whispered gently; "all that ain't the worst!" Her words were low, and in his suffering he did not hear them. "How you-all git the doctah, then?"

"I'll sell myself if needful," he said. "Don't you worry, Amanda; we'll pull through."

He controlled his emotion, and tried to smile at her. She timidly touched his arm with her hand.

"You-all ain't drinkin' none."

She never called him by name, but he had not observed it.

"I haven't drunk a drop for two weeks."

Her face was eloquent; it said plainer than any words of preaching what she felt and what she asked.

He nodded, and said quietly: "I have to *want* to stop, Amanda. You can't understand me; I don't understand it myself. I have to care enough whether or no to swear off. Just the past few weeks I had something to do. I couldn't do it and drink too. . . ."

"Take cayre of Lily Bud?"

He looked full into her eyes.

". . . I was determined she should get well. . . ."

Amanda murmured, "Of co'se."

". . . For your sake," he said.

She grew deadly cold, and, until he quietly removed his eyes from hers, she sat fascinated, her lips parted. Euston now let her hands go, and in another tone of voice, quick and practical, said:

"What's Bachman to you, Amanda?"

She gasped at the sudden change of subject so barefacedly broached by him.

"Why, he suttinly ain't nothin' at all!"

"Then, for God's sake keep clear of him. Don't let him touch you—don't let him kiss you. Get married, if you can—the sooner the better—but don't be cheap."

The character of his wife made him put a double bitterness in his tone with the last words.

Amanda grew fire-red; a sea of blood must have lain dormant around her heart, for floods of colour poured on her face and neck.

"Ih know what you-all seen," she managed to get out. "Ih hate him, 'n' you-all needn't to jedge every gyrl by the one you merried."

She got up proudly, and so stood in her miserable garb, her head thrown back. She was beside herself with wounded pride and love.

"Thayre ain't never but one man kissed me what Ih call kiss—'n' ef he's forgot it Ih ain't, 'n' nobody 'll ever git another chance. . . ."

They both stood facing.

What man—whom did she mean? As he wondered, it came to him in a flash: the night at the ladder stairs of the backwoods shanty. That kiss—that wonderful thrilling kiss, to taste whose like again and again he had married the wrong woman. He made a step forward.

"Amanda!"

She was emaciated and frail and worn, but her eyes were humid—filled with a fire and feeling that transfigured her to absolute beauty; her red lips, with their pretty melancholy droop, were alluring.

She drew back from him, and her face hardened quite suddenly, as if she recognised all that separated them, all the blindness of his mad act when he made the miserable choice that divided them. Then, with the caprice that made her nature feminine and charming, she laughed a little, and, drawing near him, she whispered:

"Ih reckon you-all stole ma pink ribbon; you ain't chanct to got et nowhars?"

Euston blushed. As the reading of the whole matter explained to him now his error and mistake, he seemed to see again the little fluttering bit of colour on the grass by the pool, and a sharp pang shot through him.

"What ribbon, Amanda?"

"Why," she said, smiling, "Ih done lost mine by th' pond—the day we taked you-all in—'n' Ih suttinly did see et pinned to you-all's shirt when you wuz sick."

Euston put his hand in his pocket, and drew out a bit of paper. Slowly he un-

folded it—there lay the talisman. He held it out in his hand.

"I've kept it . . . up till now. I was going to throw it away one of these days. . . . Now that I know who it belongs to I would like to keep it still."

He raised his eyes to hers. She had many fancies and queer thoughts, and she thought his eyes looked clean, as though they had been washed, the whites were so clear, the brown so shining; her own, tell-tale, ardent, dropped.

"Ih reckon you kin keep et . . . et's got ust to you-all by this. . . . Ih'm goin' home tew sleep. Ih'm clean wore out."

She turned her back on him, and went quickly away toward the settlement of shanties raised on their stilt-like elevations. Whatever feelings the interview roused in Euston, it greatly comforted Amanda.

* * * * *

Two weeks later saw Lily Bud, although still an invalid, able to be about again amongst the mill-hand world.

She was more jealous of her sister than angry with her. The quarrel's result, now danger was passed, had done her a good turn—the annoyance of motherhood was spared her. She said to Euston the day before he was to resume his work in the weaving-room:

"Thayre's bin a right nice gentleman hyar. Et's a minister; he's from Ireton Mills. He says thayre's a new mill yonder whar's thayre's better pay, 'n' he reg'larly thinks Ih ought to have a change o' air. Won't you-all carry me over to the new mill, Henry?"

He hesitated, then said decidedly: "I am bound to the Company."

"Fer how much, Henry?"

"Ten dollars."

To his great surprise, she took out a ten-dollar bill and a five.

"He give it tew me—the minister; you-all ain't got no call ter look so," she said feverishly. "Ask Mis' Cardlan."

It was true: a tremulous ascetic priest had passed through Crompton on a sort of missionary visit from mill town to mill town. Out of his slender purse he had given the invalid this money to help her, as she had pointed out to him, to flee with her husband from the dangerous proximity of a designing sister-in-law, and to begin a new life in new mills. As her husband still made her no answer, Lily Bud leaned forward from her rocker, and said in a voice weak with sickness and sharp with jealousy:

"Ef et's fer that thayre gyrl what tried to murder me ez you're stayin', why, Ih kin go alone, Henry Euston. . . ."

At his face she shrank back whimpering. He had never struck her, but she was afraid of him now.

"We'll go to Ireton," he said, "on this minister's money; and if I ever hear a word like that from you again, I leave you, never to return. Do you hear me?"

And he forced her to answer "Yes."

* * * * *

Now began for the sixteen-year-old toiler at her machines the actual battle for existence. Not a unique battle by any means. You may see her like any day if you will take a train to the heart of South Carolina, then penetrate to some mill-village where men, women, and children are weaving and spinning their lives into cotton cloth.

Euston and Lily Bud left Crompton, and Cinny Jones, when she brutally broke the fact to Amanda, felt a sense of pity at the start of dismay, the sudden dilation of the girl's eyes.

"Why, I ain't got nobody to own me!"

Poor little slave! the mill owned her; and she grew to be in some mysterious way part of it, its living soul, palpitating with its life. Grief at her desertion, loneliness and despair, wore her to a thread. Long before day she was at her speeders; when night came (blessed night, whose falling should surely smite the shackles from toil!)—long after the stars were out—in the artificial light of insufficient gas-jets, she was before the ropers which often she could not see for tears.

(To be continued.)